



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 6th August 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Sue Wright (SW)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Hampshire & IOW	John Fairhurst	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Norfolk	Robert Smith (RS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Nottinghamshire	Sue McIntosh (SM)		

Apologies: Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Sue O'Hara (Avon) and Mike Willoughby (Worcestershire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. There were no new faces today. We approved the minutes from the 23 July meeting.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. **PS** summarised the report issued by Gordon Rainsford on Tuesday indicating a cut in the charge which BBO makes for online pairs tournaments (from 01 August they keep 30% or \$4 per table as agreed). It was noted that BBO are slow in refunding money; nevertheless a number present voiced their delight in the improvement in the arrangements. It was noted that the investment of our communities in using BBO will make any change difficult. The question was raised as to whether a Virtual Club could mix the paying arrangements, charging members in BBO\$ for some events but for others not charging on the day. [LATER : it is confirmed that this is in order]
3. **KH** pointed out that this is an arrangement just for BBO, that other platforms are being investigated and a [systematic approach to rating these platforms](#) and to negotiating with these suppliers is being adopted. BBO currently do not charge for teams games but that this might change in the future [see notes on the Facebook page], and we are used to paying similar fees for pairs and teams events, so we should be preparing ourselves for this. Before it happens (particularly as Teams scoring is more work for the director) there are a number of features supporting teams play that we will want to see in BBO; they are being [gathered in this document](#).
4. JF reported that he had been involved in a Bridge Club Live trial of their new tournament facility, and that it had failed on that occasion. KH advised that making such modifications to long-established systems was a much more difficult task than adding features to the more recently architected systems.

5. **PS** explained that the Vision, Mission, Values Statements being developed by the EBU were intended to set the context for discussion with clubs and players about priorities, and to clarify that the EBU was approaching this with an open mind. If others are to gain as much enjoyment as the present company from the game, it is important that the EBU prioritises correctly, and the consultation venture just announced, with County BAs leading, is seen as the best way to do that. It was noted that
 - a. With clubs not meeting getting feedback will be difficult, and grass roots members may well have differing views from the club officials. It will be difficult to get responses even from affiliated clubs.
 - b. There may well be a need for doing this online, and tools such as Google Forms will help. If any CBA pioneers this approach, it would be great to share the experience with others.
 - c. There is a huge problem because we, and most organisers, are from the competitive end of the bridge spectrum and far from representative of the whole population.
6. **PS** noted that the questions being asked were also questions that the County BAs should want to ask from their own perspective. **RP** reported that he had engaged in discussions with some clubs about an associate, non-affiliated, membership of the County Association.
7. Other topics of concern to the EBU were noted:
 - a. The Eastbourne congress is proving quite a viable concern, and it not taking away significant numbers from the EBU daily games.
 - b. The EBU Board is looking at its Technology/Digital Strategy, a subset of which is the bridge playing platforms and our relationship with the providers of these.

ITEM 3: SPECIALIST GROUP REPORTS

8. On the pilot engagement with non-affiliated clubs, there was nothing to report.
9. On the technology front, it was noted that RealBridge, being developed in Cambridge, is looking to be a viable product (see [the Bridgewinners article here](#)). The system integrates audio/video with the bridge playing facilities.
10. On teaching, **PS** reported that it had emerged from a meeting of club representatives in Gloucestershire that the majority of bridge teaching had stalled in the county, with only some improvers' lessons and games continuing this autumn. **FD** re-iterated the need to give teachers some new skills around the use of Zoom and of No Fear Bridge. There is a concern that many potential learners are being missed.

ITEM 4: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES ONLINE LEAGUE

11. **PS** reminded the audience that there were two main issues to resolve – the format of the event, and which counties would be invited to play. The discussion concluded that
 - a. We should stick to the second Sunday of the month and that Sunday 11th October was a sensible starting point.
 - b. We should proceed despite some uncertainties; we will learn as we go what standard of play we can provide, and how many players in each team.
 - c. We would plan based on the original eight MCL counties, with the hope/expectation that other areas of the country would follow this example. **MP** said that he would discuss this with the Eastern Counties League organisers shortly.

12. The search for nominees as the league organiser is ongoing.

ITEM 4: UPDATE FROM COUNTIES

13. Some reports were received offline

- a. Gloucestershire: now has 5 active Virtual Clubs (+GCBA) in the county and two others asking about it. GCBA is planning a regular Monday night event starting in September, online, just as it has always done face-to-face, and with a mix of pairs and teams events. GCBA will continue with the NGS-9-high Swiss Pairs (one 12-board match per week) and will in September start up a weekly Learners' Duplicate open to all learners in the county.
- b. Norfolk: interest in bridge is lukewarm at the moment as other summer activities take over and attendance at the three on-line events each week is down. The league competition of two divisions had been completed and plans are to restart in September. The main effort currently is to gather a club reaction to the EBU reaching out.
- c. Leicestershire: will soon have five Clubs playing on line, and two clubs playing twice a week. The first County Pairs Competition held last Saturday was not a great success but will repeat at fortnightly intervals. Arrangements are now in hand to hold an AGM on Zoom on 30th September. LCBA will be moving the AGM from June to September next year, and most of the County Competitions are being re scheduled to start later (and some online) as we do expect to be playing face-to-face until next year.

14. At the meeting we heard from

- a. Nottinghamshire: **SW** reported that little had changed but they were planning for an online AGM, and any advice/experiences which others could share on holding an online AGM would be welcome [Please forward to **PS**]
- b. Oxfordshire: **KT** told us that there was no change but a small growth in numbers. Discussions have started with some other counties about making the 5-High game a cross-county event. The monthly Junior event continues on the third Sunday of the month and anyone with candidates to join should contact **KT** directly.
- c. Lincolnshire: **KH** reported that the clubs had been asked and voted to wait until face-to-face was possible before holding an AGM. The County Virtual Club is expanding.
- d. Hampshire & IOW: **JF** told us that there are 6 confirmed attendees from the county for the first online "Teacher the Teachers" event being run by EBED. Clubs which are not active have been invited to join the County Virtual Club.
- e. Derbyshire: **JP** pointed out that where clubs shared membership the fact that only a subset had become Virtual Clubs was much less of a concern, as the players are catered for.
- f. Staffs & Shrops: **PC** reported that they plan an AGM for the end of September. The County No Fear pairs is likely to fold. He asked about whether other CBAs were paying rent for their HQs (SCBA pays an annual rent for its); for both Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire the charge is based on paying for events, and so there had been no charge since lockdown.

- g. Worcestershire: **DT** reported a successful AGM earlier this week (more attendees than in previous years) and that WCBA would be testing the new Bridge Club Live structure this evening. It was looking as if online games would be available in the county on all of Monday-Thursday, and that they would be open to all players in the county.
- h. Northamptonshire: **FD** reported it was fairly quiet, that Stamford (who run 9 sessions a week) was planning an online AGM, and that Northampton was looking to how to restart face-to-face bridge.
- i. Warwickshire: **MT** was pleased to report that WCBA was setting up a Virtual Club (and that Jonathan Lillycrop had been helpful). The county was planning an online AGM.
- j. Suffolk: **MP** reported that the County had set up a planning group with two objectives – to build a strategic plan for Suffolk, and to actively engage with EBU strategic planning. The group will liaise with all affiliated clubs and their members, and some unaffiliated clubs.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

15. The next meeting will be at the same time in two weeks' time, on Thursday 20th August. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES