



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 22nd October 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Shirley Ashtari (SA)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

Apologies: Geoff Clements (Devon), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Robert Smith (Norfolk)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. There was one new face today – we welcomed Shirley Ashtari from Nottinghamshire. We approved the minutes from the 8th October meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3a Active Topics : Face-to-face Bridge

2. **JF** reported on the meeting organised the day before by Nicky Bainbridge. The discussion there showed that a lot of uncertainty remained about what was acceptable and what was not, with a suggestion that some reported examples were a “gold standard” which goes beyond the minimum necessary. **PS** felt the emphasis in that meeting had switched from urgently re-starting into a focus on preparing the ground for when restrictions ease.
3. **MV** reported that the French club with which Worcester BC twinned had reported that the FFB had agreed guidelines with the French authorities and promulgated these (nothing on FFB website). The meeting would welcome a similar set of guidelines from the EBU. **KH** pointed out that there are some differences in the position in the two countries, but welcomes the initiative shown by Nicky Bainbridge and others in testing out the various options; other clubs and the EBU must be grateful.
4. The threat to small clubs (too small for Virtual Clubs and facing a reduced footfall) was noted, although a number of them have amalgamated to go online; many clubs which have gone online are doing well financially from that. There are efforts currently underway (including a seminar two days back) to help more clubs get started as Virtual Clubs.

ITEM 3b Active Topics : Experiences with Online Platforms

5. **PS** started by reporting that Cheltenham BC and the GCBA were planning experiments with the use of RealBridge. The GCBA are looking at it for Teams Tournaments which it offers; the options there need to be clarified but we are told it will handle the County League (where all head-to-head matches play the same boards on a fixed evening) and the MCOL style of game. It was noted that in all cases, familiarity with BBO will generate some inertia amongst existing players, but those who have used this (and Stepbridge similarly) found the interface is so similar that they could transition easily. The major difference is in the approach to alerting and announcing bids.
6. **JF** reported that Basingstoke BC had just done a trial session on RealBridge, from which all feedback was favourable. The system also looks very attractive for teaching. **KH** asked about the payment models people were considering, and said he was looking at [SpadeTickets](#) and at the possibility of expanding the EBU facilities (based on SagePay, now called Opayo) to allow their use for club payments; the meeting confirmed a very positive interest in this.
7. **MV** reported that Bridge Club Live reported themselves to be very close to offering audio and video capabilities. These will be very welcome in social bridge circles, but a number of the more competitive people present reported that video tended to create a distraction. **FD** pointed out that running with audio but no video was a very effective compromise.

ITEM 3c: Active Topics : EBU/EBED Announcements

8. **PS** explained that the recent EBU consultation about options for UMS charges was raised not because the Board wanted a change but because a review had been promised to some clubs at the time that UMS for online play was introduced. The mood of the meeting (as in reports from elsewhere) is that the cost and complexity of change does not justify making any change.
9. There had also been a broadcast email from EBED but it seems to have been only to EBTA members. The attendees were interested to see this and a copy will be distributed and discussed next meeting.

ITEM 3d: Active Topics : Midlands Counties Online League Arrangements

10. **PS** noted that the first round had proceeded without any difficulties and all but one stanza of one match was played with the shared boards as planned. Darren Evetts has agreed to the use of the [Midlands Counties Congress](#) website for the MCOL and you can find an MCOL tab on the left hand menu. This website contains the regulations and instructions for match set-up, a link to the Line-ups Spreadsheet, and the detailed travellers for each match.
11. One question which arose during the last match was about the length of the break, with some people wanting much shorter but others had plans to use the break time and wanted it to remain unchanged. The matches themselves were all due to start at 1400 but some didn't get going until a half-hour later. The second set of deals was distributed at 1630 and some matches were able to restart early, but with no kibitzers in case other players strayed into watching them and saw boards they were about to play later. The timing was left up to the Match Arrangers, but since the players in a match usually change for the second half, communicating with all the relevant people can be difficult. This meeting had no wisdom to offer, and we will continue with the same arrangements for the next match.
12. A clash had been noticed between the date of the MCOL January matches and the Midlands Counties Congress, and it was agreed to move the MCOL back one week to be on Sunday 17th January 2021.

13. The one outstanding issue for the MCOL is the creation of the EBU League copy of the scores, and the management of the finances which will result when the creator is charge by the EBU for the UMS for all matches. We need someone to take on this job. The usual practice is that when one year's league is closed down, a copy of it is made as a template for the next year (an option which seems to be available even on an active league) after which team captains have to do the maintenance of the list of players' names and the entry of the results. The task is not onerous. **WE ALL AGREED TO TWIST SOME ARMS AND COME BACK WITH NOMINATIONS FOR THIS TASK NEXT MEETING.**

14. We noted that because it has not been finished, no UMS payments had been made for the 2019-2020 Midlands Counties Leagues. The question of when we will finish the league was raised again (we decided months back to have the final match when face-to-face resumed, when that did not look so far away). We agreed to discuss the matter with our MCL captains and to look at this decision again at the next meeting.

ITEM 4: Inter-County matches for non-MCOL players

15. This meeting, four weeks ago, had agreed that:

- *In recognition of limited opportunities for many to get involved in the MCOL and the opportunity which online bridge gives us to raise inclusivity and get a much wider spectrum of players engaged in county-led activities, the MCWG will instigate a stratified inter-county series of events. Attendees are asked to prepare suggestions for how such an event could work and to advertise these in advance of a discussion on this at the next meeting.*

We had forgotten to address this last meeting and attendees had been prompted before this meeting that it was coming up.

16. Some doubts were raised about how committed we were to this but the consensus was that there was a large subset of our members who were not currently offered anything of this nature who (because they no longer need to travel for such games) would be keen to take part if it was organised for them. We discussed whether entries for this should be by Counties or by Clubs or just by players, and felt that it was appropriate to be entered as a Club team representing your County. There would be a variable number of teams from different sized counties, and some form of Swiss Teams was suggested as they most flexible way to handle unknown numbers and a possible mixed standard. It was agreed that

- We would start by organising a one-day event on a Saturday for the target audience, along the lines of the games which took place in May and June. **KH** offered his help in creating a scorign spreadsheet of the style used then.
- We would not aim to start this competition until January, and **PS** offered to prepare a proposal for this, but ...
- **WE AGREED THAT BOTH THE TRIAL AND THE EVENT NEEDED AN ORGANISER AND WE WOULD ALL TALK TO OUR TOURNAMENT DIRECTORS AND COME BACK WITH SOME NOMINEES FOR THIS TASK TO THE NEXT MEETING.**

ITEM 7: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

17. Five reports were received offline

- Derbyshire: DCBA's team events are all free to enter and running on BBO, with captains agreeing the match date and the home captain setting up match. Once all games are over, the County will pay the UMS fee. The local teacher has started her new student lessons and also her year-2 improver groups.
- Gloucestershire: the Monday night games and the weekly Swiss Pairs and Swiss Teams are continuing to be well supported, but the Learners' Duplicate has yet to reach a viable number (and turned into a supervised play session on the two occasions to date).
- Herefordshire: the county and club games have stabilised and another club (Marches) has now held three online sessions on the "YourBridgeClubOnline" site which attempts to replicate the feel of a club duplicate session but numbers have been very low, (6 or 7 pairs). An invitation has been extended to another club in the county with a similar level of playing ability in an effort to increase numbers towards viability. The site has not yet added the audio and video facilities intended. HBA held a further committee meeting by Zoom; further online competition formats were deferred until the new year to avoid cutting across the existing competitions and it was noted that the Western League will not proceed this year.
- Norfolk: the County is pleased to be informed that one of its members has been honoured with a Dimmie Fleming Award for his services to Bridge in the county. The League competition for teams of four has restarted for the Autumn with 7 teams in each of two divisions. Plans are being drawn up to hold the AGM online.
- Staffs & Shrops: entries are in now for the county online league (9 teams, slightly more than expected as only 10 teams played last season in the two F2F divisions). The "no fears" pairs was resurrected last Thursday; unfortunately it had only 3 tables, so it will be given a run for a few weeks and will either improve or die a death.

18. At the meeting we were running out of time, and covered just

- Lincolnshire: **KH** reported that the LCBA had run a survey and received 51 responses so far; the county has not yet decided on holding an AGM (a quick poll showed that the majority of counties had or were planning an online AGM, but a handful had postponed until restrictions ease). In response to a query about voting, we learned that some counties had done this by email (in advance) but others had successfully used the interactive polling facilities in Zoom, and some had been able to avoid the need.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

19. **KH** reported that the Bridge Standard Working Group he had previously mentioned was now getting widespread support, and if we knew of any suitably technical people in our bridge community who might help, they would be welcomed.

20. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 3rd November. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES