



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

at West Midlands Bridge Club  
on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2019 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

EBU Chairman	Jeremy Dhondy (JD)	Nottinghamshire	Graham Brindley (GB)
EBED CEO	Donna Wright (DW)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
EBED Youth Officer	Giles Ip (GI)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Barbara Griffiths (BG)
Leicestershire	David Pollard (DP)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)		

+ two visitors representing the teaching community  
from Warwickshire: Myra Scott (MS)      from Worcestershire: Mike Vetch (MV)

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEM 1 : Welcome & Apologies

1. We had apologies from Clare Batten (Nottinghamshire) and welcomed two new faces – Barbara from Worcestershire and Kiat from Lincolnshire, as well as the EBU/EBED visitors. We currently lack representation from Northamptonshire and from Staffs & Shrops (but their off-line input is of course welcome).

## ITEM 2 : Minutes of Last Meeting (17 Apr 19)

2. The minutes were approved, and no matters arising missing from below were raised.

## ITEM 3 : News from the EBU/Aylesbury

3. JD reported that the County Chairs meeting has happened in May, and the feedback (from this meeting too) was favourable, notably for the EBU Treasurer's approach of consultation. One intended outcome from that meeting was a greater interest in Regional County WGs but JD reported that very limited interest has been forthcoming). We pondered whether the MCWG could help market the concept (our Nov 2018 discussion, [minuted](#) – is the best we have been able to do so far), and DW asked whether technology such as WhatsApp could be of use to such groups.

4. The recent review of actions against the Strategic Aims in the EBU Board meeting ([minuted](#)) was welcome, although it remained a serious disappointment that there are no quantifiable deliverables and few timescales. It was noted that we suffer from the same “gentle” project management in CBA activities, and in an effort to do better and to help EBU-central set appropriate targets on membership levels, each County’s representative undertook the following action

**ACTION 190620.1** : to establish for the County the number of extra number of EBU player sessions it could deliver within the next 12 months with an acceptable amount of effort.

5. DW noted that on some EBED plans there were success criteria, but that these were missing from the overall plan and she said she would address this.
6. It was noted that most County and EBU-central activity focusses on the 10-20% of EBU members who play in Tournaments. JD reported that various J-high events (at some EBU congresses, and Dorset’s “Try a Tournament”) had proven successful at engaging with the other club players. [\[Another example](#) pointed out later comes from Horsham BC] KT made the point that there were two aspects of club players’ comfort zone that we wished to extend – the first was playing outside the club, and the second was playing in a field of a higher standard. These events tackled the first – the second will have to come later.
7. DT reported that Gordon Rainsford had suggested that with the raising of County UMS to the standard level, CBAs would become eligible for all the financial benefits affiliated clubs receive, and JD confirmed that this was the expected position. DT confirmed that this would alleviate Worcestershire’s concerns about the pricing change.

#### **ITEM 4 : The Overlap of Interests with EBED**

8. DW started by reminding us that although EBED shared an office with EBU and gets 25% of its funding from the EBU, it exists independently and its remit is for all duplicate bridge, independently of the question of club EBU affiliation. The EBED focus is
  - Teaching of bridge
  - Furthering Duplicate
  - Young People
  - Research into the benefits of bridge
9. On [Youth Bridge](#), DW described the picture across the country as showing clusters & deserts, and estimated that less than a quarter of counties have a functioning Youth Officer. EBED has just started a Youth Bridge project (supported by sponsors), and GI will be working on that 2 days/week for the next two years. Its aim is to put together a pathway which will allow a group with sufficient enthusiasm to make serious inroads to school bridge.
10. We noted that tackling Youth Bridge will often not be on the agenda for clubs where the focus is on their members, and it is therefore appropriate for County Associations to take the initiative in this field. We agreed that this was something EBED and CBAs should work on together. The immediate actions were identified as

**ACTION 190620.2** : DW to circulate to MCWG members a write-up on the “Bridge for Youth” project.

**ACTION 190620.3** : on receipt of the write-up, each County representative to investigate with their committee if they can engage sensibly with EBED as a pilot area at this time and whether or not they have a person or persons with sufficient passion for Youth Bridge to make it work.

11. There was a little discussion about the balance of focus between having youngsters play cards, having youngsters play Mini-Bridge, and having youngsters play Bridge, and we concluded that we should aim to make the whole of that path available as we start youngsters down it. It was also noted that with the number of Juniors today, the opportunity to represent England was a viable consideration for many youngsters, but if our programme is successful there will be more competition and representing England becomes less easy. There will however be opportunities to represent a school, and we hope someday to represent each County as a junior player (as happens in chess).
12. In the Oxfordshire model, bridge happens in a number of schools, but those most keen aggregate in Oxford Junior Bridge Club (run by OCBA). Gloucestershire is working towards this model also. JD pointed out that on-line bridge is also a viable option for the younger generation, and we should keep an eye on opportunities for that.
13. On University Bridge, DW reported EBED giving help to a number of existing university bridge clubs which were struggling (eg by helping at a Freshers Week and laying on a Fast Track programme which picked up ~10 newcomers), but there were a number of instances reported of how difficult it was to break into a university which did not have a bridge club already, Warwickshire having been rejected more than once by University of Birmingham.
14. On Teaching, DW described the EBED focus as on teaching the teachers (rather than teaching learners) and doing this only with qualified people. The syllabus for this is being extended to ensure issues around the etiquette and the Laws is included. EBED had been running these course on demand but had now switched to planning a set across the country and across the year, and the take-up has been good. Where EBED does contribute to teaching learners, it is only to fill gaps and not compete with others.
15. EBED is currently doing a revision of the first (Red) book with JD as the technical expert. There is a lot of work in keeping all the details accurate, and ensuring that the book, the Hand Bank, and the teachers notes remain in sync.
16. PS asked about the role of EBTA (the Teachers Association) and whether or not our ambition should be that all teachers are members. One benefit of EBTA membership is access to the Hand Bank , and there was little doubt that the Hand Bank was a great resource, even to the extent that some counties pay EBTA membership to be able to get at those hands. We agreed that the target must be to make EBTA attractive to all teachers, and to this end the following action was agreed  
  
**ACTION 190620.4** : DW to provide all present with a statement of what EBTA offers, suitable for use in marketing membership to teachers within the county.
17. DW noted that the new Student Zone on the EBED website (is there a link or where is it?) offered more than was on offer before, and that No Fear Bridge offers free membership to teachers and 6-week free membership to students.
18. DW asked about the amount of networking of teachers within Counties, and there was little to report. She offered EBED support with any workshops a county or region wanted to run for a gathering of teachers.

19. KT made the point that beyond the basic learning, it is vital to provide practice hand and a path for newcomers through Supervised Play and a Gentle Duplicate. Where a club does not have the critical mass to run events solely for newcomers, the club needs to plan carefully the introduction of newcomers to existing duplicate sessions. It was suggested that this is something on which Counties might offer their clubs some guidance (and possibly funding help).
20. DP reported that Notts had run some non-duplicate sessions and these had worked well for the less competitive newcomers.
21. On Furthering Duplicate, PS asked about the respective roles of EBED and the EBU, and DW told us that EBED only worked on publicity in support of Youth Bridge and that the EBU took responsibility for the visibility of bridge in the national press. JD reported that this was proving very difficult and even the Good News story about raising funds for the Junior Teams in 2018 failed to reach the threshold of interest the press demanded.
22. We noted that the more often a person has come across mention of the game of bridge, the more likely they are to take an interest when the opportunity of learning or playing arrives. It is vital therefore that we make the game as visible as we can. PS reported that two of the bridge clubs in Gloucestershire had managed to get an article about their club into the local newspaper.
23. DW pointed out that across the country, councils and doctors are trying to pay more attention to loneliness and mental health issues; the availability of bridge as a means to tackle some of these problems needs to be highlighted.
24. KH made the point that when we do advertise bridge, there are a few well known names get used (Bill gates and Warren Buffet are favourites) but these are very distant people and not likely to be role models for the younger generation that we want to attract. There are some current players (eg Ankush Khandelwal who won the 2018 international (Mind Sports) Pentamind championship) who could be role models if made more visible.
25. DW said that EBED had the experience to offer help with all forms of social media, and that she had been successful in using Facebook (for free) in advertising bridge events. The key is to have a Facebook Page for the Bridge Club, and for someone to join all the local groups and at appropriate times share items from the BC page to the other groups. MV noted that the recent evening classes in Worcestershire were populated purely through word of mouth, despite using the local authorities social media framework to advertise.
26. KH reported success in making Google Search Results more useful for bridge clubs, by adding Louth Bridge Club to Google maps, and using the (free) Business Profile capabilities to improve the profile of the bridge club in searches. He offered to distribute his notes on how to do this and they are provided as Appendix A to these minutes.

## **ITEM 5 : UNAFFILIATED CLUBS**

27. PS introduced this topic as one of the three strands of MCWG activities from last year which were still active (the others being Classroom->Clubroom, and Clubroom->Tournament transitions, which had not gone away but which had no current progress to report at this time). RP reported that working with Mike Willoughby, he had been reviewing our attitude to unaffiliated clubs, and the report provided by Ron Millet to the Chairs meeting in May. As Ron had suggested, Rob & Mike felt that history has made selling the EBU to unaffiliated clubs quite difficult, and perhaps the issue should not be “how do we market this?” but “what should we be marketing?”.

28. They had concluded – and this is what RP wanted to sanity check – that

- Unaffiliated clubs are not affiliating because their members do not see a need to pay for all the services provided by the EBU; that
- The EBU should nevertheless aspire to be the national body for all bridge players; and that
- It is necessary to speak to all bridge players, affiliated and unaffiliated, to determine how to reconcile these points.

29. Those present were fully in agreement with all three points.

30. RP continued by suggesting (with his accountant's hat on) that discussions with unaffiliated clubs might raise the pricing structure as the key issue, since an all-or-nothing payment means that it is difficult to get feedback on which services are considered valuable by their consumers and which are not; and that this last question would be much easier to address if each service was priced individually. RP produced two handouts on the topic, attached here as Appendix B.

31. JD pointed out that although it needs to be looked at, pricing is not always the issue. He pointed out that after the EBU home page, the NGS ranking page is the next most often visited – so we cannot dismiss NGS as of no interest. JD also pointed out that groups like the EBU News Editorial Board had regularly on their agenda the question of whether or not the magazine was good value for money.

32. We agreed on yet another action to take this forward, namely

**ACTION 190620.5** : All County representatives to look for opportunities to consult with unaffiliated clubs about what stops them affiliating to the EBU and how those difficulties might be overcome, so that we can compare notes at our next meeting.

#### **ITEM 6 : Schedule and Plan for the MCWG Year**

33. We agreed to stick with 16<sup>th</sup> October for our next meeting, and – subject to availability – have the meeting at WMBC, as this seems to minimise the travel for most people.

34. The only later meeting currently penciled in is for 13<sup>th</sup> November.

#### **ITEM 7 : AOB**

35. Midlands Improvers Pairs : (on behalf of Jim Parker) MS asked whether we intended that this event continues in the future. We all quickly agreed that giving relative newcomers the chance to play outside their clubs was a Good Thing, but that this was more a County than a cross-County issue, as such people would not want to travel far. Running it as a joint event makes the production of hand commentaries more practical, and scoring as a simultaneous event has attractions too. We agreed in principle that we would run with this in as many counties as can make it viable, and we would ask Jim to bring to the next meeting a suggested date for 2020.

36. The meeting concluded at 1315.

END OF MINUTES

**APPENDIX A**

# Google Search and Google Maps - controlling how your Bridge Club is seen by the world

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## Why?

This little doc is borne out of the experience of adding [Louth Duplicate Bridge Club](#) to Google Maps. What we then discovered is that you automatically “own” the organisational profile on Google Search too, an added bonus. It can only help and inform the public who are interested in bridge, whilst also helping visiting bridge players the area, find our club.

We thought our experience and this info would be useful for other Bridge Clubs who, currently, do not have charge of their listing on Google Search and Google Maps.

## Benefits

- You make it easier for your Bridge Club to be found in **Google Search and Maps** results, even if located within a shared use building (note: the other organisations there are not affected at all)
- **You take charge** of what people see when they do a local search for Bridge Clubs in your area.
- The service is **free and easy to update anytime** from smartphone, tablet and PC
- An easy to use Dashboard for your Bridge Club seeing the web activity from Google Search and Maps: e.g. **request directions, visit your website**, calls to your listed number
- **Share access** to your Dashboard (and business profile) with your **Bridge Club officers**.

Below are a couple of screenshots from a smartphone of the Dashboard, taken a month after adding [Louth Duplicate Bridge Club](#)

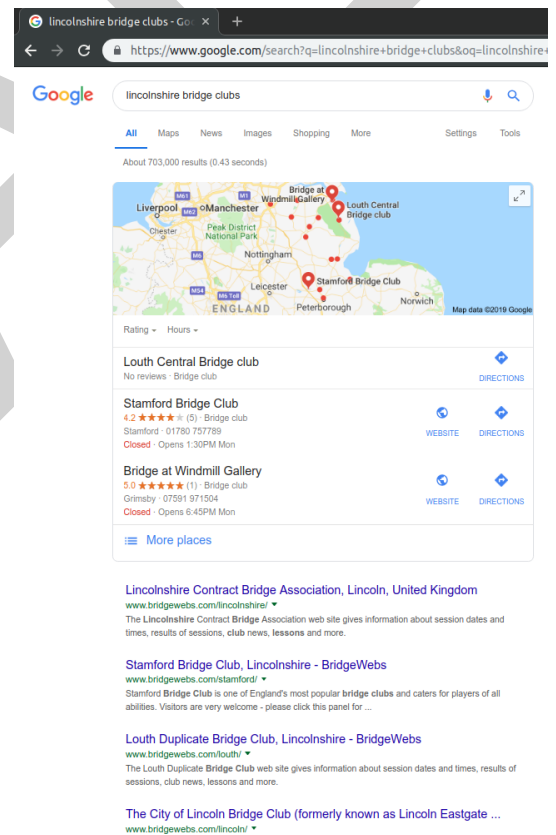
## How to make your Bridge Club business profile

1. Go to <https://business.google.com/create> and start filling in the information
2. Wait for the verification postcard from Google to arrive at your Bridge Club (if it's located within premises that are not wholly yours, let the management know you're expecting mail)
3. Follow the instructions on the postcard and insert your unique code to verify your Bridge Club. Google has a very good help page on this - [here](#).

There are plenty of internet pages walking through the whole process - [this one](#) is good.

## What Google says

(where you see Business think Bridge Club)



“Attract new customers with your free Business Profile.

Your Business Profile appears right when people are searching for your business or businesses like yours on Google Search and Maps. Google My Business makes it easy to create and update your Business Profile – so you can stand out, and bring customers in.”

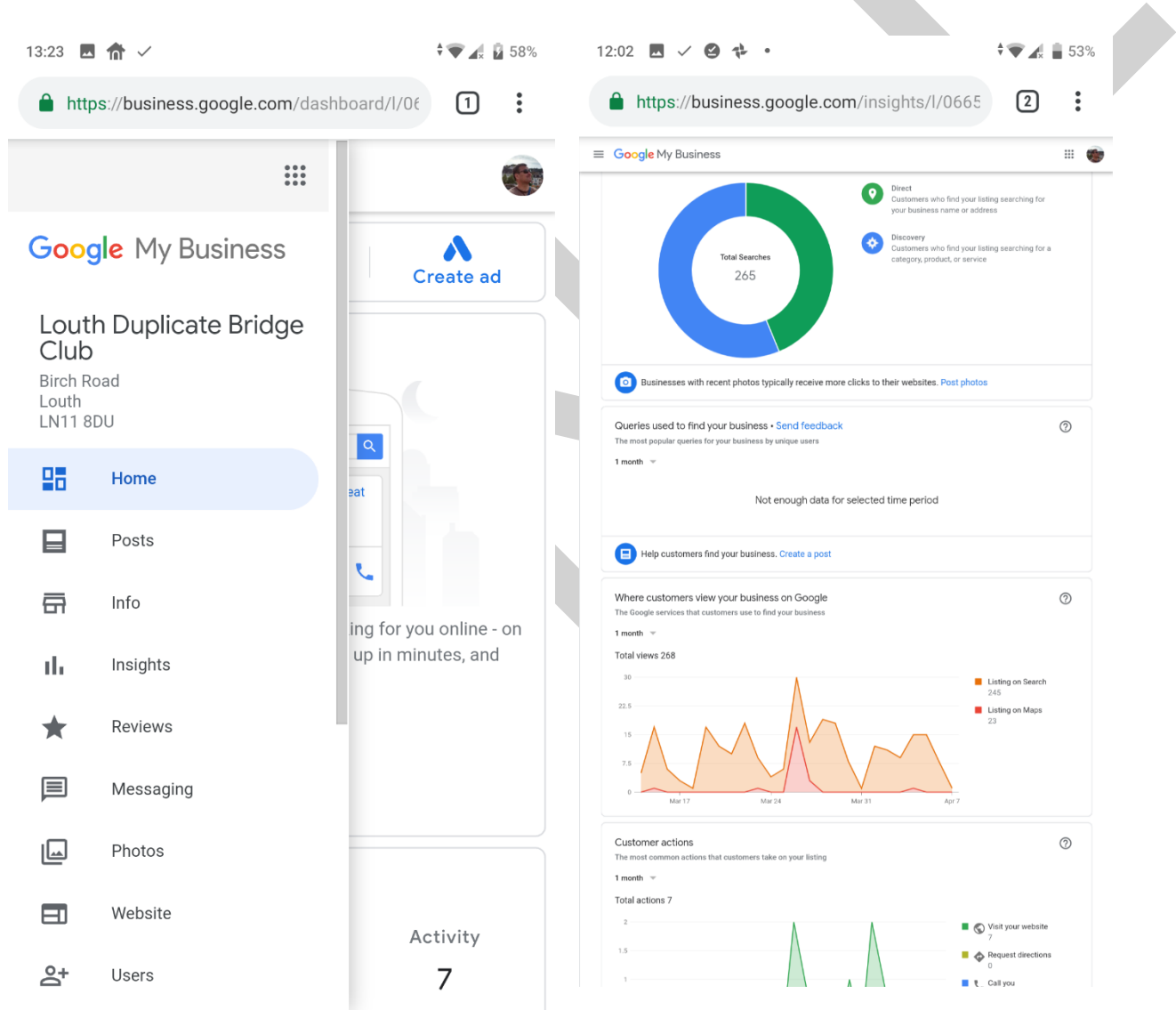
<https://www.google.co.uk/business>

“Update your Business Profile anytime.

Take charge of what people see when they do a local search for your business. Google My Business gives you the tools to update your Business Profile and engage with your customers from your phone, tablet and computer. All for free.”

<https://www.google.co.uk/business/how-it-works>

### Dashboard Screenshots (mobile phone)



## NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS

### ISSUE

Many duplicate clubs are not affiliated to the EBU and many are not known to the county associations, and therefore not supported by these bodies

### TASK

To understand if and how a county and a national body can provide support to these clubs in order to better promote bridge

### INTENDED OUTCOME

Subject to approval by the EBU Board, to try to develop a value proposition and so an affiliation package that will attract non-affiliated clubs, including those that rejected Universal Membership, into the EBU bridge community

### CONCLUSION

Our investigations reported previously lead us to the following conclusions:

- 1) unaffiliated clubs aren't affiliating because their members do not see a need to pay for all the services provided by the EBU;**
- 2) the EBU should aspire to being the national body for all bridge players ;**
- 3) it is necessary to speak to all bridge players, affiliated and unaffiliated, to determine a different pricing structure for services that will ensure that all bridge players wish to belong**

### INITIAL THOUGHTS AS TO THE SORT OF STRUCTURE THIS MIGHT BE LEADING TOWARDS

There is no value proposition that is saleable to unaffiliated clubs based on the current EBU pricing structure for its services, as not all these services are of interest to all bridge clubs and players

To become the national body for all bridge players the EBU should adopt a pricing structure closely aligned to the services provided, allowing members and clubs separately to select only those services which they wish to pay for - this could be described as "taking a more commercial approach" as it will also assist in deciding whether services should be further developed or even discontinued

Such new structure will best be developed by involving unaffiliated clubs in the process. The objective of this process should be described as "to create a national body for all bridge players"

As a starter for ten, this more commercial approach might include some or all of the following:

Club affiliation fees being increased to pay for the general support that the EBU gives towards a club's organisation varying according to a club's membership. Services covered by this would include giving clubs help with constitutions, data protection, safeguarding, behaviour and ethics, laws, marketing.....



Services for members such as the magazine, the diary, teacher and TD training places should be separately charged and expected to recoup their full cost. They can be made available to non-members at a higher price to keep charges to members as low as possible. A service that cannot cover its costs should be discontinued

A reduction in UMS, graded according to the level of master points being awarded including a zero price for sessions for which master points and NGS will not apply Whilst reviewing the current profit and loss model we further recommend that:

Cost of internationals covered by fund-raising events run by the clubs with international players involved in the marketing of the events - e.g. four simultaneous events a year with say £1 per player contribution each time

There would no longer need to be a surplus made on competitions to cover the cost of internationals, allowing a significant reduction in the charges for competitions. Further reductions might be made possible by the introduction of table-top dealing machines cutting the cost of board duplimating, delivery and caddying

**To minimise the risk associated with making such major changes we recommend doing the following:**

- 1) Work with representatives of major unaffiliated clubs to draw up a precise pricing structure**
- 2) Survey affiliated clubs and their members to ascertain whether they would continue to run their sessions under the master point/NGS regime**
- 3) Survey unaffiliated clubs to ascertain whether they would affiliate under the new structure**