



# NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call  
on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> November at 10.30am

## PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard (MG)
Essex	Cath Fox (CF)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Suffolk	Malcolm Pryor (MP)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Wiltshire	Richard Gwyer (RG)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)

Apologies: Rob Procter (Oxfordshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)

**CHAIR: Patrick Shields**

## ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 7<sup>th</sup> October meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

## ITEM 3: Demonstrations of Calendar/Leaflets

2. CF gave us a demo of the capabilities of the new EBU calendar, the beta version of which can be accessed via the EBU website ([this link](#)). Highlighted features included
  - Three types of users (Admin, Content Provider, Reader) and the Content Provider can edit only that which they have created.
  - Filters allow a Reader to see only what matters to them, and there is great flexibility in the set of filters available, so that new ideas are easily incorporated. Filters can be saved on a per user basis, and so enable direct access in the future to that on which a player focuses.
  - Anyone wanting to become a Content Provider (eg for their CBA) should contact [charlie@ebu.co.uk](mailto:charlie@ebu.co.uk) for access. Sharing an access would allow multiple CBA helpers edit the same set of items.
  - The primary intent of the calendar is to promote open events, but it can record/advertise closed events also – these should be suitably tagged.
3. Feedback was sought – now and later. Suggestions made included:
  - a. Encouragement, perhaps in the way of required fields, to ensure a Content Provider did provide the information a Reader might wish, including an active link to more details.
  - b. It would be worthwhile having some tutorial material to help new users take best advantage of this system, perhaps in the form of uploaded videos.

4. GW now talked through the current style of posters (A3 and A4) and leaflets (folded as A5) being prepared by the EBU for Counties, Clubs and others to use as marketing material. The key features were

- A professionally produced design, with consistent use of colours and pictures, and white space in which to insert local information and local contacts.
- The ability for Counties (preferably, or clubs) to order these from the EBU, whose bulk runs are a cost-effective approach to printing. Requests can be put in now, although delivery will not be until 2022.
- These can be used for advertising lessons and/or play sessions.
- A social media wrapper using this same material is under development.

The leaflets received a warm reception, and the fact that the EBU, through these, is actively promoting the game rather than the organisation, was appreciated.

#### **ITEM 4: New Experiences with Online Bridge**

5. A recent experience with BBO unavailability on TalkTalk connections was mentioned; a work around had been found, and the problem is reported as resolved anyway. GW reported that this occurrence forced a movement of a game from BBO to RealBridge, and the experience on RealBridge persuaded a number, who had previously resisted the platform, that it can provide an enjoyable experience.

#### **ITEM 5: Experience of the return to Face-to-Face Bridge**

6. In terms of positive experiences we heard reports of

- a. **MP** reported a successful hybrid event in Suffolk, wherein 40% of the players were face-to-face and the other 60% played the same boards online.
- b. **FD** reported on the Bourne BC weekend outing to Skegness for face-to-face bridge which was fully subscribed. Also that for their Winter League, Stamford BC had 17 teams sign up for a face-to-face game once a month throughout the winter.
- c. **PS** reported that Cheltenham BC, despite low numbers generally, achieved its largest live turn out for a Saturday afternoon game at which a cream tea was offered.
- d. **JP** reported that in Derbyshire he is playing three times a week, live, with numbers comparable to pre-Covid days. He also reported on one club which is using a CO<sub>2</sub> detector during play as a guide on when to open windows wider.

7. A number of less than positive experiences were also reported

- a. **FD** reported of a club which had dropped some online games to encourage face-to-face participation, but it has no effect on the live game, and some players went elsewhere (online) to play – demonstrating the spread of multi-club membership. Numbers in Stamford BC are generally low.
- b. **IS** reported a Championship Pairs game at Cheltenham BC postponed because of concerns about Covid numbers and likely attendance.

- c. **MP** reported that where clubs had switched to face-to-face numbers had dropped, and one club had decided to return to online for this winter. Also that after one face-to-face event, the Suffolk CBA has cancelled another because of concerns about numbers.
  - d. **JF** reported that the CBA had decided to restrict face-to-face events in 2021 to the Christmas Party only.
  - e. **RM** reported that only a little face-to-face is happening in Lincolnshire, with low numbers.
  - f. There was a report of clubs finding a positive Covid test amongst players, and shutting down operations for 10 days as a precaution.
8. **PS** expressed the view that given the earlier trend and the interruption of the pandemic, we should not expect to return to pre-Covid numbers, and of the 60-70% we are likely to attain, we will only see a fraction of that over this winter. To change this we need a serious recruitment campaign.

### **ITEM 6: The Future of Teaching**

9. There were a number of positive reports of learners starting on courses run in face-to-face settings – Kettering BC, Oxford BC, Cheltenham BC for example. **MP** reported on a club in Suffolk which had offered free teaching and quickly rustled up 30 newcomers. **PC** reported of plans in Staffs & Shrops for a course starting in January. Teaching in Leicestershire is happening at three venues and numbers are growing.
10. Less face-to-face contact than usual has limited the marketing by word-of-mouth, but not all clubs are suffering because of this.
11. **FD** reported that the U3A in Peterborough had come asking for help with refresher tuition slots to run before their play sessions.
12. **JF** reported on a new venture at Basingstoke BC (which has [an impressive teaching programme](#)); this is teaching on RealBridge in which four players will play one hand and then be presented with an analysis of the hand to review, at the table, before moving onto the next hand. It does not need any supervision once it is set up, and is proving popular; use of the facility is handled via a purchase from the club's online shop.

### **ITEM 7: The Midlands Counties Online League**

13. When asked, nobody present could report any enthusiasm for having MCL matches face-to-face this winter. The contrast with the EBU's Premier League, which is running live with similar numbers to earlier years, was noted.

### **ITEM 8: The Midlands Counties Restricted Swiss Teams**

14. We noted the need to start advertising, hard, for this event due on 27<sup>th</sup> November. A flyer will be distributed with the meeting minutes.

### **ITEM 9: Feedback from EBU Communications & plans for the AGM**

15. There was little to say as [the message](#) had only been distributed the day before and many had not seen it. It was confirmed that arrangements for the EBU AGM, due online on 30<sup>th</sup> November, had yet to be distributed.

## **ITEM 10: Round-Robin from Counties**

16. Inputs at the meeting were incorporated in the record above at relevant points. The following inputs were received by email
- a. Keith Stait reported from Herefordshire: things continue to be quiet here and while I am aware of 4 bridge players having tested positive for Covid over the last month there is no evidence (so far) that the individuals affected contracted it or spread the infection at face-to-face clubs. One club has regrettably suspended their face-to-face sessions and returned to online only for the winter. The decision was attributed to low attendance to support the costs involved.
  - b. **MT** from Warwickshire: numbers attending clubs' face-to-face sessions seem to be slowly improving, though many are struggling to achieve 50% of pre-pandemic numbers of tables. The County teams' coordinator has had to work extremely hard to enter teams for premier competitions such as the Tollemache. A number of the top players are unable/unwilling to commit to playing large numbers of boards online for a protracted period. At club level, quite understandably, many older players are electing to play principally online with the onset of colder weather and ever-present concerns over Covid.
  - c. **DL** from Leicestershire: LCBA is holding the next Executive Committee meeting face-to-face. This will give the opportunity to present the two Dimmie Fleming awards to members of the Committee. All the normal County Competitions are now running online with reasonable participation. It was decided not to start the League; it is possible it might run in early 2022. At the Executive Committee meeting we consider how LCBA might help struggling clubs - perhaps running a Learn to Play Bridge in a Weekend which was reasonably successful just pre-Covid.
  - d. **MW** from Worcestershire: The Malvern Congress was held over the weekend of 29th-31st October, attracting 80 pairs and 52 teams for the Championship events. Some of the teams entries were transferred from the Kent congress, with whom WCBA co-operated very successfully to the benefit of both counties. The Lancashire GP event on the same day was also cancelled, with some teams from that region entering the Malvern event. It is believed that success factors included; making an early decision to run online; running a panel of international players to commentate after each session; running Newcomers and 9-High section on the Friday evening. County events, however, continue to come under pressure and WCBA has decided not to run the Inter-Club Teams this year.

## **ITEM 9: AOB and NEXT MEETING**

17. We agreed that the next meeting will be in four weeks' time, and that our pattern would remain the first Thursday of the month, and therefore Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES