



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 20th August 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)
Devon	Geoff Clements (GC)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Hampshire & IOW	John Fairhurst	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Norfolk	Robert Smith (RS)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

Apologies: Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Sue McIntosh & Sue Wright (Nottinghamshire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. There were no new faces today. We approved the minutes from the 06 August meeting.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. **PS** recapped the events of the past two weeks – the announcement that BBO would, for teams games, start asking for a fee from clubs and counties who were charging for these games (not all do, eg Derbyshire's pivot teams is free entry), and that the EBU – seeing the delay in processing at BBO – would make an advance payment to clubs and counties based on what they had earned during June (and July two weeks later). **KT** reported these welcome advances had already been received by OBA & OBC. The long term position on teams' charges is uncertain – the key being that BBO do not like others making profits from their capabilities without having their cut, even though they don't yet understand how to charge for teams' games. Gordon has been reminded of the dilemma of Counties collecting only for UMS purposes, and **KH** pointed out that there are other alternatives (eg Stepbridge offers free teams games currently) and that a [list of bridge platforms and all their attributes was available online](#) (courtesy of KH). Those using BCL currently were encouraged to add details on BCL features to this list.
3. **FD** commented that after initial hesitancy the online games were proving more inclusive than face-to-face games as partial anonymity made encounters less scary. **KH** pointed out that there is an issue with anonymity begetting bad behaviour and noted how major providers such as Google and Facebook have had to address this over the years. He suggested that a "real names policy" was both a Good Thing and inevitable.
4. **KH** told how the plan had been to launch English Bridge School on 10th August: the launch had gone ahead for teachers but was held back for students until 24th August. Students enrol via the EBU's Bridge Warehouse. Next Monday publicity will go out on EBU/EBED website and Facebook channels. **PS** noted that we want to get this publicity to non-players, so this is only a small part of what is needed.

5. **KH** advised that there was no need to rush with publicity as teachers needed to spend a bit more time getting to know the system and to iron out any bugs, before we as CBAs push the advertising. Once a teacher and a learner are enrolled in EBS, they need to be linked up, so it would be a worthwhile effort for Counties to ensure that they have a suitable network of teachers in their county to which new students can be referred.
6. **FD** reported on many instances of ad hoc help being given to people to help them learn to play, even with beginners teaching friends – which is currently very disjoint from EBS. He was concerned that EBS will look like another learning curve for some teachers. He also suggested that we should look to inviting Giorgio Provenza (the new CEO of EBED) along to an MCWG meeting in a few months' time.
7. **PS** raised the question of Regulations for Online Bridge and asked about the comfort levels with current practices. On the question of UNDOs, a variety of practices were reported, ranging from not allowed at all (with recommendations to use the confirmation features on BBO) to allowing them but advising people to request these only for a mis-click, and to be willing to trust the honesty of those who ask. On the question of KIBITZERS, there was again diversity ranging from none in more serious events, to allowing them because there are people who enjoy watching their friends or team-mates play. It was noted that some dissent can arise where teams with different opinions meet, and it is important that the organisers have specified a default for such cases.
8. **RP** mentioned an email from Gordon Rainsford just received; it was (intentionally) sent only to those who have played in EBU online games. The comments therein on use of System/ Convention Cards on BBO struck him as irrelevant to the vast majority of players, and he suggested that a more relaxed attitude to these (as visible say to anyone who has played in France) would be more appropriate. **MP** stated that the Regulations infrastructure we have in England harms rather than encourages participation in the game. **PS** pointed out that the EBU had written its Regulations to cater for the top level games it manages, and many organisations had taken the easy route of using these unchanged rather than putting the effort into tailoring them – so this is something in our hands. **PS** also referred to a suggestion by David Burn, [which you can read about on Bridgewinners](#), that the Laws of Bridge need a re-write to make them simpler.
9. Finally we came to the request which had been made of the County Associations – to consult their clubs and members about which aspects of the EBU Mission are more important than others. Everyone agreed that with no face-to-face meetings this was proving a difficult task. **KH** suggested that an online survey might be the way forward and gave as [an example a survey](#) being prepared for use in Lincolnshire (developed from a Manchester CBA survey).
10. We discussed whether Counties bypassing clubs and talking to members was likely to be an issue; it was noted that some counties do this a lot, but in other counties the clubs were sensitive about being bypassed. **RP** reported on having used Survey Monkey some years ago in Oxfordshire and getting a 40% return rate, with the responses coming from all categories of bridge player.

ITEM 3: SPECIALIST GROUP REPORTS

11. On the pilot engagement with non-affiliated clubs, **MP** reported that he and Keith Stait had pulled together the material they had and that there was just one layer of checking to be done before finalising it. He reminded us that this was a primer for Counties who had not yet started any engagement with non-affiliated clubs; where conversation had already started, other approaches might be better.

12. On the technology front, it was reported that the Bridge Club Live attempts had seemed tentative. [LATER : offline, **MW** provided this feedback : BCL are reporting that their trials have gone well. One of the Worcestershire Clubs, Bewdley BC, participated in a trial in which a number of other clubs were involved. It did not go particularly well, being extremely slow. However, this appeared to be largely attributable to some participants' lack of familiarity with BCL – all of the Bewdley players are very familiar with it. Despite what they perceived as teething troubles, Bewdley intend to adopt the system, as do both Worcester BC and Worcestershire CBA for their club nights. Worcester CBA are running a trial, which it is hoped will be confined to their members, on Weds 26th August]
13. The developments at RealBridge (with audio and video integration) continue and the demonstrations have gone very well; RSVP Bridge is up and running with a unique form or audio integration. **PS** reported how Cheltenham BC was running on BBO but actively looking at the alternatives, particularly Stepbridge.

ITEM 4: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES ONLINE LEAGUE

14. **PS** reminded the audience that in the previous discussion we had agreed that we would run this competition, using the dates of the original MCL face-to-face series. The remaining questions were the format of the event, who would be the organiser, and which counties would be invited to play. We agreed today that
- a. Even through some of the top players are not playing online, it was best to continue; if face-to-face bridge restarted in January there would still be too much threat of disruption to countenance a face-to-face league in spring 2021.
 - b. Some of the Midlands Counties were uncertain about raising teams, and the non-Midlands counties present suggested that they would like to join in, given the likely absence of anything equivalent in their area.
 - c. If we have a variable or uncertain number of counties an alternative would be to run the game as a Swiss Teams, with the matches still on the given dates. **KT** reported that the Oxfordshire Swiss Teams had been successfully organised that all matches play the same boards, and that is something that we could consider for this game.
 - d. **PS** will start up as organiser until someone else is ready to take over, and will produce a set of regulations to cover the Swiss Teams option.
15. The discussion concluded by moving on to a discussion of the return to face-to-face bridge. **GC** expressed concern about the opening of casinos which share many issues with bridge clubs, and suggested that the issues for bridge clubs who own their premises are very different from those of bridge clubs who use public buildings. In the discussion:
- a. We confirmed that each bridge club must make its own choices as their circumstances will often be unique; meanwhile people have started playing social bridge games face-to-face.
 - b. When face-to-face returns there will be serious competition between this and online bridge for the attention of players. Some events will never go back to being played face-to-face.
 - c. In many places (eg Stamford) the majority of players have not moved to online and the pressure there for return to face-to-face is greater.

ITEM 4: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

16. With time running out we only addressed

- a. **JF** reported that the "Teach the Teachers" course was going ahead shortly and that he was working with EBED people on the planning of this.

17. Some reports were received offline

- a. Nottinghamshire are planning an online AGM for 26th September.
- b. Norfolk : with numbers low, some players are saying they would prefer the times of events to be similar to when they play on normal Club nights. **RS** wrote a simplified version of the EBU note on its Mission on the grounds that if it was too long then most people would not bother to read it anyway, sent it by e-mail to 20 Affiliated Clubs and 15 Non-affiliated Clubs and asked for comments on what those Clubs want from the EBU and what they want from Norfolk CBA. As forecast, there has been little response. One Affiliated Club said that their Committee had no comments on the Mission Statement, another said they were concerned about cheating on-line and that they thought the EBU was too weak on this matter so they were only looking to social Bridge for a while. The Secretary of one Non-affiliated Club reported that their members were not interested in the EBU and didn't think it could do anything for them. From the rest--zilch. **RS** believes that to get anything worthwhile from the Clubs it will involve a phone call to each (with the danger that this might just capture a personal opinion).
- c. Staffs & Shrops : The AGM date has been finalised for Sunday 27th September via zoom. As reported two weeks ago, the "no fears"/intermediate session on a Wednesday afternoon has folded due to lack of interest, a total of 17 tables over 5 weeks (directors got a pair in twice to avoid a half table). The County is planning to try and resurrect these sessions in the autumn.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

18. With the EBU holding a Chairs' Meeting on Wednesday 2nd September, it was agreed we would postpone our next meeting by one week to Thursday 10th September. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES