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For immediate release

## **Judicial Review considering whether bridge is a sport starts tomorrow**

The Judicial Review in to whether bridge should be recognised as a 'sport' takes place at the High Court tomorrow (22<sup>nd</sup> September).

The case was brought by the English Bridge Union (EBU) to contest Sport England's position that Mind Sports, which includes bridge and chess, should not be recognised as 'sports'. This position runs contrary to that of the Charity Commission which recognises as 'sports' activities which "which promote health by involving physical or mental skill or exertion" <sup>(1)</sup>. This positioned was established by Parliament in the 2011 Charities Act, and specifically includes Mind Sports, yet Sport England chooses to use an older, less inclusive definition of 'sport' – the 1992 European Sport Charter. The EBU is seeking to address this inconsistency in the application of the apparent wishes of Parliament, and bring about a move towards a more modern and inclusive interpretation of the definition of 'sport'.

The EBU believes that a more inclusive, consistent definition of 'sport' would open up sporting opportunities to those who cannot, or otherwise would not, engage in sporting pursuits, allowing them to 'compete', challenge themselves, and become healthier. The challenge and health benefits of undertaking Mind Sports are predominantly mental, however the EBU believes that such activities should be encouraged and supported, rather than being intentionally excluded by the definition of 'sport' which Sport England chooses to use.

Government ministers have recognised the benefits to the participant, and to society, of engaging in Mind Sports, with Tracey Crouch MP, Minister for Sport, saying during Parliamentary Questions, "I recognise that many of these games are enjoyed by many people and that the mental agility required in this activity can help with conditions and bring many health and wellbeing benefits" <sup>(2)</sup>. Further more, academic research has shown the cognitive benefits<sup>(3)</sup>, particularly to the elderly, of such activities, and likewise teachers have reported that playing bridge has helped improve learning and academic performance in children <sup>(4)</sup>. The social benefits for those groups are also well recognised, particularly combating problems of isolation in older people. Despite awareness of these benefits, bridge is currently given no support from publically funded bodies. The recognition of bridge as a sport would offer greater opportunity for more people to be exposed to these benefits. As well as the increased exposure that the status of 'sport' would afford to bridge, it would also enable funding opportunities to support the activity at all levels, particularly at grassroots and junior

levels.

The stance taken by Sport England in refusing to recognise bridge as a sport is also at odds with the position taken by the International Olympic Committee, SportAccord, the European Union, and a number of European Countries. Earlier this year the organising committee of the 2020 Olympic Games included bridge on its shortlist for possible inclusion in the Tokyo games (though it was not included in the final consideration), and it has since been included as one of the sports which will be contested in the 2018 Asian Games and 2017 South East Asian Games <sup>(5)</sup>.

If bridge were an Olympic sport then it would be one in which Team GB would be hopeful of a medal. Since 2008 England has won 9 medals at World and European team events, and they will be hoping to add to this haul in the World Bridge Championships which start this weekend in Chennai, India. England will be represented in all three events – the Open Teams, the Women’s Teams, and Senior Teams – and will compete against twenty two other countries across fourteen exhausting days of competition. England’s participation in the event is funded solely by the players and the members of the English Bridge Union.

In a parallel case, in July the issue of whether bridge should be considered a sport by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs for VAT purposes was referred to the European Union Court of Justice. The presiding judges deemed that the EUCJ should give a judgment on whether the EU directive which states that sports be exempt from VAT should be applied to bridge in the UK <sup>(6)</sup>. In a significant number of European Union countries no VAT is charged on bridge competition entry fees.

1 - [The Charity Commission decision on Hitchin Bridge Club](#)

2 - <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150604/debtext/150604-0001.htm>

3 - Bridge is seen as an excellent way of improving mental acuity and delaying the onset of dementia, and the social and partnership aspects of bridge are of great benefit to those who may otherwise become isolated (see: [Participation in cognitively-stimulating activities is associated with brain structure and cognitive function in preclinical Alzheimer’s disease, Schultz et al, 2014](#); Annals of Internal Medicine, American College of Physicians and the Washington Post, 2003 reporting on: Verghese, J. 2003. The effects of mind games on Alzheimer’s and dementia. Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, USA.)

4 - [The educational implications of bridge](#)

5 - [World Bridge Federation announcement](#)

6 - <http://www.tribunals.gov.uk/financeandtax/Documents/decisions/English-Bridge-Union-v-HMRC.pdf>

### **What is Bridge?**

Bridge is a card-based mind sport, played in pairs against other pairs (the pairs are sometimes combined into teams of four or eight); The partners sit opposite each other at a table. There is an auction (often called bidding) and then the play, after which the hand is scored. The more tricks a partnership correctly predicts they will make the better their score - but if they do not make as many as they predict their opponents score points instead. In competitions the same hands are played at each table so you can compare your scores with the other partnerships and work out who did best with what they were dealt, thus almost eliminating the 'luck' aspect that exists in card games such as poker.

Playing bridge is one of the most enduring and popular pastimes in the world and for over 100 years it has fascinated people of all types and from all walks of life. It is one of the most popular leisure activities in Britain, with around 300,000 people believed to play on a regular basis. Famous players include Bill Gates, Martina Navratilova and members of the bands Blur and Radiohead.

### **About the English Bridge Union**

The English Bridge Union (EBU) was formed on 23 May 1936 and is a non-profit making membership-funded organisation committed to promoting the game of duplicate bridge. It is also a National Bridge Organisation, affiliated to the European Bridge League and the World Bridge Federation.

The national headquarters of the EBU are in Aylesbury where around 20 professional people support and advise the committees, serve the membership, and help implement policy.  
There are around 55,000 members of the EBU, playing in around 620 affiliated bridge clubs in England.

**For any further information please contact:**

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