



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 28<sup>h</sup> May 2020 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Basingstoke BC	John Fairhurst (JF)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Herefordshire	Keith Stait (KS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (BD)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Nottinghamshire	Pravin Tailor (PT)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. JF is from the largest club in Hampshire and asked if he could sit in and we welcomed him. We noted that Sam Punch had asked to join the MCWG Facebook Group (and had been approved); we agreed that it was a closed group to allow free discussions amongst the MCWG county reps and we would restrict it to those people. Sam Punch should be removed. A separate Facebook Page can be developed to support information being broadcast from the MCWG.
2. We discussed the UMS payment for the intercounty event of 23 May and agreed (**PS** having consulted Aylesbury about possible mechanics) that Lincolnshire would do the EBU submission for this and other games (while they continued to organise) and late in the year would raise a bill on each other county for their contribution (likely to be about £2 per foursome per day).
3. No check was made that the previous minutes are approved – that will wait until next meeting.

## ITEM 2: Round Robin on News/Plans/Problems

4. **PS** asked that reports be brief this week to allow more discussion time.
5. We started with **MT** from **Warwickshire** from whom there was nothing new to report. Warwickshire were glad to see that the inter-county game on 23<sup>rd</sup> May that KH/PS had organised went well. Others (in due course) endorsed this.

6. Next came **MW** from **Worcestershire** who passed over to **MV** who reminded us that most of their county bridge was on BCL and that this meant that Worcestershire bypassed the UMS options which went with BBO. **PS** reported that Gloucestershire were not charging for individual games but were planning to charge players £10 (might need to be more) for the remainder of the year to cover UMS charges for all the games in which they play. **MV** wondered if the WBC Pairs League might need to charge £4 per event. **DT** stated that he felt in recent correspondence the BCL players were being “attacked” by the EBU.
7. From **Oxfordshire** we heard from **KT** who reported continued growth, and a successful Junior event last Sunday (to be repeated monthly). The 5-High event has low entry so far, the hint being that these players are already well catered for by their clubs.
8. From **Herefordshire** **KS** reported that some more have moved into online bridge.
9. From **Northamptonshire** **FD** suggested that Stamford BC, by offering so much, was stifling development at other clubs. Stamford have asked for voluntary subs to support the EBU and are receiving a favourable response. There is increased interest in starting to learn, but teaching when working with small groups is proving more time-intensive than face-to-face. **KH** pointed out the EBED tutorials showing how to handle multiple groups at once. It was also pointed out that online teaching requires different skills from face-to-face and not all past teachers were interested in doing it.
10. From **Basingstoke BC in Hampshire** **JF** told us that they had a late start but have a county TD now trained for EBU Virtual Clubs (VCs), had run two sessions at Romsey (~10T each), and are aiming for 4-5 trained TDs. Petersfield is also trying as a VC, but support is limited and the future uncertain. There is a strong desire to continue their face-to-face Gentle Bridge sessions and the EBU’s 1100 am game is welcomed. The difficulty of transitioning teachers into online teaching was mentioned, and **JF** commented favourably on a New Melville BC (Edinburgh) teaching session on which he sat in.
11. **PT reported from Nottinghamshire** that they now had a county TD trained and were running their first county event in early June.
12. From **Lincolnshire** **KH** reported that with a low population county they were struggling to get numbers for VCs, and efforts were focused on banding clubs together. He pointed out the conflict between free bridge on BBO and the charging model of clubs/CBAs/EBU – and suggested that the Freemium model commonly used online (free services but charges for extras) was a better approach to funding membership organisations.
13. For the next inter-county game on 13<sup>th</sup> June, **KH** has reserved a place for every county currently participating in the MCWG; any who are not intending to come need to indicate this by at least Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June so that other counties can be invited to fill the spaces.
14. From **Staffs & Shrops** **PC** confirmed activity at Oswestry and at Stafford, and that the first county game will be on 10<sup>th</sup> June – and hopefully weekly after that.
15. For **Gloucestershire** **PS** reported that a second VC had started, and that attempts were underway to form two more.
16. From **Leicestershire**, **DB** reported that 2 new games were about to start and he hoped they would act as a catalyst for others.

17. **Offline, Jim Parker** reported from **Derbyshire** that DCBA County night continues to thrive, Ripley BC have started a weekly VC session, Allestree BC have started two weekly VC sessions (one shared with a Nottinghamshire club) and JP is starting a new VC for EMBC on Monday. One club not running paying events on BBO has written to Gordon Rainsford making a UMS offer.

### **ITEM 3: MORE GENERAL POINTS**

18. **RP** asked about the numbers playing on-line bridge – thinking of number of players and numbers of player-sessions. His investigations in Oxfordshire found that they were looking like 35k player-sessions online in a year against an average of 55k in face-to-face days. **MV** reported that Worcester BC had about 80 players each playing about 2\*24 boards weekly, and **PS** reported that Cheltenham BC was running at about 80 player sessions per week now against around 100 for face-to-face in early February.

19. The question was raised (in chat, not followed up) of whether we should be doing more to share teaching resources and teachers – valid now that locality is no longer relevant for teaching activities.

### **ITEM 4: EBU FUTURES**

20. **RP** had asked (between meetings) to raise with this group three statements with a view of presenting them to the EBU Board. He provided some background and they were discussed:

- a. “that the EBU should aspire to be the national body for all bridge players” There was no dissention expressed; **PS** suggested that the EBU Board had already affirmed that promoting Duplicate Bridge cannot be separated from promoting other forms of the game, but it was also suggested that limiting EBU control to only Duplicate Bridge was to the detriment of the game.
- b. “we would need a balance of input from members and non-members to design the shape of the future national body” There was no dissent from this. **FD** made the suggestion that asking “the next generation” to design the national body was the best recipe for obtain fresh and untainted ideas.
- c. “the one-size-fits-all charging approach might need to be adjusted if we are to attract players needing differing services from the game’s national body” **RP** opined that alternatives had been insufficiently considered when UMS was introduced and that the issue of UMS had created a divide between members and non-members that would need addressing before item b above could be addressed. Nobody argued that the current system was ideal.

### **ITEM 5: FUTURE PLANS**

21. We failed to confirm, but left assuming that we would meet again next week at the same time. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES