What3words

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What is it?

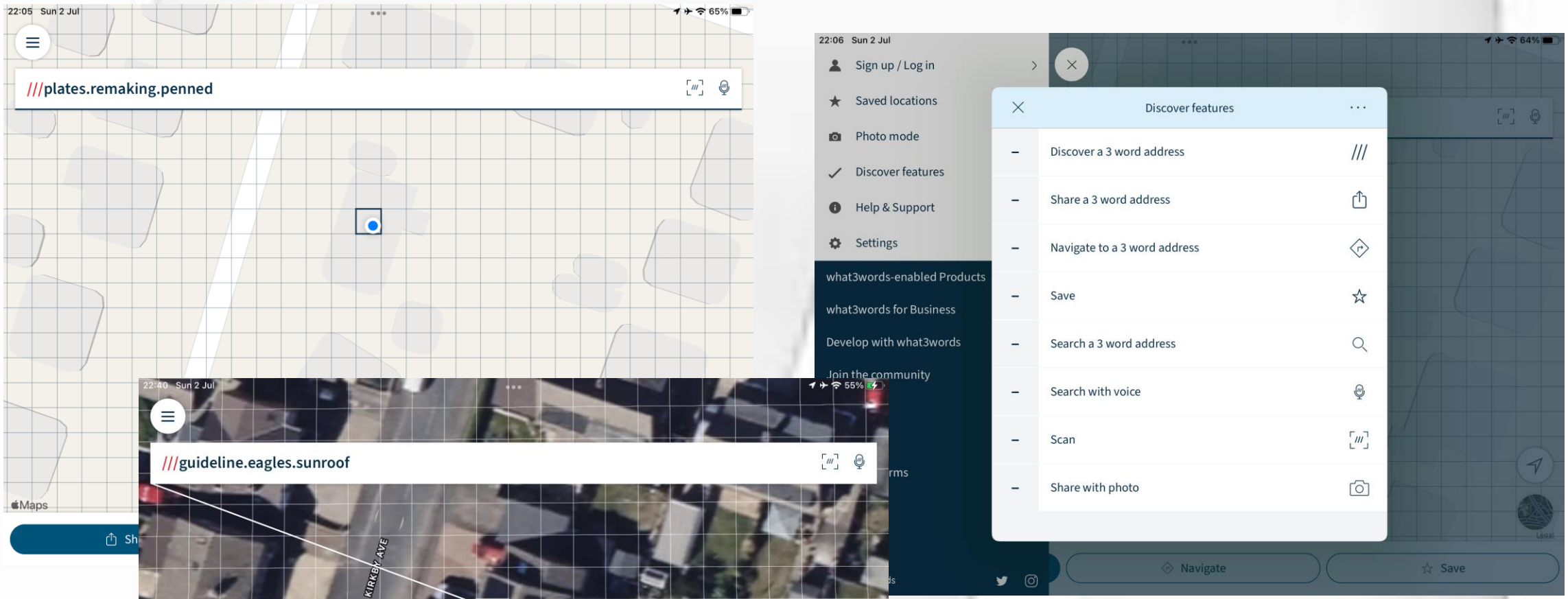
- A proprietary geocode system designed to identify any location on the surface of Earth with a resolution of about 3 metres (9.8 ft). It is owned by What3words Limited, based in London, England.
- The system encodes geographic coordinates into three permanently fixed dictionary words. For example, the front door of 10 Downing Street in London is identified by ///slurs.this.shark
- Unique combination of 3 words = address or “code”
- Mainly “business to business” business model

History

- Founded by Chris Sheldrick, Jack Waley-Cohen, Mohan Ganesalingam and Michael Dent, What3words was launched in July 2013. Sheldrick and Ganesalingam conceived the idea when Sheldrick, working as an event organizer, struggled to get bands and equipment to music venues using inadequate address information. Sheldrick tried using GPS coordinates to locate the venues, but decided that words were better than numbers after a one-digit error led him to the wrong location. He credits a mathematician friend for the idea of dividing the world into 3-metre (10 ft) squares, and the linguist Jack Waley-Cohen with using memorable words.

About What3words…..

- Founded in 2013, the company has made a loss every year since
- Divides world into grid of 57 trillion 3mx3m squares each with a 3 word address
- Word lists are available in 50 languages – translation not always straight forward!
- Uk 40,000 words (covers land and sea) – others 25,000 words
- Shorter words used in high population density areas
- Used by 85% of emergency services
- App available on iOS and android



ACCURATE
MEMORABLE
NON-AMBIGUOUS

It’s useful but…..

- Need to be able to read (and spell!)
- Mistakes (even one letter) render the code misleading/useless
- Words can have cultural sensitivity (numbers much less likely to)
- Homophones (words that sound the same eg wants and once)
- Plurals
- Similar 3 words addresses in same area
- Accents
- Language?
- Human error (best used in computer systems)