



NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 8th July at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Warwickshire	Myra Scott (MS)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Wiltshire	Richard Gwyer (RG)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)		

Apologies: Rob Procter (Oxfordshire), Malcolm Pryor (Suffolk), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Mike Willoughby (Worcestershire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 10th June meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website. Ian Sidgwick, who has recently become President of the Gloucestershire CBA was welcomed as a new face.

ITEM 3a: Experiences of Online Bridge

2. **PS** reported that there was a new playing platform on the horizon (which might be available towards the end of this year) from Bulgaria. It is reported to have embedded audio & video (like RealBridge) but be more oriented to individual players (where RB focuses on the tournament organiser).
3. **FD** noted that many less competitive players were becoming very comfortable with playing bridge on apps; mention was made of Trickster, Whizz Bridge, and Bridge Bandit. Only one instance (a club in Oxfordshire) was noted of activity on FunBridge (on which the EBU has a daily game).
4. **JP** reported no plans to change from BBO. Clubs and county have an ongoing survey of members still gathering replies: the indication is 60% want to play both F2F & Online. The intention is to look closer at Hybrid events and exactly what type events can be organised.

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

5. We noted that the first congress-type event was due in August. **PS** expressed concern about participants who, at the event, received notification to self-isolate (due to earlier activity) and the potential disruptive effect of this.
6. **FD** reported a club whose start-up plans were not to start with a duplicate session but to start with a social event, and use that (for some) to introduce the etiquette expected in a live session and (for others) to offer a refresher on good behaviour.

7. **JP** reported that the Derbyshire County TD was visiting all clubs as they restarted to confirm comfort levels.

ITEM 3e: The Future of Teaching

8. **PS** offered the view that much of the country has lost 12+ months' worth of bridge teaching and it will take a serious effort to recover to the levels of newcomers we need. It was noted that some areas had done a lot better than others over this period, but that teaching newcomers had generally become more labour-intensive. One problem suggested was the issue of integrating those who had learned online back into the culture of a bridge club.
9. **MS** reported that EBED were eager to put on new teacher training weekends and had plans for one (face to face) in each of September, October and November. See [the website for details](#). They would welcome suggestions of more venues at which to run. She also reported that EBED was looking into running a course to support teacher-assistants, and **JF** agreed that it was much easier to get volunteers to support assisted play than it was to get volunteers to take on the many-week commitment of running lessons.

ITEM 3d: The Midlands Counties Online League

10. The proposal for how this runs in 2021-2022 has been circulated (and is copied as Appendix A) and some questions have been raised, and the following responses were noted -
- The fact of a slight difference between the scoring methods online and live is mitigated by the use of an appropriate (but different) VP scale in the two cases, and an equally fair result should emerge in both cases.
 - There will be some counties short of expertise in running events on RealBridge, but there should be enough others to cover this. **PS** will provide help if needed.
 - Kibitzing on RealBridge is easy to arrange - you just need to fill in an online form ([linked here](#)) with the details of your event, and it all happens automatically – and with a delay that you can specify (for this event we would encourage 30 minutes).
 - It was confirmed that the RealBridge fees (currently) are 40p per player for each match (which happens to be the same as the UMS charge which also applies to all – a cost so low that some CBAs preferred to pay it rather than chase to collect it from the players). **KT** reported that Oxfordshire are calculating these charges and building them into the entry fee for the County League.
11. **DB** reported that Leicestershire CBA had considered the proposal (very promptly) and were satisfied with it. **KT** reported that Oxfordshire had (informally) approved the proposal. **JP** reported that the proposal has been issued to the full committee and feedback from Chair of selectors is positive.
12. We agreed that (other) counties would be chased for a response a week before our next meeting, so that arrangements can be finalised at that point.

ITEM 3e: The Midlands Inter-County 6-High Teams

13. **PS** reminded us that the MCWG had first introduced restricted-standard events on a regional basis because we perceived inadequate numbers in any one county to run such events. We have now run three sessions (8-high, 9-high and 6-high) and even the June event got a decent turnout (15 tables). He asked whether the appetite for this would last, and if so, should the MCWG continue to organise these events?
14. The immediate response to both questions was 'yes'. The fact that this was a teams' game made it very different (and attractive), as so many have learned in the context of (the much more complex) match-point pairs games. **JF** reported that introducing teams games and restricted games in the county had been found to be very attractive. A number of people suggested that more variety in the format of bridge games was an important part of learning the game. **JP** reported that in Derbyshire the normal progression for newcomers was into League bridge (with teams scoring). **PS** reported that Berks & Bucks have been very successful with a Learners' League along similar lines as a preparation for club bridge.
15. The use of alternative formats was also seen as one avenue to encourage players to mix better, and not be nervous about playing outside their comfort zone. Other approaches were the use of Pro-Am events, and charity events.
16. It was agreed that providing teams games for restricted grades was a task with which we should continue, and we postulated a schedule of an event in September, November, January and March, and alternating between 6-high and 9-high events. **PS** request volunteers to help out Mike & Sue (to whom thanks) who had managed the arrangements for the last two sessions; **MS** had provided a useful service by attending on the day, and is willing to do that again. **MS** noted that the county paying the entry fee for some who are new to these events is very useful as a door-opener for such players. **PS** reminded us that the profit to date is being held by the GCBA Treasurer. We will need to sort out the dates and plans in August.

ITEM 3e: Reactions to the BAMSAs conference

17. A number of attendees had listened to a number of the pre-recordings (and were impressed) and a few had attended one of the live days. The recordings of these are due to be available in August. The pre-recordings offered a set of world-wide perspective on topics we cover here.

ITEM 4: Round-Robin from Counties

18. We did a quick round-robin but many inputs had come already in discussion. Extra inputs (including some by email) were-
- Derbyshire: it is hoped that Spondon-based clubs will return after the venue has its full clean on 23rd July. The CBA is arranging a group meeting of all club teachers to create a common plan; also pre-pandemic there was teaching bridge scheduled at a local school, and the intent is to get this moving forward again in September.
 - Hampshire: **JF** has been researching interest in inter-county team-of-8 matches and finding that it was not easy to get organised. He also asked about how counties handle cheating accusations or concerns. **PS** identified the GCBA "Recorder Process" as the one approach which has been implemented – [details here](#). **JF** suggested Hampshire was going in the same direction.
 - Lincolnshire: the CBA is having a face to face AGM on Aug 1st, with online participation available. [Details here](#).

- Norfolk: some clubs are intending to restart after July 19th and some are leaving it until September. County events will start as F2F at beginning of September.
- Oxfordshire: there is a Charity Event on Thursday 15th July in aid of local Mencap charities. More entries welcome. Details in the "Strawberry Bridge" item on [the OBA home page](#).
- Suffolk: (today) SCBA are holding a meeting with all the Suffolk Affiliated Clubs to discuss a range of issues, including the future mix of online and face-to-face bridge in the county (county level competitions and regular club sessions, returning to face-to-face, encouraging beginners and those new to bridge, training for club directors, and issues raised directly by the clubs)
- Warwickshire: some clubs have started some face-to-face games.
- Wiltshire: some clubs are opening over coming months, and teaching is planned to start in September. The EBU's new Discovery Magazine was receiving a positive reception.
- Worcestershire: the county are likely to run regular county events online in order to give easy access for all our members, with only specific events F2F; and, by and large, leave F2F to the clubs, who are more geographically orientated. On teaching, a national PR campaign to raise awareness for recruitment would support local recruitment activities extremely well.

ITEM 5: AOB and NEXT MEETING

19. **JP** expressed concerns about the EBU insurance scheme and the coverage of Covid issues. **IS** had also been investigating this and had obtained the policy documents but they do not make easy reading, and he is planning to chase for clarification covering Covid questions and CBA liabilities. Asking players to sign a waiver on arrival for a face-to-face game was suggested as one way out.
20. **JF** asked about the way the EBU was setting prices for events such as the recent Seaside Congress. **PS** explained that from the start of lockdown, the EBU had targeted its online fees at about 80% of the fees for the equivalent face-to-face sessions. This has helped the EBU survive the past year, but they are now looking to go for a rather smaller figure (probably about 65%) over the next year. The fact of professional staffing, and of paying VAT, will always mean that an EBU event is more expensive than the equivalent county-organised event.
21. **FD** pointed out that the Andrew Robson training sessions around the country were starting up again; he knows of two sessions for next year which are already fully subscribed - suggesting the appetite for such events is still there.
22. We agreed the next meeting will be in four weeks' time, on Thursday 5th August. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES

PROPOSAL FOR INTER-COUNTIES LEAGUE : MIDLANDS 2021-2022

1. This proposal is specifically for the next season. The season following that (2022-2023) will need to be re-assessed following the experiences of next winter.
2. For 2021-2022, there are the 8 counties taking part, and the format will be all-play-all 32-board head-to-head matches, converted to VPs.
3. Matches will be on the second Sunday of the month, September to March (exceptions may arise if clashes emerge, and counties can agree on a different date for any match).
4. Matches will be online by default but if/when face-to-face is common in both counties and most team members are willing the two participating counties are encouraged to consider playing face-to-face and may do so if both agree.
5. Online matches will be played on RealBridge unless either (a) one county had declared up-front that the county cannot field enough RealBridge players to take part, or (b) the two participating counties agree to play on BBO. The RealBridge costs will be met by the home team.
6. If the match is played face-to-face then the regulations and VP scale will be as used in the last face-to-face season, to be [found here](#).
7. If the match is played online then the regulations and VP scale will be as used in the recent online season, to be [found here](#).
8. The Dawes, Porter and Markham trophies should be awarded to the winners of the three divisions in the coming year.
9. The winners of these leagues will be the Midlands representatives in any national league playoffs in 2022.