



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 11th June 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire+	John Fairhurst (JF)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (BD)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Norfolk	Robert Smith (RS)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Toni Smith (TS)		

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes of the meetings of 4th June 2020. New to the group was Robert Smith, chair of the Norfolk CBA.
2. **KH** pointed out that the next inter-county match planned is just 2 days away and after Lincolnshire paid the UMS charges for the first inter-county match, he was now looking to another county to pay this time. **PS** volunteered to persuade the GBCA treasurer, and **DB** offered that Leicestershire will take the next turn.
3. **PS** described the plan for the MCWG Facebook group and access to it, and received agreement from the group. The plan is
 - a. The function of the group is the continuation of the “private” (the group has always understood that some form of Chatham House rules would apply) discussions which take place in this group.
 - b. Membership is restricted to attendees at these meetings, and a list is maintained of those entitled to be members.

ITEM 2: The Midlands Counties League

4. **TS** reported that the need for a decision on this had been highlighted at a Notts CBA committee meeting, particularly if a restart is expected in the autumn; the consensus here was that the lockdown situation was too volatile to make plans at this point, but we agreed to come back to this in our first MCWG meeting in July.

ACTION: all present to remind the Chair at the right time.

5. Notts CBA committee had also discussed concerns about cheating, and had postulated inter-county games being played with one of each partnership at home while the other was in a central location (e.g. village hall) and therefore could be supervised in a social distancing context. Some pointed out the fact that this would not be secure enough; **PS** mentioned the recent [discussion on BridgeWinners](#) wherein some of the “Recorders” (in ACBL language) had expressed their confidence that cheats are getting noticed and are being chased down. In the discussion we concluded that suspicious incidents are not always nefarious and what we need is an easy mechanism to report any odd occurrences to a central point where patterns can be detected and investigations can take place (something much easier when all actions are recorded – a fact which ought to discourage cheating in the first place!). **KH** reminded us that the EBU takes cheating very seriously and that on-line cheating currently being investigated.

ITEM 3: Feedback/News from the EBU

6. **KH** and **PS** had spent 4.5 hrs on the previous day in an EBU Board meeting at which many things were discussed. They highlighted:
- a. The take-up of Virtual Clubs continues, and not to the detriment of the EBU-managed games, which support players at times their club is not active. Worth noticing and advertising through all counties is the EBED Learners sessions at 1400 on Wednesdays and Fridays ([click here for details](#)) which were initially only advertised via EBTA teachers but need wider publicity. The sessions include teachers on hand to help and a Zoom discussion afterwards.
 - b. Much discussion took place about the learning strategy, and the video campaign just started which will lead into that. The theme is “teach the game you love to the people you love” and the initial videos can be [seen by clicking here](#).
 - c. The EBU is adopting a structured approach to developing a new strategy. The key points used at the meeting are copied as [an Appendix to these notes](#). The idea that of a contribution from the MCWG to the engagement with non-affiliated clubs was raised and we will discuss that later.
 - d. A proposal from **KH** was raised that the EBU adopted the practice of having some “Executive Working Groups” (unpaid volunteers from the membership) working to Gordon Rainsford (as CEO) to tackle aspects on which the EBU/Board are currently weak, specifically on Commercial Development, Marketing and Technology. Adverts for subject matter experts who are willing to put in some serious effort to join these groups will emerge shortly.

ITEM 4: EBU FUTURES

7. In preparation for this meeting **RP** had written two papers (distributed in advance) entitled “Meeting The Challenge Of Expanding The EBU To Cover All Bridge Players” and “How To Involve Non-Members In A Discussion About The Future Shape Of Bridge’s National Body In England” – all of which falls into line neatly with the agreement by the EBU Board on a strategy aiming to address the needs of all bridge players. **KH** made the point that EBU-central was not well placed to engage with unaffiliated clubs, but that counties often were. It emerged that no directory of unaffiliated clubs exists, although you can find a number of clubs by using the facility from [Bridgewebs linked here](#) (spotted by **JP**). **KH** has created a shared file into which we can all deposit details of unaffiliated clubs – [click here to view](#). [Some counties may prefer to make their website list the master list for them] Many commented on their unsuccessful attempt to engage non-affiliated clubs in the past.

8. Some comments were raised on the question of whether UMS was a Good Thing or not. A key point made by **MW** was that even if it had been successful financially, the way in which it has split the bridge playing community has hurt the game. **PS** believes that the fact that it is not a perfect system is understood by the EBU Board, and there was a suggestion that it could be combined with a membership model. **PS** expressed the view that it was too early to get into this detail, as we need to work out WHAT services are needed, before delving into HOW these are paid for; some others would like to tackle these topics in parallel.
9. The question put to the MCWG was whether or not a subset would be willing to pilot an engagement model with non-affiliated clubs so that we could both learn their views but also develop a robust process to use across the country. **KH** pointed out that to engage properly in this would take effort and time. We had volunteers from Herefordshire (**KS**), Northamptonshire (**FD**) and Suffolk (**MP**). **PS** took responsibility for working with these three to define the task, and said they would report back regularly to this meeting.
10. **RP** pointed out the potential value in engaging on these discussions with the likes of Andy Robson and Bernard Magee. Engagement with other CBAs and Regional CWGs was also raised. **KH** reported that he had attended the Northern CWG and it felt much like this group in its ways of working. The only documentation to appear from the NCWG since this time last year is one set of minutes (although they have met more). We agreed that **PS** would arrange for a broadcast of the plans for this group and the two input papers to all CBAs.

ITEM 5: TEACHING

11. There was insufficient time left in the meeting to tackle this properly, but we did want to. **PS** proposed that a few counties with active teaching document their approach and distribute that in advance of the next meeting, to give everyone some food for thought. **FD** and **PS** agreed to do this. **PS** went on to say that there are multiple issues in a proper teaching strategy, at least
 - a. Training teachers and their professional status
 - b. Making available teaching materials.
 - c. Ensuring there are enough teachers available for the numbers interested to learn.
 - d. Linking teachers and pupils.
 - e. Enabling pupils to move from learning into playing in clubs.

He expressed the view that while a central body like EBED could tackle items 1/2, it was the County BAs that need to take responsibility for the later steps, and this is not a responsibility to which many of us have paid attention.

12. **KH** made the point that online teaching knows no geographical boundaries and we as counties should be willing and able to link potential learners to any teachers in other counties. He offered to initiate a list of those teaching and what services they were offering, to which we can all add those local to us. The [document doing this is found by clicking here](#).

ITEM 6: FUTURE PLANS

13. We agreed to meet again at the same time next week. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES

APPENDIX A : EBU STRATEGY

This is the presentation given to the Board and with which they concurred.

WHERE WE START ON STRATEGY – PROCESS

1. We must understand our mission
2. We must understand our past performance
3. We must understand how the world is changing
4. We must decide on what we look like in the new world
5. Only then do we build a strategy to get us there

Are we agreed on this primarily sequential process?

STATUS OF THESE STEPS TODAY

1. MISSION = “Promote bridge”

different market segments – do we recognise these?

need for partnerships – are we committed to this?

2. Honesty and listening to others’ views too.

Are we ready to do this? How do we approach it?

3. This picture has still a lot of development to come
 4. Early guesses (e.g. online stays) but a lot to learn
 5. << not yet >>
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WHAT CAN WE DO NOW?

For steps 1&2, we need to engage with others

EBED, CBAs, players, teachers, clubs (A and non-A)

- Confirming the shared mission
- Confirming the willingness to work together
- Helping in our assessment of the past

Question: can we divide up this task?
