



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> May at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Avon	Sue O'Hara (SO)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Wiltshire	Richard Gwyer (RG)
Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)	Worcestershire	Mike Vetch (MV)
Oxfordshire	Rob Proctor (RP)		

**Apologies:** Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Robert Smith (Norfolk), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)  
Dean Benton only arrived for the last few minutes of the session.

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 29<sup>th</sup> April meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

## ITEM 3a: Experiences of Online Bridge

2. It was noted that in a number of cases the attendance at the coming weekend of Green Point events was down on expectations. **MP** noted that Suffolk/Cambridgeshire had merged their event with one from Kent. This was attributed to saturation of the calendar and the opportunities emerging for other activities.
3. **RP** noted that a team who had regularly organised a bridge event in aid of Mencap, had recently approached his county to help run the event as it now had to be online.

## ITEM 3b: Returning to Face-to-Face Bridge

4. It was noted that a number of clubs had re-opened this week: a number of these are doing games (eg team matches in Nottingham) which involve no player movement. Players accept that this is still a positive step forward. Most of these clubs are using screens. Details from the Mid-Essex BC [are available here](#). Nobody present knew of any games which were not based on a unique set of boards per table. Although interest was shown in vaccination status, nobody reported rules enforcing a positive vaccination status.
5. It was noted that on BBC Radio (NFI) a question had been asked about a bridge club re-opening and the speaker referred back to the rule of 30 in a community hall. It was hoped that this answer was only relevant during the current phase. Stamford BC runs with seven tables, which fits this picture.

6. **PS** noted one question being asked in Cheltenham BC : with space for only limited numbers early in re-opening, should these places go to those who have not been playing online, or to the faithful members who have contributed to club funds online during the past year. A number of people suggested the demand would be sufficiently muted to avoid this being a problem.
7. As small clubs return to live bridge, there might be difficulty in making their games viable. **RP** reported that Oxfordshire CBA were considering whether they needed to help to organise merged games for these clubs until a critical mass is available for each.
8. **MV** reported that Worcester BC was planning a re-opening but had decided to do it (at least for now) only in the better-ventilated of the two locations they use.
9. **PS** asked about how counties were planning for the winter and for their 2021-22 County Championships. The consensus was that sufficient uncertainty would exist for some months that delaying any decision was the only option.

### **ITEM 3c: The Future of Teaching**

10. **MV** reported that Worcester BC had decided not to run a new online beginners' course, noting that such courses were very heavy on manpower. He pointed out that beginners were learning to get together themselves, and with help, to play and re-play boards geared to lessons; this was a fruitful learning path. **FD** noted that different learners progressed at enormously different rates. All had found the transition of learners into regular duplicate is much smoother online.

### **ITEM 3d: The Midlands Counties Online League**

11. **PS** reported that the agreed threesome (himself, Jim Parker & Richard Jephcott) would be meeting shortly to develop a proposal.
12. **MT** reported that Warwickshire with Ian Mitchell were putting together plans for inter-regional League Playoffs. There is varying levels of interest in this – no League run in the North, South-West have declined to get involved, Midlands leagues are still to complete. No date has yet been settled for any play-offs.

### **ITEM 3d: The Midlands Inter-County 6-High Teams**

13. The publicity for the event on 19<sup>th</sup> June has started; there was concern that with summer coming the appetite might be small. There was a suggestion we might defer the event, but **PS** suggested that even as few as 10 teams would provide a satisfactory event and a pleasant experience for those who take part. **MW** agreed to do some checking on numbers and to report back.

### **ITEM 3e: Reactions to the EBU County Survey**

14. **PS** asked about reactions to this and we learned that a number of county representatives knew nothing of it ([see here for a copy](#) – this is a general archive accessible from the Minutes page on the EBU website); this seems to result from a combination of mainly email distribution issues and to a lesser extent intra-county communications. **GW** and **CF** were able to identify which of those present seemed to be missed.

15. It was acknowledged that there were multiple sources of problems with EBU broadcasts to distribution lists; **CF** confirmed that there is an active group now looking at these problems – along with other communications issues. **GW** confirmed that on communications in general, useful ideas on how to improve would be most welcome. Approaches are in place to track read events on distributed emails but their reliability is not clear. An issue during the pandemic also arises when the “normal” point of contact has been inactive during lockdown.

#### **ITEM 4: Round-Robin from Counties**

16. We did a quick round-robin and learned that:

- From Derbyshire: [offline report]: All affiliated clubs have been invited to the County June committee meeting (15th) to see how clubs and county can help each other to move forward. There is now one club in Derbyshire running a weekly session on RealBridge; however, feedback from a committee member following competing in Green Point events on RealBridge was that it was better for more social games where competing friends can chat after play has finished.
- From Essex: NTR
- From Gloucestershire: plans are being made for an online 2021 AGM and – for the first time in recent memory – there are more volunteers for the committee than there are posts. This is attributed to the county’s increased visibility during the crisis and the sense of community that has been generated.
- From Leicestershire: **DB** reported that LCBA now has a new Tournament Sub-Committee planning the autumn calendar. There is an expectation of online winding down during the summer, so nothing new is expected until the autumn.
- From Norfolk: [offline report] Norfolk has stopped the weekly BBO events owing to lack of numbers, because Clubs are providing enough options on-line for their members. The first F2F event is planned for September. Following the successful on-line joint congress with Cumbria, NCBA have agreed to run it again with them on-line in March next year.
- In Northamptonshire: **FD** noted that county deliberations tend to focus on EBU-affiliated clubs – which skips by non-affiliated duplicate clubs, rubber bridge clubs, and U3A groups. He noted that while the U3A organisation was not resuming meetings, some U3A players who are keen to play have been meeting up in pubs to play bridge. He also reported that he was involved in planning a bridge holiday for which the value of paying for an EBU Licence for a small event was becoming dubious.
- In Oxfordshire: NTR
- From Staffs & Shrops: **PC** reported that the first County Committee meeting for a while was next week.
- From Suffolk MP reported that the County Association has just had its second on-line AGM. In lieu of prize-giving on Zoom which doesn't work very well; they had (1) included a full list of winners in the Chairman's report, circulated in advance to AGM attendees and published on the website and (2) a well received 2-minute [video](#) celebrating the winners which was shown at the AGM and included on the website. He noted that the AGM had run more smoothly online than it did live, so this practice (and that of more frequent online committee meetings) might continue post-pandemic.

- From Warwickshire: NTR but **MT** noted that clubs using but not controlling multi-user community facilities were very concerned about how things would work out for them.
- From Wiltshire: **GW** noted that the county was running two sessions per week and that numbers were trickling downwards. **RG** noted that Corsham BC was surveying its members and finding enthusiasm for a return to live bridge. On the other hand, the committee at Warminster BC did not feel the need to rush to re-open immediately and they would be canvassing members for their opinions before any decisions are made. Wiltshire CBA is planning a mix of online and live for the next year.
- From Worcestershire: **MW** commented that some clubs (2-3) are intending to resume F2F playing in June, Government regulations permitting. The County has some flourishing online programmes and it seems inevitable that, as summer arrives, there will be oversupply. That is good, because it offers choices. No doubt there will be some rationalization during summer but WCBA does not see any damage being caused by this.
- **MV** asked about the position on club insurance, and it seems to have been restored to the position of previous years ([see this link for the latest message](#)). This talks about Directors and Officers, but it has been confirmed that the cover extends beyond that to other committee members.

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

17. **RP** asked for thoughts on the regulations for the Gerald Faulkner Trophy in which the default is that matches are live, with online an option if both captains agree. There was support for the view that the default should be online, with face-to-face if both teams agree. **PS** assured the meeting that the matter was under active discussion within the EBU.
18. We agreed the next meeting will be in three weeks' time, on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> June. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES