



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> July 2020 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Hampshire & IOW	John Fairhurst	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Sue McIntosh (SM)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)		

**Apologies:** Keith Stait (Herefordshire), and Fred Davis (Northamptonshire).

**CHAIR:** Patrick Shields

## ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes of the meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

## ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. PS reported that negotiations with BBO were ongoing but slow; Gordon Rainsford has submitted a new proposal to them but the person who needs to respond is not available until next week. The fact that BBO wants to be an exclusive provider to the EBU and its clubs has been noted and is uncomfortable for many. The message EBU sent out about Direct Membership last Friday (and corrected the next day) had been open to mis-interpretation (the hint of membership loss was all wrong) and has caused upset; concern was expressed about if and how (in a GDPR world) it had been sent to non-members of the EBU. [LATER: it is now believed that non-members only received the offer through the website and not by email].
3. There was also discussion in EBU circles about the possibility of restarting some events in the autumn; the most suitable for this are those with small numbers where social distancing is practical. One idea was to run one division of the Premier League in one bridge club, so that there would only be 8 tables in play there. Unfortunately, this caters only for a small part of the membership.
4. The final piece of news is the announcement of the English Bridge School on the EBU website. KH reported that this was part of a heads-up to EBTA teachers that the online platform will be available for term time starting in September. The strategy outlined involves direct student interaction with the website; it was pointed out that this might upset some teachers, but acknowledged that user-centric, self-service e-learning is the way of the future. KH reassured us that the approach is being driven by teachers and remains teacher-centric. The new EBED CEO is Giorgio Provenza who comes to the role with many qualifications as a player and as a teacher.

### **ITEM 3: PILOT ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS (MCWG-PENC)**

5. MP reported the group had collected views in three counties and were now pulling back to focus on the current (limited) objective to pilot an effective approach to non-affiliated clubs that can be used by all counties. He indicated it will be dovetailed into EBU communications, which PS elaborated as being the next stage in the development of the EBU Mission, for which it is planned that the County BAs will drive the engagement with clubs. PS clarified that this venture was not about maximising affiliation, but about understanding what bridge players and clubs wanted and needed, and that the next stage would involve both affiliated and non-affiliated clubs.

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

6. PS introduced the two issues that we have – one is how and when to complete the 2019/20 season of which just one match remained, and the other is whether to instigate an online MCL for the coming months. Looking first at the existing competition, there were clearly vested interests from some counties, and multiple ways to finalise the scores were we to stop at this point. A number of counties noted that they had truncated and finalised (in different ways) a number of leagues which they had underway when lockdown arrived. In the absence of any suitable instructions in the [League Rules](#), the meeting had a strong preference for treating the current event as a 2019/21 series, and waiting until face to face bridge resumes for an opportunity to play the final round.
7. For the coming year, KH pointed out as an example the Presidents' Cup which runs as an online league, with [self-service management based on a spreadsheet](#), and suggested that it would be straightforward to run an online league. PS reported that Gloucestershire had run a match in the style of MCL against the North-East successfully. There are two fundamental questions – the match arrangements and what counties should be involved. On the latter point, it is clearly desirable that all CBAs get to play bridge, but there might be considerable benefit in trying to get a set of online leagues running across the country. KH highlighted some research that he had led for Lincolnshire on inter-county leagues last year – [click here to read](#). It was agreed that PS would approach counties not present to test the appetite for that.
8. On the format and structure, driven by a desire to clearly differentiate this league from other online games, the preference was expressed for using a fixed Sunday and only once a month for the matches, and keeping the matches at 32 boards. If it was a 32-board match it would need to be run with a break. We need a volunteer to be the Master Organiser for this event, and everyone was asked to think of candidates and bring their names next meeting. There was a case for being more flexible than we are for face-to-face and possibly running the Porter and/or Markham as a team-of-4 competition, making it easier for counties lacking enough online members to play. PS offered to prepare a specification and circulate it to the group.

### **ITEM 8: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

9. RP asked about how well the EBU Forum was working as a feedback mechanism on the Vision / Mission / Values Statements – and a quick poll suggested very few of those present were active there. He proposed we spend some time discussing these issues at the next meeting in an attempt to catalyse activity.
10. The next meeting will be at the same time next week. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES

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