



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 5th November 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)		

Apologies: Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Mike Thorley (Warwickshire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 22nd 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. It was noted that the most recent restrictions have cut out a foursome meeting to play bridge socially, as some have done recently. The consensus is that online bridge is here to stay, and that the EBU and many counties will continue to support it even when face-to-face resumes. The number of UMS-generating player sessions in some counties is above 60% of previous levels (even 90% occasionally) although a number of these are shorter sessions (and the change in length is liked by many). There are still many face-to-face players not yet engaged in online play.

ITEM 3b Active Topics : Experiences with Online Platforms

3. The past week has been a bad week for BBO with performance problems on multiple evenings. **PS** reported that BBO had refunded automatically all the entry fees when a game he was playing in which had started got abandoned because of technical issues (and the BBO forum suggests this is standard practice). Nobody had heard of any performance problems for Bridge Club Live and RealBridge (yet).
4. **JF** reported that Basingstoke BC had now subscribed to RealBridge (although not exclusively) and are going with a one-year trial of [SpadeTickets](#). It was noted that on RealBridge partner's face is more visible to you than it is in face-to-face play, and the possibility of the view of partner being blocked while a deal is active is very attractive. It was confirmed that RealBridge offers the chance to play with screens – whereby you see and hear only one of the opponents and not partner. **KH** has started a requirements capture about what we would like to see on RealBridge which currently reads as follows. Please contribute via **KH/PS**, who will progress this with the EBU. The current content is as follows:

- a. audio & video (or at least video) suspended automatically from the first bid/display to the last card played or claim accepted. Desired implications: player's access to opponent's AV remains on. Partner's AV is restored after the deal end, until the next deal starts.
 - b. Functionality to allow multiple alerting structure to include self-alerting/announcing, alerting/announcing partners' bids, and screen-style alerting (bids alerted/announced both sides of the screen). A nice-to-have option would be the ability to replay an announcement without retyping it.
5. **MV** reported that BCL has been trialing audio and video capabilities.
 6. Nobody is currently paying any attention to StepBridge.

ITEM 3c: Active Topics : Midland Counties Online League (MCOL)

7. It was noted that the UMS payments for the season will amount to £76.80 per team; nobody had found a volunteer to manage the finances for this event. 😞
8. It was proposed and agreed that all responsibility for the MCOL will now be passed to the set of Team Managers who have been identified for the nine counties. The MCWG will only get involved on request. It is hope that the Team Managers can find a volunteer within that group to manage the finances.

ITEM 3d: Active Topics : Midlands Counties League 2019-20 Finalisation

9. We had postponed finalisation some months back, but the return of face-to-face is receding and we agreed to reconsider the question, noting that some parties were keen to see the event concluded. The three options were identified as completing the event online, assigning an artificial score for the missed match, or waiting for a face-to-face completion. There was a strong consensus that it was better to have the "correct" result than finish the event now, so the earlier decision to wait until face-to-face resumes was ratified and the event becomes the 2019-2021 MCL.

ITEM 3e: Midland Cross-County Teams (for non-MCOL players)

10. The proposal from last meeting that we do a one-day appetite-testing event was confirmed and we decided that this would be held on a Saturday at the end of January; we want to hold this event on RealBridge and will consult them about available dates [LATER: they have since said that if we subscribe we can have any date/time we choose. "Subscription" is being investigated]. We agreed on
 - a. Swiss Teams format, with entries open to any four players from any county.
 - b. Restricted entry, to be NGS 8-high average for each partnership.
 - c. This would be an inter-county competition with each county scoring the total of the three top-performing teams from that county, giving every county an incentive to maximise the number of teams they have.
11. We need a snappy name for this event, and we still need some county to stand up and take responsibility for managing this event (series).

ITEM 4: The Lincolnshire Survey

12. **KH** reported that the survey he had constructed for Lincolnshire had received a useful response, including a number who were not playing online. One highlight was the large number playing on social events. The [survey itself can be found here](#), and the [summary of results here](#). **PS** offered this link to the [output of the \(differently oriented\) Gloucestershire survey](#). The key impact of the Lincolnshire results has been a resolve to run more online games, and to put more effort into getting more players online; RealBridge with the video & audio might be the incentive that these people need.

ITEM 5: EBED and the email from the CEO

13. **MW** reported that the rise in the EBTA price of membership (£25 to £45) had led him to re-examine the benefits that one gets from membership. It was noted that in some counties the EBTA membership was paid by the county, but in general the take-up of EBTA membership seems low, with some counties reporting fewer than half their teachers being members. **KH** reminded us of the benefits – [see the list here](#) – which is remarkable value for money.
14. A key issue identified was providing links between students and teachers. With online teaching capabilities making the location of teachers less relevant for now (it is the time/day of availability that matters most) we need a different sort of directory than the current offering. We need something with a variety of filters, and we need to get all teachers registered with it.
15. It was suggested that a visit to this group from Giorgio Provenza would be useful. **PS** will progress this.

ITEM 6: Tollemache Plans

16. A show of hands revealed the vast majority of counties were intending to play in the Tollemache later in November. There was some discontent expressed about the level of the entry fee, which this year is many times the LCBA income – some counties are paying the fee, some are paying part and having the players pay the rest. **MP** reported that he had requested that video of partner be disabled for the Tollemache to avoid unnecessary UI situations.

ITEM 7 : UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

17. Two reports were received offline
- Derbyshire: **JP** has tried RealBridge and is considering using it for its social aspects and will attend the club owner/TD session on Friday. The DCBA inter club teams of 4 event has started and will run until late March.
 - Oxfordshire : **KT** reported that OBA continues much the same, have run a multiple teams on RealBridge and that seems to have promise. OBC will trial a seminar on RealBridge and are considering using it for duplicates.
 - Warwickshire: little to report. Unfortunately the County is unable to enter a team this year for the Tollemache, despite their best efforts.
18. At the meeting we were running out of time, and covered just:
- Avon : **SO** reported that they had introduced one more Virtual Club session and were looking at RealBridge as a possible platform. They were involved also in a number of cross-county games and had an increased number now in the Avon League.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

19. We agreed the next meeting will be in two weeks' time, on Thursday 19th November. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES