



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2020 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Hampshire+	John Fairhurst (JF)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (BD)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Toni Smith (TS)		

and apologies from Keith Stait (Herefordshire) and Robert Smith (Norfolk)

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes of the meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and of 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

## ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. PS reported that considerable time had been spent by the EBU Board discussing the relationship with EBED. The independence of the organisations had created a separation, but there was now a strong desire to work as partners and speak with one voice, each representing the interests of the other when appropriate. This, and the recent appointment of a new CEO to EBED, will mark the start of a new era. JP expressed the need for more liaison with counties on the teacher entries in EBU/EBED directories.
3. PS further reported that BBO charges had changed on 1<sup>st</sup> July (to take 40% of the input) and would change again on 1<sup>st</sup> September (to 50%). KH pointed out that Gordon Rainsford was working with BBO on what the charges should be, and that the EBU Board were conscious that it was not best to tie the EBU into a single online bridge platform. RP asked for confirmation that the BBO percentage was independent of the charge levied, and suggested that a minimal BBO charge with further charges externally was to be preferred (LATER : it seems that BBO object to this and ask for the given percentage of whatever is the effective charge to players).
4. PS and KH reported that they had both now played on [STEPBRIDGE](#), and found the platform exceeded their expectations. It offers a very similar set of procedures to those on BBO, and lacks only the double dummy solver which BBO has. Some aspects of the interface are better than the BBO interface – one of these is a clock following a jump bid forcing a pause before the next hand calls. Use of the platform is free for the Sunday and Wednesday evening games that the WBU has organised, and the suggestion is that others can also use the platform for free during 2020.

5. KH also mentioned that the idea raised here at the last meeting of using curtain cards was now gaining popularity in EBU circles, and that the proposal for Executive Working Groups was now accepted and the first advert was out (on [www.ebu.co.uk](http://www.ebu.co.uk)).

### **ITEM 3: REPORT FROM THE NORTHERN CWG**

6. PS had attended this week's NCWG meeting and reported a great similarity with this group in terms of issues raised and initiatives reported. Two points came through from the discussion:
- a. The move to online bridge is far from finished; although some players have months of experience behind them, more are coming online all the time.
  - b. The drivers and leaders for online bridge are not always the same people who have provided leadership in the face-to-face game; different background and different skills are proving of greater value.

Both of these points resonated with the MCWG community present.

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

7. MP reported that the group had not met this week, but that in Suffolk he had discovered non-affiliated clubs who were interested to affiliate in order to gain Virtual Club status (a welcome marketing opportunity). He noted that the remit of the group was wider than this – addressing the future rather than the present. FD reported on some local (Northamptonshire) conversations which had identified that as more individuals were playing online, some were declaring that they did not expect to return to face-to-face play.
8. RP asked about the group's reaction to the announcement on the website of a reduced Direct Membership fee, and some present agreed with his thought that the charge was too high. KH reminded us all that the UMS charges were not charges on a club, but were the means by which our personal membership of the EBU is paid for, and the club was just an intermediary facilitating collection. FD reported that Stamford BC had asked their members for voluntary contributions to support the EBU and collected £1400, for which the EBU has expressed sincere thanks.
9. RP reported that in Oxfordshire the county was advertising to all clubs the sessions of all 7 clubs who were running online. PS reported that Cheltenham BC was taking a similar attitude but offering a £10 online membership (while full members pay £25 annually) to any members of other bridge clubs in Gloucestershire and to external partners of any club members.
10. The point was made by PS that bridge has always been an extremely cheap pastime, but that today the interest of the audience was much more focused on comfort and enjoyment than on price. We need to reconsider the price point for playing bridge, possibly bringing it more in line with the costs of other entertainment activities; we need to reset players' expectations on price and performance.

### **ITEM 5: TECHNOLOGY SUB GROUP**

11. We agreed that, since the last meeting had slipped by with no attendees, the group would meet in an ad hoc manner; requests to meet should be emailed to [kiat.huang@gmail.com](mailto:kiat.huang@gmail.com).

## **ITEM 6: TEACHING SUB-GROUP**

12. FD reported that they had met, with five present, and that he remained keen to hear of others' accounts of teaching during lockdown. The use of audio/visual alongside online play seems to be standard, but the effort needed to get newcomers comfortable with this technology was very noticeable. He reported on starting with a group of four, then then taking two foursomes together, but found three foursomes became awkward. MV reported on experiencing how larger numbers means a much increased chance of disruption by one player having difficulties. KT reported that Oxford BC had put together a Zoom/BBO training package. JF reported that he had seen that a staggered start to sessions be helpful, and suggested that adding people to a group one or two at a time might be easier.

## **ITEM 7: ROUND-ROBIN REPORTS FROM COUNTIES**

13. There were null reports from Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Norfolk.

14. For Nottinghamshire TS reported that the number of clubs was increasing with several running last night, although the top players cannot be persuaded to play. PS suggested that this was down to being able to organise a suitably high standard of game. The idea of CBAs helping to coordinate clubs' choices of night was raised, but it was noted that some clubs are very resistant to outside help.

15. From Avon, SO reported no change, but the same difficulty in persuading the top players to turn out. Bristol BC is about to have its AGM on Zoom. [Notes from MP from Suffolk on their AGM are here] [LATER report from SO : About 80% of our members have renewed their membership for the current year. So we only issued invitations to those who had renewed. 57 members attended the meeting a couple of people said they were unable to connect . We had one person controlling the meeting and the Chair ran the meeting along the usual lines of our AGM. Everyone was muted initially apart from the trustees. Then people could wave when they wanted to speak. All the nominated personnel were elected unopposed but we did use a voting form on zoom. This would have been a good way of voting on motions , but we didn't have any! We discussed the virtual club and got some feedback on why people were not joining in and also thoughts on how we could get back to playing at the club, maybe using tablets. We had positive feedback after the meeting]

16. KH reported from Lincolnshire that they had a first Virtual Club started and that the new committee was active now, and was considering an online AGM. [Notes on the [Suffolk CBA AGM on zoom are here](#)]

17. JF had no new activities to report but asked whether CBAs had considered their (if any) responsibility for the welfare of the county members who might be isolated or alone; a number of those present reported initiatives from their local bridge clubs to do this and a number of club website are advertising volunteers to help those in need. Bristol BC went as far as phoning all members to check on their status.

18. From Warwickshire MT reported that a subscription-based payment service (£5 a month) is the ongoing option preferred by players for pairs sessions. He noted that one large club in the county was very concerned about financial survivability, particularly with the lack of recognition of this by the EBU as a major concern for medium and large clubs. PC reminded him about the £10k government grant and the possibility of forming alliances with other local clubs

19. There was discussion of the level of competition which the (shorter) BB\$1.50 EBU games give to the BB\$3+ charge of Virtual Clubs. The value of club games to club members is that they play against people whom they know from face to face play. This makes these games much more attractive than the EBU games, and suggests a different audience and therefore minimal competition for players.

20. MW reported from Worcestershire that they have partitioned the county pairs event into two divisions to give people opposition of similar ability, and that they have seen numbers increase. MV added that discussions on a return to face-to-face bridge continue, and various of those present reported that they are having active discussions with venue management about this.

21. We also had offline reports by a number of counties

- a. From Suffolk : who see no immediate prospects of face-to-face bridge and have a proposal before the committee to cancel, postpone or convert to on line all SCBA events scheduled up until the end of November (while continuing regular reviews of F2F developments in UK and ROW). Suffolk is expecting the post-Covid world to be hybrid, containing on line and F2F bridge. For example, continuation of the popular Sunday online pairs session.
- b. From Derbyshire : 4 affiliated clubs and the county are now regularly playing on BBO, with training being scheduled and a hope to increase activities for 2 clubs and the county and introduce at least 2 other affiliated clubs to running events on BBO. Active clubs are being accommodating to non-members. The county have started running some teams events and running other calendar competitions in parallel with a successful BBO County night.
- c. From Herefordshire : Ross Virtual BC met again on Monday with 13 tables and the county is participating in the President's Cup.
- d. From Staffs & Shrops : three Virtual Club active plus a County Night, and a plan to start a county No Fear session on Wednesday afternoons.
- e. From Leicestershire : two clubs are running online games and two more are in the pipeline; the County is planning to run a relaxed game on Saturday afternoons.

#### **ITEM 8: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE & AOB & FUTURE PLANS**

22. JP complemented RVBC on the Risk Assessment they have developed and suggested that that the EBU should be lobbying the government and other national bodies to put forward the case for developing a means of allowing a return to F2F bridge. He has developed a questionnaire to try to capture members' thinking about the return to face to face ([available by clicking here](#)). MT commented that his reading of the latest Health & Safety documentation suggested that community halls could be a logistical nightmare for re-opening. JP in looking at Spondon (three bridge clubs, DCBA and others) had been considering 72 hour gaps between uses in the initial phase.

23. KH gave further background on the Executive Working Groups which the EBU was now creating. These are core to a volunteer based non-profit organisation and aim to take advantage of the vast expertise and experience of the bridge playing population. The intent is to find subject matter experts to help guide the EBU and to take forward appropriate initiatives. We are all encouraged to talent scout for candidates. There is a good illustration of the role in [this diagram on the EBU website](#).

24. 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