



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Sue Wright (SW)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire & IOW	John Fairhurst	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Sue McIntosh (SM)		

**Apologies:** Geoff Clements (Devon), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Malcolm Pryor (Suffolk), Mike Willoughby (Worcestershire) and Robert Smith (Norfolk)

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. There were no new faces today. We approved the minutes from the 20<sup>th</sup> August meeting.

## ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. **PS** had raised with Gordon Rainsford the question of what a club or county should do if presented with accusations of online cheating. The EBU has tackled a number of cases itself, but where clubs have processes in place the recommendation is to follow those, and to come to the EBU if help is needed. Two parties present reported cases where suspicious behaviour had been reported but investigation revealed that this was just strange but lucky choices. We noted that it is important that accusations are not levelled at the table – as is the case in face-to-face play. **PS** was proposing in Gloucestershire to have some trusted players lined up to investigate any accusations, and **KT** expressed a willingness for Oxfordshire to pair up with Gloucestershire so that any investigation could involve an independent investigator from another county.
3. The next question was about the playing platforms which were alternatives to BBO; with the EBU using RealBridge for the Autumn Congress, should we be preparing our players by running trial events on these platforms? [The EBU does plan some open trials for RealBridge, dates tbd]. It was noted that as well as StepBridge and RealBridge, [Sharkbridge](#) has been developing well, and is reported to offer some useful teaching capability (minibrIDGE, and the ability to make everyone in a class declarer on the same hand). It was suggested that in moving platforms the bigger learning curve was for directors – the playing facilities are easier to learn. **KH** raised the possibility that different platforms might eventually become preferred venues for different types of game – perhaps specialising in Teams Tournaments or in high security games.

4. **PS** asked about reactions to the Chairs meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> September; the amount of useful information was highlighted, as was the questioning about the Tollemache. The Chairs' meeting had demonstrated some support for holding a County Championship but with only a slim majority; it was felt by the company here that it should go ahead, and only when it does will we understand the level of support. For some counties it might be a necessary lever to get the top players to engage in online EBU or county events. **PS** was asked about the current EBU stance on resumption of F2F bridge in clubs: he told the meeting that within the previous hour there had been a significant update to information on the EBU website.
5. **FD** reported that a Youth Advisory Group meeting had happened in the past week and he had attended. He was impressed by their open-minded approach to using online technology for Youth and University. **FD** also reported in a task being given to 12-year-olds to write Apps, and suggested that we look to the younger generation for good ideas. **KH** mentioned the development of [Tricky Bridge](#) which is a bridge app designed specifically for the young generation; some information on it can be found on Bridgewinners, and noted that BBO have just purchased Sunray (a Chinese bridge platform which has a Minibridge capability). **PS** reported (second-hand) of a teacher whose recent advert for student resulted in an overload, and suggested that in the current situation there might be a large latent demand.
6. Finally we came to the request which had been made of the County Associations – to consult their clubs and members about which aspects of the EBU Mission are more important than others. **PS** reported that Gloucestershire had done an online survey with about a 25% response rate; key features which came back were that
  - a. The responders were equally distributed across knowing their NGS grade was A/K/Q, or knowing it was J/T/9, or knowing it was 8/7/6, or not knowing it at all.
  - b. Half the respondents declined to declared themselves “comfortable playing in cross-county congresses”.
  - c. Too large a number, when asked to assess aspects of County or EBU performance, declared they didn't know what was going on and could not assess.
7. **PC** suggested that in the online world, the club structure was crumbling as only the Tournament Director was visible to the players. It was felt that the short-term issues survival issues were taking all people's attention. **RP** reported that Oxfordshire had a meeting arranged with all their non-affiliated clubs to discuss engagement, and a model whereby these clubs could have an Associate Membership of the County Association. This engagement has moved forward from the recently circulated advice, into asking how these clubs and the CBA could help each other. He also made the point that if counties do not give feedback to the EBU, they lose the (moral) right to complain if they disagree with EBU plans.
8. **KH** asked whether there would be a demand from clubs and counties, were the EBU to create a payment system allowing club members to register cash in advance and automatically draw down on that when they played games at affiliated clubs. As well as saving clubs effort and time, it was felt that this would be very attractive in a world where people became sensitive about the hygiene issues of handling money.

#### **ITEM 4: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES ONLINE LEAGUE**

9. **PS** reported that only a handful of counties (one negative and five positive) had fed back on whether or not they were willing to commit to some or all of the proposed Midlands Counties Online Leagues. He indicated that there were still a few weeks in which to decide but the first game was in a months' time. He confirmed that the structure of each division would depend on the number of teams who engage (all play all League if practical, Swiss Teams if numbers too large).

## ITEM 5: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

10. Some reports were received offline (including nil reports from Norfolk Suffolk)

- a. Herefordshire reported that engagement with online play was increasing and the County had now started up a Virtual Club, and will be playing a friendly match against Devon.
- b. Derbyshire reported on a struggle to find enough documentation on StepBridge offerings to enable confidence in planning their use. Currently the majority of events in Derbyshire use TD's from EBU BBO lists, and the county is looking at running some of its calendar events on BBO. A suggestion was made that that BBO have yet to find a way to run teams events after November. [PS clarified that this (almost certainly) refers to the Swiss Teams capability which only works with the deprecated Flash interface which becomes unsupported at the end of 2020, and that use of this was a minority sport]. Teaching starts this month and local adverts have been placed aimed at new beginners.

11. At the meeting we learned

- a. Warwickshire's online club was up and running. Also the CBA was finding it difficult to communicate with the non-affiliated clubs within its boundary.
- b. Nottinghamshire has its AGM planned for online, and across the county there are multiple BBO Virtual Clubs and one club focused on BCL.
- c. Lincolnshire reported that the new committee (interim until an AGM happens – and that there was no appetite for an online AGM) continued to be active, and the county selection committee was being re-activated.
- d. Leicestershire reported they will have an online AGM on 30<sup>th</sup> September, and they have ditched the unsupported Saturday morning pairs they tried; 5 Virtual Clubs continue in the county with steady numbers.
- e. Worcestershire reported that three clubs and the county were organising sessions successfully on BCL, and there were plenty of social games and teams bridge in addition. The County Committee had been exercised recently by some clubs too determined to open, and would like the EBU guidance to be firmer (in saying that you cannot, or providing a DCMS approved plan). It was pointed out that the advice on the EBU website had moved in that direction in the past few hours.
- f. Derbyshire reported that they had been planning to re-open with screens in use but had now put it all on hold.
- g. Northamptonshire reported that Stamford BC had dropped one of its 9 online weekly games (for lack of support), and had, following extensive discussions with the District Council, re-opened its premises with one Supervised Play and one Open Tournament a week. After two weeks of operation SBC is going back to ask the DC if they were still considered "Covid Secure".
- h. Oxfordshire reported one new Virtual Club starting this month, that Oxford BC was adding two new online sessions, and the county was continuing its 9-high evening.
- i. Staffs & Shrops reported a planned AGM at the end of September, at which there was a proposal to remove the word "Duplicate" from the county constitution.

- j. Gloucestershire reported that in parallel with the weekly Swiss Teams and weekly 9-high Swiss Pairs they were running, a programme of Monday night games (Swiss Teams, Pairs Ladder, League) had now been started and would run until the end of the year.

**ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

12. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 24<sup>th</sup> September. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES