



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 24th September 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Devon	Geoff Clements (GC)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Sue McIntosh (SM)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Nottinghamshire	Sue Wright (SW)		

Apologies: John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Malcolm Pryor (Suffolk), Rob Procter (Oxfordshire) and Robert Smith (Norfolk)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. There were no new faces today. We approved the minutes from the 10th September meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. **PS** summarised the recent developments on face-to-face bridge; the EBU had strengthened its advice two weeks ago and last week Nicky Bainbridge had organised a meeting of interested parties to look at the issues around re-opening. She reported on seven clubs which had re-opened with some pictures, and gave details of the extensive precautions ([slides here](#)) being taken at Rugby Village BC. **JP** had attended, with concerns about Spondon in mind; the Limited Company which runs Spondon Bridge Academy are investing in the cardboard/perspex screens offered by Terry Collier's firm ([slides here](#)). The outcome of the meeting was a resolution to write to the EBU asking for more action on the topic. Points which merged in the discussion which followed here were
 - a. In reopening, there are health and welfare issues common to all bridge clubs, and finance issues which are relevant only for a subset (particularly clubs with their own premises, this includes the EBU).
 - b. Where a club has sole access to premises, and when it has shared access to premises, the issues will also vary.
 - c. The experimentation described will be a great help if and when clubs re-open in the future, and the EBU's task should be to facilitate communication of best practice.
 - d. If we get any form of fast and reliable checks that a person is free from Covid, we will be able to resume without restrictions.

3. **PS** asked next about new experiences with online platforms, noting that EBU TDs had been through training on use of RealBridge recently, and that the EBU intends to run some trial games before the Autumn Congress is played there. [LATER: these are now advertised on the EBU website] **MV** reported that Worcestershire's use of BCL was continuing to build up, based on the early start many members had with BCL. The recent outage and tournament cancellation experienced on BBO was noted – it is worth alerting players to the fact that such events are outside of our control. **JP** reported that his (EBU arranged TD's) had been asked and believe BBO is the most suitable available platform. **KH** reported that RealBridge are being pursued to improve their almost non-existent documentation, and added that they had indicated that they had no interest in collecting payment from players at game time, but are going for a simpler payment model (similar to a face-to-face venue charging the Tournament organiser, who then charges the players). **SM** reported on Sandy Fulton's positive experience with RealBridge and his urging Retford club members to use it.
4. The next question was about CBA success in engaging with clubs and players, in order to offer information and ideas to the EBU as it formulated its future strategy – and asked about whether the EBU (and CBAs) had the right model for engagement with clubs. The statement that “The EBU was created with County Associations as its formal members, and delivers services to its player members directly and through affiliated clubs” does not put clubs anywhere near the centre – is this right? **MW** pointed out that this was an organisational design question and therefore complex – it needed to balance efficiency of organisation (often coming from a hierarchical structure) with being market oriented (and having direct customer interaction). Two interesting points were raised
- a. It is worth considering how NBOs in other countries approach this and their level of success.
 - b. The legal and formal structure is not as important as the lines of communication and their effectiveness.

PS will open up a discussion on the MCWG Facebook group on the role of clubs in the EBU and its governance.

ITEM 3: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES ONLINE LEAGUE

5. **PS** reported we had 7 counties committed to play (all are 2020 MCL teams), and still had to get definitive answers from Worcestershire and Lincolnshire. It was noted that
- a. There is currently no charge levied for the playing of these matches, but there will be a requirement for a contribution (along past lines) from all CBAs toward the EBU UMS charges for the event.
 - b. The dates will be the second Sunday of the month, October through April.
 - c. Scoring by cross-imps was likely to be too difficult, so the event will be scored by simple addition of the imps of each foursome.
6. **KH** raised the question of the expected standard of the teams. Historically it has been the case that counties have turned out their best eightsome, the next best eightsome and their third best eightsome. It was pointed out that for a flagship MCWG event, this structure excluded the majority of our players – and as events in the summer had shown, there is plenty of appetite amongst lesser players to represent their counties. It was agreed to retain the historical approach to these events but:

- a. 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.
- b. It was important to ensure that cross-county events were not just “another bridge game against some strangers” so we must find a way of ensuring these games are special.

ITEM 4: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

- 7. Some reports were received offline (including nil reports from Norfolk and Staffs & Shrops).
 - a. Derbyshire : DCBA is now running two more of their annual Team-of-4 events on BBO and have plans to replace the inter-club Team-of-8 event with Team-of-4 leagues. One of the five Derbyshire non-affiliated clubs has affiliated to the EBU - the main reason being that they were enthused by the success of Bakewell BC (with help from **KT**) in becoming a Virtual Club. Local teaching has 10 students for yr. 1 course and 4 for the yr. 2 course (and is running a relaxed bridge club for 8 players). The EMBA board that run the Spondon venue is applying for a bank loan to assist their cash flow over next 12 months. Currently the Spondon income from non-bridge users (e.g. Slimming World) is about 1/3 of last years' same period amount. Their only employee has been furloughed.
 - b. Hampshire : The response to advertising for learners for online bridge (using village Facebook groups, Parish Council newsletters and local press and club membership to contact friends and relatives) has been a bit disappointing so far; some weeks remain before the planned course start date in November. Interestingly there was quite a good response when the latest classes via the U3A were advertised! Just prior to the recent Covid spike, HIOWCBA did canvas members about a controlled move back to the club for face-to-face bridge and received interest on this from members playing online and from some that had not had that experience. The U3A who use the same facilities had been prepared to teach at the club, but all plans are now on hold.
 - c. Norfolk : one Club decided to try a F2F event for 4 socially distanced tables, but only 5 pairs turned up (and still played). Now that idea has been abandoned. All other Clubs are resigned to having to wait until the New Year at least.
 - d. Suffolk : the green pointed County Congress is being run on October 3rd and 4th (Pairs Saturday, Teams Sunday) and currently has 18 tables of pairs and 16 team; non-Suffolk pairs welcome. The County Championship teams (Pachabo qualifier) is now going to be run as an on-line knock out (32 boards in early round, more later, plate competition for losers of first match). Several clubs now running special sessions for intermediate players that are proving very popular.
- 8. At the meeting we learned that
 - a. Devon have started a weekly online game and are this is attracting a wider variety of players than usually at county events.

- b. Gloucestershire has started a Pairs League and a Teams League on Monday nights, where all involved play the same boards and the results are successfully pulled to a single results sheet on Bridgeweb for examination (using improved BBO-to-XML facilities). These events are aiming at the better players (ie not competing with club events) and are pulling in players from neighbouring counties seeking a strong game.
- c. Lincolnshire noted that they were struggling to get the better players active online.
- d. Nottinghamshire has its AGM coming this next weekend, online.
- e. Warwickshire reported that they have the Warwickshire Pairs League up and running, but have yet to restart the Birmingham or Coventry PLs.
- f. Worcestershire reported that they are migrating now from the bulk of play being in their Pairs League into the use of Virtual Club duplicates on BCL. The amount of online bridge being played seems stable.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

- 9. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 8th October. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES