



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020 at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)
Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

**Apologies:** Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Malcolm Pryor (Suffolk), Mike Thorley (Warwickshire)

## CHAIR: Patrick Shields

### ITEM 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We welcomed Cath Fox who as well as representing Essex here, is active as a member of the Technology Executive WG for the EBU. We approved the minutes from the 19<sup>th</sup> November meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

### ITEM 3a Active Topics : Experiences with Online Platforms

2. A number of instances of problems with BBO were reported upon – primarily around Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> November and Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November. **RP** reported on a match in progress being cancelled; **PS** reported on delayed tournaments while people struggled to log on; **DB** and **PC** reported on abandoned events.
3. Since the early days, no performance issues have arisen on Bridge Club Live.
4. **JF** reported of an event delayed on RealBridge, to which RB had reacted very positively (giving free sessions and a donation for the charity being supported by the delayed event). **DB** reported on some RealBridge login problems, but it was thought that these were due to incomplete closure of earlier sessions (people might need to close down browsers/windows and/or clear cookies). **MV** reported a successful exploration event with RealBridge, but in the county many have paid fees to BCL, so moving away from that is unlikely.
5. **PS** asked in anyone had tried the BBO Voice capability; the only feedback was rumours that it was not very reliable.

### ITEM 3b Active Topics : Face-to-face Bridge and Futures

6. We are at a low point currently, but **CF** reported that Essex had just started a Working Group looking at “Bridge Beyond Lockdown”, tackling in particular
  - a. What might be done to help small clubs survive, eg some might merge.
  - b. The possibility of hybrid event with the same boards online and face-to-face.

7. The fact that online bridge has a different Accessibility profile was noted, and **KH** reported on playing against MR who is severely disabled and for whom online bridge is a great opportunity.
8. **PS** pointed out that there were multiple hybrid options to consider, some involving more use of tablets and technology in a face-to-face context. **RP** requested that an experiment be done to confirm the viability of events run simultaneously on BBO and RB, and an opportunity whereby **PS** can progress this was identified.

### **ITEM 3c: Active Topics : Midlands Online Cross County Teams (MOCCT)**

9. **PS** reminded the audience of the questions unresolved in the previous discussion:
  - a. We lack a snappy title for the event: concern was expressed that using Midlands in the title would create confusion with the Midlands Counties Congress, but **PS** pointed out that the use of the congress website for MCOL was deemed to be a win for all parties as it made the adverts there for the congress more visible to others. Including in the title something to indicate the restricted nature of the event would be useful.
  - b. There will be a need for familiarisation sessions, but that looks straightforward to arrange.
  - c. The maximum number of teams we can cater for is unclear (**PS** to check with RealBridge – who came back and said no issue, they had done 70) but we agreed that we would not identify any limits until it became necessary.
  - d. We confirmed that the restriction would be a maximum NGS-8 average for the two players in any partnership, and not concern ourselves with different partnership grades.
  - e. We have not yet identified who will (i) handle entries and (ii) TD on the day. Our plan was to pay one person to handle both but it is still possible for CBAs to handle their entries and the TD just to work from a supplied list.
  - f. The draft flyer was deemed a good start but some changes to the wording are needed. Suggestions for changes to be emailed to **PS** asap for incorporation.
  - g. We agreed that all counties engaged with the MCWG were welcome to advertise the event and supply entries.

### **ITEM 3d: What would create a mass attendance at a weekend event?**

10. Since we last met **FD** had distributed an expanded version of his proposal from the last meeting. The key features of this idea were (i) a surprise guest (a Bridge “name” or a famous person who plays bridge) turning up at an online event to make it special, and (ii) lining up the event with a big charity event such as Red Nose Day (next Friday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021). If the event was recorded it could provide invaluable advertising for the game, possibly even being shown on TV. Points which were made during discussion
  - a. Getting celebrities attention would be difficult but lining it up with a big charity event maximises our chances. We need to have a detailed plan for the event before approaching any celebrity. It might be right to ask a media company to take on the task of booking celebrities. This is stage one.
  - b. Stage two is making a recording of the event and using it to publicise the game. Getting Teresa Brookes (from the EBU’s Marketing Executive WG) involved was suggested.
  - c. Sam Punch’s success with the Keep Bridge Alive event in February was noted.

- d. We should keep an open mind as to what bridge platforms are to be used for an event like this, and it might be worth doing a small pilot before embarking on a large scale event.

#### **ITEM 4: Follow Through from the EBU AGM (of 25<sup>th</sup> Nov)**

- 11. The main discussion at the AGM revolved around the changes to the Bye Laws for the Disciplinary Process. The suggestion was made that we should leave chasing online cheats to BBO, but it was pointed out that the BBO approach is not visible to others and would not affect playing on other bridge platforms.

#### **ITEM 5: Best Bridge Books for Christmas (for learners)**

- 12. **MW** made the point that the books we like best might well be above learner level. The suggestions most voiced were from some years back (acknowledging that the bidding will seem strange but the card play is great)
  - a. Mollo & Gardener : Card Play Technique
  - b. (Donovan &) Macloed : Bridge is (Still) an Easy Game

#### **ITEM 6: Round Robin Catchup from Counties**

- 13. We had confirmation of nothing to report from Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire.
- 14. Four reports were received offline
  - a. Derbyshire : questions are being asked about the potential for return to face-to-face games. No real change in the games being run - 18 tables at last night's county game, one of the DBCA annual events (Swiss Pairs) was held last week on BBO and the knockout handicapped pivot teams has reached the final stage. DCBA had to withdraw from the Tollemache for a couple of reasons – lack of familiarity with RealBridge, and players not willing to commit to several hours playing on-line.
  - b. Leicestershire : at the County Executive meeting on 26th November support was given to all of the Resolutions and elections to the EBU Board, and it was noted that the EBU would have a significant deficit for 20/21. All LCBA Clubs are being asked if they have interest in the Online Cross Counties teams of four. LCBA has reviewed all of the usual County competitions until the Spring of 2021 and those that are suitable will be organised. The provisional Calendar was agreed for 21/22.
  - c. Norfolk : The winter league is well under way with two divisions of 7. NCBA will hold an AGM via Zoom on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> December. The two pairs events continue weekly and numbers are stable. Two clubs are trying on-line sessions using RealBridge for its audio and visual facility.
  - d. Nottinghamshire : can report on one new club affiliate – which affiliated to run games on BBO. The club had been unknown to NCBA before but the NCBA is now reaching out to them. The fact that the club had affiliated to the EBU only became known when the EBU provided county membership stats; knowing earlier would have been helpful.

15. At the meeting we only had time to hear from

- a. Essex : **CF** reported that from about 60 sessions per week, the county clubs were now running about 20 sessions per week, and none at non-affiliated clubs; the players have converged on the six clubs which are online and they clubs are running extra sessions. She pointed out the value of online opportunities to anyone with a disability. Essex has had very limited engagement in inter-county games.
- b. Somerset : **TR** reported that activity levels continue to be high, with the SCBA running six online games each week (4 on BBO, 2 on RealBridge) and having 10 active virtual clubs (8 BBO, 2 RB) and there is a team-of-four league, inter-county matches, and a recent congress. The one problem area today is the total absence of teaching, and there is a concern that clubs who have been hibernating might have trouble re-attracting past members. **TR** suggested that clubs will have to support online and face-to-face in the future.

#### **ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

16. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> December. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

17. After that our meetings will be on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and then Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021.

END OF MINUTES