

RaSP Extraordinary General Meeting 9 Dec 2014

1. Attendees

Committee: Bryan Pearson (Chair), James Matheson (Vice Chair), Hugh de Lacy (Secretary) , David Greenfield, Paul Catling, Andrew Hall

Representing Air Broadband (ABB): James Dening, Jo Dening, Andrew Glover

plus 14 RaSP members.

Apologies for Absence: John Colville, David Almond, Peter Whiteley, John Chalmers

2. Purpose of Meeting

The Chairman announced that the EGM had been convened to allow members to vote on a proposal to amend the Constitution to enable the Committee to hand over the running of the network to Air Broadband in accordance with the background information and proposed constitution changes circulated prior to the meeting. At this point the Chairman passed the meeting to the Vice Chairman because of a possible conflict of interest (in the event of ABB taking over the running of the network the Chairman would benefit from rents received from ABB).

3. Constitution Changes

The Vice Chairman briefly summarise the proposed changes to the constitution, explaining that the changes gave the committee the power to hand over the running of the network to ABB. How long RaSP will then continue depends on the views of the members (to be discussed at the next AGM).

4. Background to the Proposed Constitution Changes

David Greenfield outlined the reasons for the proposed changes: RaSP has become difficult for a volunteer group to run because of the large growth in membership with the resulting increase in demand for support.

When RaSP was originally set up it was expected that it would become redundant in a few years by the provision of better phone line-based broadband but this did not happen. It was hoped that the Connecting Cambridgeshire project would provide a fast service to most of the RaSP area but this is now very doubtful in all of the RaSP areas except Swaffham Prior. It is likely that members in Swaffham Prior will be lost when the new service arrives; this is potentially creates financial difficulties for RaSP because of the high cost of fibre rental which is on a long-term contract. The renewal date for this contract is at the end of next year by which time it is likely that the faster BT service will be available in Swaffham Prior.

The other major factor in the decision is a desire on the part of the committee to step down, having run RaSP for the past 12 years.

Having sought a suitable commercial partner for over a year, Air Broadband are seen as the right kind of community oriented organisation to carry on the service that RaSP has previously provided.

5. Air Broadband

James Denning briefly introduced ABB.

Andrew Glover runs a business broadband service based in Cambridge; partners James & Jo have run a community Internet service in Prickwillow for 7 years. ABB was set up to take advantage of the buying power of the commercial business and provide more extensive community service. The group has a fibre coming into Ely Cathedral which provides a good jumping off point plus additional resilience. The group needs to grow further to become fully viable and the addition of RaSP subscribers will further this aim.

Vice Chairman: the EGM vote is to implement a change to the RaSP constitution to enable committee to hand over running of network to ABB.

6. Questions from the Floor

Tony Jordan: will support still come from RaSP members? Andrew (ABB): no: all support will be provided by ABB and its contractors.

Greg Cotner: should RaSP be transferring a profitable business to a commercial organisation for free? Hugh: RaSP is not a profitable business, it breaks even but only with free labour. VC: RaSP should not be regarded as a business; much of the equipment is old, RaSP would not be viable on its own as a commercial business.

Andrew ABB: RaSP is undersized; ABB needs to get more subscribers which will need continuing investment to reach a size where the bus becomes commercially viable.

What guarantee is there that ABB will continue? James Denning: if ABB were to fail it would be the whole business, couldn't conceive of cutting out one part. No guarantees can be given but the partners have a big vested interest in making the business as a whole viable.

VC: the set-up we have now is not viable in the medium term. The committee cannot envisage carrying on beyond the end of 2015.

David Elliott: are ABB interested in business customers currently with BT? Andrew Glover: in principle yes.

Robert Holingsworth: what speeds can be provided vs BT? Andrew Glover: ABB have a lower 'contention' ratio than BT and other big providers; also business customers use less bandwidth at night so that domestic customers can be given a better service than BT.

What are ABB's charging policies? Jo Denning: ADD will guarantee the same price for at least the first 12 months; going forward ABB will be competitive on price; will offer enhanced services when feasible, at increased price. New customers will automatically go onto newer services. Service is likely to be asymmetrical in future but with fast upload speeds available for the higher priced packages.

Is there any issue with Virgin about Air taking over? ABB will take over the contract at an agreed date; ABB might be able to get better terms. The nature of the fibre link from Reach will change from an internet link to direct data link back to the ABB base in Cambridge.

7. Voting on the Proposal

The VC pointed out consequences of a 'yes' vote (see note at end of Agenda).

The VC proposed that the meeting support the proposal, seconded by David Greenfield.

The proposal was passed unanimously on a show of hands.

RaSP will pass contact details to ABB who will then confirm new arrangements to individual members.

Linda Kirby proposed a vote of thanks to the committee for keeping RaSP going on a voluntary basis over so many years.

The meeting then closed.