



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 25th June 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)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Hampshire+	John Fairhurst (JF)	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 Lesley Millet (from Yorkshire) who chairs the Northern CWG.

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We welcomed **LM** with the thought that there ought to be overlaps and synergies between the (expanded) MCWG and the Northern Counties WG and that any NCWG members who wanted to drop in here would always be welcome. She indicated that the NCWG was meeting again next week and offered **PS** the chance to attend (accepted). We agreed to postpone the approval of the minutes of the meeting of 18th June 2020 (which had edit and distribution problems) until next week.
2. **PS** pointed out that the meeting was being recorded and that to date the record had only be used as an aid to producing the minutes; Keith Stait (Herefordshire, who had presented apologies for unavailability today) had expressed an interest in being able to catch up by viewing the recording, and we agreed that it was appropriate to share the recording with known MCWG members who missed sessions. **MW** pointed out that our storage capacity is limited to one meeting.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

3. **PS** explained that he had raised the question of the National CWG with the EBU Board earlier this week. They agreed that the concept had fallen into abeyance, but could see it resurrecting again once a full set of Regional CWGs were in operation. The TOR of this MCWG group were created in the absence of a National CWG and **MW** reminded us that our feeling was that a National CWG only inhibited communications and presented no value; no-one who was present at the meeting demurred from this view. The fact that the EBU website held minutes dated August 2019 and labelled as National CWG was a source of confusion; **PS** agreed to investigate remedying that.

4. **KH** reported on the discussions within the EBU Board's Restart WG on what it will take to allow safe face-to-face bridge. We had heard that two clubs in Guernsey (St Martin's and the CBA) were restarting this week (with some precautions). Rugby Village BC had produced a rigorously considered formal Risk Assessment and was hoping to restart on 6th July. The RVBC plan is to have only half the tables in play, each with a full set of boards, and for players to have their own bidding boxes. Across Europe, but particularly in Denmark, the return to face-to-face bridge is progressing.
5. **PS** reported that the EBU Board wants to consult with all clubs on the future of the game and the role of the EBU; they were planning to make the approach to affiliated clubs through the CBAs. This less impersonal approach was welcomed. **LM** reported that **Yorkshire** had recently done this, contacting all 34 clubs by telephone to check on their current status. **LM** agreed to share the template of questions asked of the Yorkshire clubs; **PS** indicated that it would be a useful start, but that we would need to add questions about how a national body could help a club in the future. **LM** indicated that the results of the current survey would in due course appear on the YBCA website (in Board minutes).

ITEM 3: UPDATE FROM THE NORTHERN CWG

6. **LM** started by pointing out that the group was rather Yorkshire centric because of the size of that county; some other counties were playing bridge but not teaching (eg North East), some were quiet (eg Merseyside & Cheshire), and some (eg Manchester) were playing outside EBU spaces. She reported that the crisis and online meetings had brought to the table some counties who had previously lacked the energy to join in. This had been seen in the MCWG also, and it was suggested that we have a joint meeting occasionally.
7. **LM** reported that they had some very large attendances at online games, eg an unprecedented 30 tables for the Mixed Pairs. **KH** pointed out that despite such examples, overall numbers (in the UMS space) were well down on pre-crisis levels - although there are also many players playing outside UMS circles. Online events were reported as of a much more mixed standard, as less experienced players did not feel as intimidated as in face-to-face bridge.
8. The question was raised of whether clubs will (or will need to) integrate online bridge and face-to-face bridge in the future, and there was a positive consensus that the answer was 'yes'. It was noted that BBO, in providing a bridge venue, charged quite heavily for that service.

ITEM 4: REPORT FROM THE NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS PILOT

9. **MP** reported on behalf of the group that they were grateful to **RP** and **MW** who had spent time with them explaining previous ventures into this space, and to others who had made offline contributions to their thinking. They were now in a position of formulating questions to ask of clubs, and noted that, given past failures, this time there must be a different approach and/or product to be considered.
10. **FD** reported on some earlier related work in Northamptonshire where they had approached bridge players (as opposed to clubs) to ask for their views - an approach which breaches the affiliated / non-affiliated boundary. One part of this discussion was, for players at each different level of experience, to look at the availability of suitable sessions in the area on different days of the week.

ITEM 5: REPORT FROM THE TECHNOLOGY SUBGROUP

11. The group had met once and will continue to meet weekly. **KH** reported that in planning various games recently, he had developed spreadsheets to record the arrangements and results (with useful capabilities such as automatic propagation of scores when appropriate). He is now organising these into templates, and the suggestion that we have a "go-to-place" to collect these was well supported.

ITEM 6: REPORT FROM THE TEACHING SUBGROUP

12. This group has not yet met but **FD** reported on an “absolutely invaluable” discussion to which **JF** had invited him, involving also Richard Bangay of Newbury BC.

ITEM 7: ROUND-ROBIN OF NEWS FROM THE COUNTIES

13. We had confirmation of nothing new to report from Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Northamptonshire. The question was asked as to how many of those counties present had become Virtual Clubs and a show of hands suggested about two thirds (a slightly higher proportion than evident in [the list of all VCs](#)).
14. From Worcestershire **MV** suggested that as an alternative to four tablets per table one approach might be to re-introduce curtain cards. This would allow every player to handle only their own personal pack of cards; the downsides are that it would slow the game down, and mistakes will be made – but these might well be acceptable limitations. **LM** mentioned that there are ways for one foursome to play Duplicate Bridge at home ([click here for one option](#)) and **FD** pointed out that **MV**'s approach was visible in the EBED Practice Books. **PS** pointed out that in all these ventures players played the same boards at the same time, giving you barometer scoring.
15. **PC** raised the question of the £10k grant available from the government, noting that this was quite a large sum for small clubs. A number of clubs across the country have taken advantage of this and it was suggested that whether or not to do so was an issue for the conscience of the relevant committee.
16. **DB** reported from **Leicestershire** that they have another club now running as a Virtual Club and the county is working with others.
17. **RS** reported from **Norfolk** that they were continuing with two charged events per week plus a free Swiss Pairs on Sundays, and suggested a drop of 1-2 tables when charging was introduced. NCBA had wanted to charge BB\$2 but were told the minimum was BB\$3 (instances of permission to charge BB\$2 have since emerged).
18. **SO** reported from **Avon** that only Bristol BC was running as a VC and that they needed to see 10 tables present to break even on this. There was concern that the availability of free games was reducing numbers.
19. From **Oxfordshire** **RP** reported on no response to an attempt to get EBED to advertise the Oxfordshire 5-high game to the EBED Supervised Play audience. All counties should be advertising this – details can be found [on the OBA website](#).
20. **MP** reported from **Suffolk** that their AGM on Zoom was successful; that there were no complaints about it being held online. He also reported positive feedback for arranging a number of “winter” events to happen online to avoid travel issues.
21. From **Lincolnshire** **KH** reported that there had been a change in county management following three resignations and that they were now moving towards an AGM by Zoom to elect a new committee and to becoming a Virtual Club.
22. From **Warwickshire** **MT** said that alternative methods of payment for events were under discussion with a subscription being the most popular option. He expressed the view that the requirements for clubs to reopen would prove stringent especially in hired premises.

23. **MV** from **Worcestershire** reported that they had informed the EBU of their plan for an “honesty payment” to the EBU for the games that they run on BCL, and had suggested that this payment would cover the 40p UMS to the EBU, but that the County Association was not interested in the 8p charge that they normally levy. He has also suggested that the club Terms of Affiliation needed some re-writing to reflect better the online world, but has no response yet. **PS** reported that Gloucestershire had declared a plan to return any UMS it receives during lockdown back to the originating clubs.
24. From the South, **JF** reported that **Dorset** and **Hampshire** continued at a slow pace (one event/week) but that **Surrey** was getting its act together, trying to duplicate its normal calendar online with a variety of games. A large online director pool is a big asset for Surrey. **KH** raised the question of TDs trained in one MCWG county passing on that expertise to TDs in other counties and it was agreed as the correct way forward. As a first step **PS** suggested we pool all documentation we have on BBO TD work (send links to **PS**, and include any videos) and that we then examine how we can help each other. **JF** commented on how the work splits into three parts (setup, running the event, and scoring) and that these can be assigned to different individuals.
25. For Derbyshire, **JP** had (offline) distributed an analysis of all Derbyshire clubs (most of which are EBU-affiliated) and an assessment from one club Chair of the value to different members of the services which the EBU offers. He also reported (offline) that his planning (with **KT**) of TD-training is progressing, and that Teaching is the county’s weakness (following long term reliance on a couple who have just retired from teaching bridge). He expressed the view that return to normal play was a long way off, and that Lovebridge looked a good answer when that happens, but the system was very expensive.

ITEM 8: EXTRAS & FUTURE PLANS

26. **KH** made the point that if some were finding costs of online sessions an issue, they might look at the arrangements the Welsh Bridge Union had made with www.stepbridge.co.uk which is enabling them to run free online games for the rest of 2020. There is a hint that this option may be available to others.
27. FYI : [this story](#) of use of Zoom alongside BBO might be worth reading.
28. 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