



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 17th December 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)		

Apologies: Kathy Talbot (Oxfordshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 3rd December meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.
2. Last meeting we had discussed a mass-attendance event. **FD** reminded us that in 2009 (see [page 16 of this issue of English Bridge](#)) there was "Celebrity Grand Slam" and in the [Epson world-wide Simultaneous Pairs in 1992](#) there were over 100,000 players took part. The possibility of a fresh "Guinness Book of Records" item for playing bridge was suggested [LATER CHECK: "contract bridge" gets only one hit on the online website]

ITEM 3a Active Topics : Experiences with Online Platforms

3. **MW** reported that Droitwich BC had tried the audio/visual offerings from Bridge Club Live; it is primarily a chat capability for use between deals rather than during a hand, and you move off to a second tab for this.
4. **MP** reported that Suffolk had signed up with RealBridge (as has Gloucestershire) and will be running events there. The SCBA believes that screens are both easy enough to use and essential to better manage Unauthorised Information. **JF** reported that Basingstoke BC is splitting its bridge between BBO and RealBridge, in recognition of the fact that some players find the video distracting. A number of counties mentioned running a Christmas Party on RealBridge in the next few days. There is talk of a "RealBridge Lounge" supporting casual bridge games, but details are not available.
5. **PS** reported that performance problems with BBO had not disappeared yet, and there were reports of delays and cancellation of games on Tuesday of this week..

ITEM 3b Active Topics : Face-to-face Bridge and Futures

6. **PS** raised the following question: given that we had clubs of all shapes and sizes pre-Covid, and that in lockdown we have seen behaviours ranging from hibernation to fully embracing online bridge, will clubs need help in thinking through what options for the future (with or without online, separate or integrated, ...) would best suit their members? In the discussion the following points were made
- a. The online bridge world existed before Covid, and the players involved did occasionally meet up in person and enjoyed doing so. This might be a feature to replicate once restrictions ease.
 - b. Geography matters in face-to-face games, but online, as well as the company playing, the convenience of the time and the standard of the game will be the important factors driving the selection of where to play – and we could be doing more in making the options here more easily accessible by our members.
 - c. A number of county associations (Essex and Suffolk at least) are already engaging with their clubs to discuss the future – including options for clubs working together and possibly sharing premises (which can avoid the work in setting up and taking down the tables etc.).
 - d. There was positive interest in a more accessible form of calendar of bridge events, particularly online events. The EBU calendar provides a lot of events, but it is not clear whether or not it is complete. [LATER: when events get an EBU Licence they are added to the calendar; action by the tournament organisers is needed in other cases]

ITEM 3c: Active Topics : Midlands Online Cross County Teams (MOCCT)

7. We discussed the naming of the event and decided that the key attributes we wanted people to notice were “8-high” and “No Fear” and that we would therefore call it
Midlands No Fear 8-High Swiss Teams
8. We agreed that each County Association would be responsible for advertising and gathering entries. They would supply a list to **PS** who would be the TD for the event.
9. The draft flyer will be updated and re-distributed.

ITEM 4: Round Robin Catchup from Counties

10. We had confirmation of nothing to report from Avon, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire.
11. One report was received offline:
- a. Leicestershire: LCBA has reviewed current Competitions and is planning for online events in the New Year, all on BBO at the moment. LCBA has found no interest in the Midland No Fear 8-High Swiss Teams (all clubs being BBO rather than RealBridge).
12. At the meeting we only had time to hear from:
- a. Staffs & Shrops: had their biggest ever attendance at a county night last night.
 - b. Worcestershire: with the appearance of RealBridge the platform of choice within the county is unclear. **MW** identified a small drift from other forms of the online game into Virtual Club Duplicates.

- c. Warwickshire: **MT** reminded us of the Midlands Counties Congress on 6-8 January, and noted that the excellent Mr Bridge magazine had now folded. The number of Virtual Club games were increasing.
- d. Suffolk: **MP** reported increased activity on RealBridge. He noted that as well as meeting with affiliated clubs, the SCBA was planning a meeting with all non-affiliated clubs to discuss bridge futures.
- e. Essex: **CF** reported that the county was now starting online events.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

13. A question was raised about the entry fee for the EBU's latest NICKO (Inter Club Knock Out) competition, given that only a few rounds of the previous series, for which entry fees had been paid, had taken part. LATER : Gordon Rainsford confirmed that the series started in 2019 will be restarted as soon as restrictions go, that the two series were independent, and that it was appropriate to pay an entry fee for both.

14. It was agreed that the next meeting will be in three weeks' time, on Thursday 7th January. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before. After that we expect to resume fortnightly meetings.

END OF MINUTES