



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
HELD ON TUESDAY 10TH JULY 2007 AT STUBBS COMMON FARM, DONCASTER.**

Present:	Peter Stocken	(Chairman)
	Sally Bugden	(Vice-Chairman)
	John Neville	(Hon. Treasurer)
	John Carter	
	Michael Hill	
	Graham Jepson	
	Philip Mason	
	Jeff Morris	
	Alan Nelson	
	Barry Capal	(General Manager)
	Sandra Claridge	(Minute Taker)

An apology for absence was received from Martin Pool.

1 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 8TH MAY

The minutes were signed as an accurate record.

1.1 Pro-Celebrity Bridge

Ideas put forward by Simon Cochemé for a Pro-Celebrity event were discussed. The Board broadly supported the proposals and indeed any initiative which would raise the profile of the game, but no resources were currently available to progress the matter, particularly in terms of TV coverage. It was suggested that the ideas be expanded into a plan for its implementation, preferably charity orientated, with some pointers as to where sponsorship might be attracted.

Sally Bugden reported on a possible contact with Comic Relief to teach bridge to celebrities.

1.2 Youth Committee

A response from the Selection Committee on the composition of the future Youth Committee, was noted. It was agreed that the Board's decision at the last meeting would stand, i.e. that there should be a single sub-committee of the Board responsible for Youth matters comprising two members of the Board, the two squad managers, a member nominated by the Selection Committee, together with the Youth Officer. It was noted that the introduction of a sub-committee did not require a constitutional change.

1.3 Tournament Directors' Assessment Panel

Sally Bugden reported that all members of the Panel invited to participate had accepted, and an initial meeting would be held on 7th August in Aylesbury to discuss the assessment and appraisal process. Tournament Directors were, to many people, the public face of the EBU, and the objective of the Panel would be to assess Tournament Directors at all levels in terms of customer relations, training needs and interpersonal skills, as well as identifying the individual aspirations of each TD. A record would be compiled of each member of the existing Panel of Tournament Directors, and following the initial review, there would be an annual appraisal. Prior to interviews with each Tournament Director, the advice and recommendations of the Chief Tournament Director would, of course, be sought. Sally Bugden said that due to pressure of work on strategy matters, she had passed the Chairmanship of the TD Assessment Panel to Peter Stocken.

1.4 Educational CD

Graham Jepson reported that he hoped that the CD would be retrieved by the end of July.

1.5 Gaming Act

Jeff Morris said that while the Honorary Counsel's opinion was that there would be no change in terms of duplicate bridge, there was some doubt in the case of clubs holding rubber bridge sessions or charging more than £19 for entry to a competition. In response Barry Capal confirmed that the Act was currently only at the consultation document stage, and it was suggested that Jeff seek confirmation from Evan Harris MP.

2 TREASURER'S REPORT & ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR TO 31st MARCH 2007

John Neville reported on a successful year, the surplus for the year of £76K being significantly above the budgeted figure of just under £33K. The improvement over the preceding year's result had been achieved, against a background of an expected 3% drop in membership, through a combination of a reduction in staffing costs of just under 10% through non-replacement of some staff and reallocation of duties, a reduction in distribution costs for English Bridge of £25K, and a modest saving in the cost of support for international teams.

Bridge for All had produced a better than expected result for the year due to the success of the recently launched Book 1. Cost centres which had proved disappointing were Master Points which had remained virtually unchanged despite an increase in the cost of certificates, Licences, Competitions and Tournaments, and Trading where sales were 10% down on the previous year. Whilst this activity is under regular review, it should be noted that the Bridge Shop is considered to be an important feature of EBU services by a high proportion of members and clubs. Results of the first Joint Venture events under the new system had also been disappointing. The figures for Creditors and Stock were acceptable in terms of the level of turnover, and there had been a significant write-off of superseded *Bridge for All* material during the year. The Investments figure in the Annual Accounts had been changed to reflect maturity of high-yield Eurobonds, and current assets were sufficient to meet the EBU's operating needs without recourse to borrowing.

The new Accounts Manager had coped very well with the work, and was commended for all the work she had undertaken since taking over. The Union's Auditor had provided extra assistance in terms of VAT, regularising reconciliation of Control Accounts and in reinstating a routine for Pensions contributions. Problems had been experienced with the Unions' Advertising Managers, but improved practices had been put in place and the figures in the Accounts reflected the true position.

In conclusion, John said that conservative assumptions had been built into the budget for the current year, leading to a projected loss of around £28K. Key features taken into account were the recruitment needed to enhance the vitality of the EBU, together with the projected loss of a further 500 members. In terms of the worth of the Company, John believed that its value should be broadly maintained, taking into account necessary initiatives. He recommended to the Board a 50 pence increase in the membership fee for the year from 1st April 2008. Pending discussion of the Strategy Proposals, the earlier suggestion of a larger increase in subscription for those not paying by direct debit should be shelved. The Board supported these recommendations, which would be put to the Shareholders at the AGM.

The Annual Accounts to 31st March 2007 were formally approved, and it was agreed that they would be sent to Companies House forthwith and published on the EBU website. The Chairman was joined by the Board in thanking John for his contribution over the last few years.

3 GENERAL MANAGER'S REPORT

The General Manager reported as follows:

3.1 Office/IT

An upgrade of PCs was being undertaken at minimum cost. A further 100 sets of Bridgemates had been purchased which would be used at Brighton, midweek. Software developed by Jeff Smith would be tested.

3.2 Staffing

Krys Kazmierczak has commenced his duties as Club Liaison Officer, and excellent reports had been received following his initial visits to clubs.

Matt Betts took up his duties as Communications Officer on 4th July, with responsibility for Press and Public Liaison.

3.3 Constitutional Recommendations

In light of the expected lengthy debate on Strategy at the AGM, it was agreed that Constitutional changes should be deferred to a Shareholders meeting in 2008.

3.4 Youth Trust

It was hoped that once the requirement that all Trustees be CRB checked had been satisfied, registration of the forms provided to the Charities Commission would be achieved.

3.5 Charities Act 2006/Trust Charity

Initial discussions had taken place with a firm of charity specialist Solicitors, who had indicated the new Act would almost definitely allow bridge clubs to receive Charity status provided that:-

- (a) they are "not for profit";
- (b) they have no barriers to membership, for example membership tests;
- (c) they have a Constitution acceptable to the Charities Commission.

Thus, proprietor-owned clubs were unlikely to qualify, and those clubs that "check out" the skill levels of potential members may also be disqualified, as would clubs who exclude Juniors.

It was believed that for the EBU to achieve the benefits of charitable status the Union would require constitutional reorganisation. The General Manager was authorised to make preliminary investigations into the likely cost of pursuing the matter.

3.6 County Constitutions

It was agreed that examination of County Constitutions would be deferred pro tem.

3.7 Procedures Manual

The General Manager requested feedback on the draft Procedures Manual to enable conclusions to be reached at the September meeting.

3.8 Rating Scheme

The Rating Scheme had not progressed, but discussions were ongoing.

4 SHAREHOLDERS' MEETING OF 6TH JUNE

The Vice-Chairman reported that there had been a large and interesting response – from clubs, counties and individuals - to the new Strategy Proposals that had been outlined at the Shareholders Meeting. They ranged from the very positive at one end to the distinctly negative at the other, with every shade of opinion represented in between. Most were requests for further clarification. The current key objective was to help Counties with their consultation process, and to this end John Carter had arranged ten meetings with Counties, finishing in September, to discuss reactions from counties, clubs and members. It was agreed that to provide further clarity “Barry’s blog #15” would be sent to all members who had supplied email addresses, and a condensed version of the proposals, produced by Hampshire CBA, would be included in the August issue of *English Bridge*.

The Chairman thanked Sally Bugden, John Carter and Barry Capal for their hard work in answering the unexpectedly high response from the membership to the Strategy Proposals. Michael Hill agreed to produce an overall summary of the feedback once the programme of County meetings had been completed.

5 CRB DISCLOSURE

A paper produced by John Pain, was noted.

6 COMMITTEE REPORTS

6.1 Laws & Ethics Committee

The Board supported the opinion of the Honorary Counsel that the default position in regard to disciplinary Hearings was that they be public, except in the case of members under the age of 18, and that it was not an option for defendants or witnesses to object to the proceedings being open.

6.2 Tournament Committee

John Neville stressed that in considering changes to the prize structure for tournaments, the prize fund and hospitality combined should not exceed the existing level of 20% of the entry fees.

It was noted that, despite falling numbers, the Easter Festival at Blackpool would be continued, but would be subject to constant review, and alternative venues would be explored. Michael Hill suggested that major changes to the tournament scene should be avoided until the outcome of the new Strategy proposals was known.

6.3 Editorial Board

The Vice-Chairman said that Elena Jeronimidis' first edition in August was eagerly awaited. Changes had been made in terms of contributors, and for one issue only there had been an increase in pagination.

7 BGB MATTERS

Philip Mason had nothing to report and the Annual Accounts were taken as read.

8 EBL/WBF MATTERS

The Chairman tabled a report of his recent visit to the 3rd EBL Open Championships at Antalya in Turkey for the purpose of voting in the elections for the EBL President and the EBL Executive Committee. Radoslaw Kielbasinski (for the sake of brevity, Radek hereafter), the President of the Polish Bridge Federation, was challenging Gianarrigo Rona (Rona hereafter), the President of the Italian Bridge Federation and current President of the EBL, for the Presidency of the EBL.

The Chairman reminded the Board that it had instructed him not to make up his mind as to who to vote for until he had held discussions with all the parties concerned. On his arrival at Antalya, he discovered that Radek had said that he would drop his challenge to Rona in return for certain guarantees; moreover the Scandinavian countries were prepared to support Radek in achieving this compromise and sought England's support. These countries were not happy with the way the EBL was and had been run: like England, they wanted greater transparency, tighter financial management and a curtailment of unnecessary expenditure. Accordingly, together with the representatives of Denmark and Norway he attended a series of meetings with Rona, Radek and the representatives of France and Holland, these latter being supporters of Rona. Only when it became apparent that the combined votes of the Scandinavians and England held the balance of power did the Rona camp accept the compromise offered. On reflection, the Chairman concluded, it was not an entirely satisfactory outcome, but a line had been drawn in the sand. He had agreed with the Scandinavians that in future the activities of the EBL should be monitored closely, regularly and challenged where necessary, and he promised close cooperation between England and themselves.

The Chairman informed the Board of the votes cast for each candidate for the Executive Committee, together with how he himself had voted.

As a footnote, the Chairman said he was delighted that the President of the Turkish Bridge Federation had said in his address to the Bridge Press at the end of the Championships that the 50,000 euros spent on the opening and closing ceremonies could surely be spent of something more worthwhile, like, for instance, the promotion of junior Bridge

Alan Nelson, who had also been at the Championships but as a player, reported that the Chairman and he had met with Rona on 20th June to protest about the decision to change the qualifying criteria for the Mixed Pairs Final in the early hours of the morning of the day of the first session of the Final.

They explained that many of their members playing in the Tournament had complained to them about the timing of the change and the fact that the change had allowed the senior Italian player, Alfredo Versace, to play with his sponsor in the final.

Rona said it was his personal decision made at 2.00am that morning after consultation with two Tournament Committee members, Melander and Beineix, in order to allow as many people as possible to play in the Final. He said he was unaware that allowing four additional pairs would allow Versace to join the final.

The Chairman and he had then expressed their dismay at his response and stated that given the conflict of interest arising from his presidency both of the EBL and the Italian Bridge Federation, his action was an appalling breach of normal corporate governance guidelines for an international members' organisation.

They also reminded him that this incident followed the earlier scandal of the premature pardoning of Lanzarotti and Buratti by the Italian Bridge Federation; they would have no alternative but to recommend to the Board of the EBL that it should support their formal protest to the EBL. This action would be recorded in the Board Minutes and published on the EBU website for the information of their members and those of other interested NBOs.

The Board expressed its full support for both the particular, as expressed by Alan Nelson, and the general, as outlined by the Chairman. With regard to the latter, there was, in consultation with other NBOs, a pressing need for tighter controls and indeed a substantive change in attitude throughout the EBL. Such was their concern that, without a significant improvement in transparent corporate government, the Union might come under pressure from its member to consult with other like-minded countries as to value of continuing its membership of the League.

The Board congratulated David Harris on his election to the Executive Committee and his appointment as EBL Honorary Counsel.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The General Manager was asked to discuss further a possible sponsorship opportunity conditional upon access to the Union's database. It was agreed that, if found to be appropriate, the matter could be pursued subject to the list being non-transferable, and that it must be used for a specified purpose only.

It was confirmed that problems experienced with the tendering process for EBU overseas holidays had now been eradicated, and one holiday had been contracted for 2008.

Next meeting
Tuesday 11th September 2007 at noon
At the Imperial Hotel,
Russell Square, London

Board Minutes – 10th July 2007