



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 9th July 2020 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Lincolnshire	Kiat Huang (KH)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Norfolk	Robert Smith (RS)	Worcestershire	Dave Thomas (DT)
Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
		Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

Apologies: Keith Stait (Herefordshire), John Fairhurst (Hampshire & IOW), Dean Benton (Leicestershire), and Fred Davis (Northamptonshire). Also Nottinghamshire reported a change in County Committee which had yet to resolve a new representative.

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes of the meeting of 2nd July 2020.

ITEM 2: Feedback/News from the EBU

2. PS reminded the group that Gordon Rainsford was active in negotiating financial arrangements for the EBU with BBO but the relevant personnel at BBO were proving difficult to catch. JP reported feedback that he had received: even if BBO\$ were not charged for an event, BBO were asking for their same percentage cut of whatever players paid. It was suggested that BBO were currently in a monopoly position and that this and the current financial deal were not sustainable. A number of alternative charging schemes (eg by session rather than by person) were identified. We were reminded that there are multiple alternative platforms emerging.
3. PS pointed out the communication issued from the EBU Board to all counties asking for contributions to the development of a Vision Statement, Mission Statement and Values statement for the EBU as it goes forward. Various counties reported that the materials are actively circulating and that the openness of approach was welcomed. MP asked whether the EBU management would be willing to dismantle the current structure if a radical change was indicated; the Board members present indicated that nothing was yet ruled out.
4. The group was also reminded about the initiative to generate Executive Working Groups to help further the EBU's work. This is geared to pull in talent from the bridge community – people who have in the past acted as Chief Commercial / Marketing / Technology Officer. We were all encouraged to do some head hunting.

ITEM 3: PILOT ENGAGEMENT WITH NON-AFFILIATED CLUBS (MCWG-PENC)

5. MP reported that ideas were now being pulled together in a manner to fit in with the EBU initiative discussed above (paragraph 3).

ITEM 4: TECHNOLOGY SUB GROUP

6. NTR [requests to meet should be emailed to kiat.huang@gmail.com]

ITEM 5: TEACHING SUB-GROUP

7. NTR. [next meeting yet to be arranged by Fred Davis]

ITEM 6: ROUND-ROBIN REPORTS FROM COUNTIES

8. There were null reports from Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, and Warwickshire.
9. There were offline reports from the following
 - a. Derbyshire: County night as a VC is doing better than usual F2F, and has attendees who did not travel for F2F county games. Average event NGS is a couple of points lower than for F2F. There are no new students emerging but several improvers sessions run each week.
 - b. Hampshire: The two-division Hants league (9 and 10 teams) is coming to the close of its second season and more teams are expected for the third season. The County is holding its first heat of a Simultaneous Pairs event (in aid of Kidney Research) as is another Hampshire club. The teaching strategy is taking shape but unfortunately both the U3A beginner coordinator and the only recognised club teacher have passed away in the last two weeks. We are getting support from 3 Counties Bridge who have expertise in bridge teaching and a willing group of around 10 volunteers to help.
 - c. Suffolk: the weekly Pairs game gets 20 tables and there are 26 teams in the league. The County committee has decided that players who do not disclose their identify in their BBO profile will not be allowed to play in county events, and that no face-to-face events before November will be considered.
 - d. Leicestershire: the CBA is now talking to all clubs including non-affiliated clubs regarding further help setting up Virtual Clubs, will be starting an LCBA pairs event on the 1st August and with support will play that every Saturday morning.
 - e. Norfolk: when free events were started in mid-April the numbers were 10-14 tables three days a week. Since NCBA (and others) introduced the Virtual Club events charging \$3 the number of tables dropped to the 7-9 range. The league competition is running with two divisions of 7 teams and is planning to start a second session in September: it is expecting more teams. There is no sign of any Club considering a face-to-face restart prior to September.
 - f. Staffs & Shrops : the main County event is going well, however the first No Fear event only attracted three tables (the decision is to go for at least a month and hope that numbers improve).
10. From Somerset TR told us that they continue with four games weekly averaging about 20 tables (down a little since charges came in), alongside 7 clubs running as Virtual Clubs, and a League. Their Swiss Teams evening was successful and they will repeat this on 28th July ([see website for entry details](#)). It was organised by Nicole and allows every match to play the same boards; as yet there is no BBO-extractor equivalent for display of the results but results can be compared on the BBO Hand Records interface.

11. From Avon, SO reported that they had positive feedback after the Bristol BC AGM on Zoom, and that, although some sessions were showing a loss, the intention was to continue with the existing Virtual Clubs.
12. From Worcestershire, MW commented on the growing sense of fixture congestion as so many games get organised. The County plans to hold its AGM on Zoom in August, and to do a trial run a few days ahead of that.
13. For Oxfordshire : RP reported that the County committee was about to meet to plan the next year, but for now they had 8 Virtual Clubs running plus a County night, and the County will continue with the monthly high-5s game for beginners.
14. For Lincolnshire, KH reported that they had a weekly pairs game running (6 tables) but a sense of more casual bridge than competitive bridge being played. They were soon to start a 2-division league.
15. RS raised the question of falling numbers and the timing of sessions. The availability of more daytime activities will be one contributor, as is the increasing number of alternative bridge games. A number of counties expressed a plan to move some afternoon sessions to the evening over coming months. It was noted that Leagues in which people timetable their own matches (and the style of the BCL drop-in game) avoid these issues. MV told us that in Worcestershire that he had checked the number of boards played in local events over the past five weeks and they had been seen to increase. PS reported that GCBA has generated twice as many UMS sessions in the last quarter as it did in the same quarter of 2019.
16. A quick poll revealed that about half the counties (Herefordshire not present, included) were thinking of having online AGMs.

ITEM 7: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

17. JP reported on concerns expressed to him about face-to-face bridge, and suggested that government regulations did not yet allow this. In a social distancing world, concern was expressed as to whether the limited footfall allowed would harm the financial viability of bridge games (and their attractiveness). MT had searched for the "Community Hall guidance" referenced in respect to the opening of Rugby Village BC, and failed to find it.
18. KH reported on recent face to face bridge efforts on the continent and showed some pictures of [how one club had adapted](#) to take advantage of the [lovebridge.com](#) approach using tablets at each table while keeping the tables far apart.

ITEM 8: AOB and NEXT MEETING

19. We considered whether weekly meetings remained justified and agreed that we would still meet weekly but keep the round-robin of county progress for every second week. Feedback from the EBU Board members was welcomed on a weekly basis, but we would not generate minutes from those sessions. For County updates, members were encouraged to use the Facebook Group both for timeliness and to provide an easily accessed historical record for any newcomers to the group.
20. The next meeting will be at the same time next week. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES