



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 18th June 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Nottinghamshire	Toni Smith (TS)
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)

and we also had Mike Hickling who hails from Lancashire

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. **PS** explained that the vague words around "Chatham House rules" were there because any discussion on this pre-dated the current group TOR and had not been discussed with the current group. He also explained that the plan to broadcast the WG idea and background to other CBAs (para 10 of previous minutes) had not yet been actioned but was in the pipeline. We approved the minutes of the meeting of 11th June 2020.
2. New to the group was Sue O'Hara from Avon (a county which had always been silently monitoring) and we also had Mike Hickling, identified as a useful contact by **FD** because of his background in teaching bridge. **MH** explained he had been a Teacher-Educator for EBED for the past two years, and had even done sessions in Scotland for the SBU using the EBED syllabus. He was concerned that EBED was pushing too far into a professionalised teaching model for a pastime such as bridge.
3. [For the record but not mentioned] Gloucestershire has agreed to take on the UMS payment for the first inter-county event.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

4. **KH** commented that he was spending multiple days each week helping EBED on technology, and went on to highlight two technology steps being considered by some bridge clubs
 - a. A group in Hungary (VISOFIT) started in 2017 developing a tablet-based, offline, in-club version of bridge in which all players use tablets. This avoids the hygiene issues which come with touching of cards and has become a lot more attractive in the current crisis. There was a plan to demonstrate the system at this summer's EBU Eastbourne congress, which has now been shelved. This approach offers enormous opportunities for data gathering, which can be used for personal analysis as well as group statistics.

- b. Perspex screens across a bridge table are being actively [marketed by Bridge+More](#). They have already been adopted [by some in Denmark](#). Some suppliers in this country are also being asked about screens.
5. **PC** pointed out that some bridge congresses in the US were now being scheduled for the summer months. Both **FD** and **PS** reported on knowing clubs who were actively preparing risks assessments to address the relevant practices to minimise the risks as clubs re-open. Interest was expressed in sharing these.

ITEM 3: ROUND-ROBIN REPORTS FROM COUNTIES

6. To save time at the meeting we had the following offline reports from county representatives
 - a. **KS** for **Herefordshire**: first online Virtual Club in the county (Ross-on-Wye) has started.
 - b. **MW** for **Worcestershire**: the county is arranging an “honesty UMS” arrangement with EBU and (aiming to minimise the effort) will track what games members play in, and present them with an account when club bridge resumes.
 - c. **MP** for **Suffolk**: the third “season” of online league about to start (rising to 25 teams) and plans are underway to run the county AGM Pairs and Seniors Pairs as online games. Support has been expressed for continuing some online after the crisis, to avoid travel in poor weather. The county AGM will be on Sunday 21st June via Zoom, and an updated constitution will be presented taking greater account of the online world. The SCBA committee are enthusiastic about being involved in the non-affiliated club pilot.
 - d. **TS** for **Nottinghamshire**: activity continues to increase and the £100 charge for TD training has not put anyone off; an AGM on Zoom is in its planning stage.
 - e. **PC** for **Staffs & Shrops**: weekly pairs continues and a new weekly session aimed at beginners/novices is being planned.
 - f. **KT & RP** for **Oxfordshire**: continued growth on all fronts (including Juniors) although one club had a TD trained for BBO, but then backed off (preferring to use teaching tables, while still playing UMS). Oxford BC have a great initiative going to get players online. A check suggests 190 tables of online play in the last week (against ~260 in face to face days) and an estimate that 50% of the membership has ventured online now.
 - g. **JP** for **Derbyshire**: now planning to offer some of their standard events online, and concerned about the cost of employing professional TDs which might discourage some clubs – a solution being better cascade of the requisite skills (but currently lacking a volunteer). **KT** suggested other counties could help in the TD training (contact her if required; **PS** can help too, but not until he has finished with Glos TDs at the end of June). DCBA have postponed their AGM until 2021. Currently only teaching of improvers is ongoing – but no beginners, and **JP** has researched YouTube for helpful videos and circulated a list of these to teachers.
7. At the meeting we heard from
 - a. **FD** for **Northamptonshire**: a few more sessions are happening.
 - b. **RS** for **Norfolk**: they have been running 3 events/week for the past month and two will now become Virtual Club sessions while the third is for friends of the TD and runs for free. A teams’ league with two divisions has been set up.
 - c. **SO** for **Avon**: Bristol Bridge Club is running three VC sessions a week, and a Pairs League with 5 divisions (37 pairs). ACBA is planning to hold its AGM by Zoom.

- d. **JF** reported that not a lot had changed, but that the website for **Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey** had revealed to him over 100 unaffiliated clubs (and 72 affiliated) and the Surrey site also lists 21 teachers in the county.
- e. **KH** for **Lincolnshire**: some movement towards VCs, and last weekend's inter-county match went well with captains meeting up in the Zoom channel which ran throughout. The event was won by a late entry from Sussex ([full results](#)). The two runs of inter-county games have been at the higher skill levels and it might be timely to now aim lower down; the match structure can be copied, so anyone organising is not starting from scratch. No volunteers were forthcoming for the next run but the suggestions were made that (a) we should plan out a series of these spanning the skills range over the next six months, and (b) it might be better to run in groups of 8 not 16 for less experienced players.
- f. **MT** for **Warwickshire** : moved are underway to extend and expand the existing pairs sessions. **MT** also commented on the lack of information we had about the Northern CWG, and asked that we invite their Chair to attend one of our coming meetings; **PS** agreed to do that.
- g. **PS** for **Gloucestershire**: 3 VCs running and another two on the horizon. Next week Cheltenham BC is having a friendly match (probably 9 teams of 4) with the Anney BC with whom they have twinned for some years. **KH** suggested that it would be attractive to get twinned towns to generate a combined team and offer matches to other pairs, and **PS** will progress this idea with Anney.
- h. **DB** for **Leicestershire** reported the enjoyment the LCBA players had in last weekend's match, that there was one VC up and running and LCBA would be starting another before the end of June. Of the three teaching clubs in Leicestershire only one was doing any online teaching, and there only a little.

ITEM 4: PILOT ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS (MCWG-PENC)

8. **PS** reported that since last week he had, with help from the three participants, drafted a Task Description ([circulated with the agenda](#)) to which the EBU Board had signed up with these words:
 - a. The Board is keen that the EBU and its parts engage with non-affiliated clubs with the aim of uniting the bridge community as we move forward. This pilot is an important step in developing an effective engagement, which we hope will seriously inform the new EBU strategy on the creation of which we are just embarking; it is too early at this point to commit to exactly what the follow-through will be.
9. Comments were made on the large number of non-affiliated clubs which exist and the estimate that the bridge playing population of this country is many times the EBU membership. U3A groups and golf clubs were identified as rich sources of bridge activity and potential players. We were reminded that not all bridge players want organised bridge.
10. **RP** reminded us of the investigation into non-affiliated clubs which had taken place a few years back and **PS** suggested that the conclusions which emerged from that ([link here to it all](#)) was that cost was the main reason why non-affiliated clubs did not now affiliate. **MP** suggested that the new team should meet on Zoom with **MW** and **RP** to learn from their experience. **RS** reported in action visiting non-affiliated clubs in Norfolk a few years back, and how they reported that they had everything they needed without affiliation. **PS** noted that the task was not to persuade them to affiliate to the existing EBU, but to understand what they want of a national body.

ITEM 5: TEACHING

11. **PS** introduced the topic by reporting that in Cheltenham the crisis had come just at the point where the normal practice was to switch from formal teaching to learning through playing, and many of the learners have found their way into online bridge. **FD** reported from Stamford that online lessons were now at week-6 but were proving manpower expensive to run in small groups but were helped a lot by use of No Fear Bridge. Buddies from the bridge club were to start playing soon with the newcomers, and there was a waiting list for the next teaching due to start in three months' time.
12. **MH** pointed out that there are two distinct streams – newcomers and improvers, and in Clitheroe he has been running one session a week for each (using BBO and Zoom). The preparation of 2-3-hour sessions to a professional standard has proved very time consuming. The biggest time costs were in preparing the material and preparing suitable hands (the handbank being too narrowly focused on one aspect of the game at a time). A big issue is the difficulty, in an online environment, of spotting the student who was failing to understand – and there were reports from schools of how live teachers have become much more appreciated after pupils experience online learning.
13. It was agreed that different learning styles suit different people, but that online was here to stay and that we needed to find the right balance between the different options. **KH** pointed out that in order to grow we need to attract younger players, and that generation will look first to online options. **KH** reminded us of the “Show the game you love to the people you love” [videos](#) which we should propagate through all our contacts and websites.
14. In terms of sharing materials, nobody had anything to offer which can compete with No Fear Bridge. It is great that it is there and so good, but lack of any competition in that space cannot be best.

ITEM 6: FUTURE PLANS

15. Other news: **JP** reported that BBO have announced changes to the running of Free Tournaments. This will not affect Virtual Clubs but might hit other TDs.
16. We raised the question of frequency and content of meetings. It was agreed that
- a. The Thursday morning needs to concentrate on news and highlights of other topics.
 - b. Separate groups should be created to do more in-depth discussions on other topics. **KH** volunteered to organise a session on technology. **FD** agreed to take on the session on teaching.
17. 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