

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call
on Thursday 1st June 2023 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Derbyshire	Jim Parker (JP)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Hampshire	John Fairhurst (JF)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Wiltshire	Gayle Webb (GW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
		REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
Apologies: Anne Wright (Leicestershire), Julia Staniforth (Nottinghamshire), Keith Stait & Rob Wilkinson (Herefordshire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 4th May 2023 meeting. All past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website, and all meeting notes and papers presented, and a variety of papers distributed by the EBU, and more, are held on an MCWG OneDrive share; any attendee needs only to ask to be given access.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. **PS** noted that the EBU had now declared that the remaining Online One-Day Green Point Swiss events for 2023 would be run on RealBridge, driven by the difficulty of viewing results during the event on BBO, the lack of Victory Point scoring for Pairs on BBO, and the unfortunate experience of a restart on the first BBO Swiss Teams.
3. **SM** reported that the first Cumbria-CBA-run (EBU) NGS-J-High event had now grown into a series of quarterly events. She told us that the USA is running, on 10th July, a massive fund-raising event for Youth Bridge, and that RealBridge would be organising a Teachers Conference, world-wide, over the weekend of 16-18 September. Sessions in the conference will be at different times of day to allow engagement from all parts of the globe. **SM** also commented on the thorough process adopted by the CBAI in Ireland for accreditation of teachers.
4. **SM** gave us advance warning that a new capability to manage Convention Cards was coming in RealBridge soon, as was the ability to keep everyone playing should a situation develop during a pairs game where there were two half tables.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

5. **JF** asked about the options for playing with tablets which had recently been mentioned in the national press. Four scenarios, with which various groups have been experimenting, were identified
- The first to emerge was LoveBridge which allows the four players sitting around the table each to hold a tablet rather than 13 cards, and they make all their bids and plays on the tablet – while still able to interact socially with the other players. This is used in some bridge clubs in Hungary.
 - A variation on this has screens across the table dividing N&E from S&W, giving fewer options for Unauthorised Information.
 - The USBF has taken this approach a stage further for some of its trials – it places two of the players (N&E or S&W) in one room, while the other two are in a different room.
 - The EBL has adopted the use of tablets at the table (with screens) for the bidding of the board, but once the bidding is complete the players extract the physical cards from the board and play then with cards.
6. **JF** commented on a shortage of Tournament Directors for F2F sessions, and wondered if the use of tablets (which would remove issues such as bids/leads out of turn) would simplify the TD role and make that more accessible. **IS** reported that there is around Gloucestershire a demand for TD training and a coming course is fully booked. The option of an APP (on a phone perhaps) to guide a TD was mentioned as attractive.

ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING

7. **PC** raised the problem (seen recently) of a potential newcomer approaching a local bridge club at this time of year, only to be told to come back in September. The strong consensus was that every bridge club and County Association needs to have an answer for such an enquirer, which keeps that person engaged with the game. **GW** reported positive experiences of pointing newcomers to the [New Zealand federation lessons](#). **SM** reported on new approaches (such as postponing talk of transfers) being taken up in the USA by ABTA leaders.
8. We noted that Mark Humphris is taking over from Giorgio Provenza any time now as CEO for EBED. We resolved to invite him to one of these meetings soon. [DONE: he is coming on 6th July]

ITEM 6: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES LEAGUE

9. Our intention was to finalise the plans for 2023-24 at this meeting. **PS** had proposed some changes to the rules in advance of the meeting. It was noted that we cannot force people to play bridge in a style that they do not wish to play, and that we need all parties to be tolerant of the views of others. We discussed the question of how strongly we should drive forward face-to-face matches, noting that we achieved only a very small number last year. It was agreed that separate online and face-to-face league matches would each struggle to get the necessary critical mass, and so were a non-starter. Noting the positive time savings and the eco-impact of the online choice, we compromised on this wording:

- Team Managers are recommended to make two or more of their matches take place face-to-face during the season. Reducing one of the matches to be team-of-4 is an accepted alternative to holding the match online. Decisions on which matches are face-to-face need to be made at least three months before the match date.

10. We noted that some face-to-face events for the Midlands Counties is needed in order to retain the sense of community which we have developed over the years. We resolved to look at how this can be tackled outside the MCL structure.

11. We agreed to make a small alteration to the schedule to move some local matches to September and March, to make face-to-face easier. The schedule is now

10 Sep	08 Oct	19 Nov	10 Dec	14 Jan	11 Feb	09 Mar
DE-LE	OX-DE	SS-GL	NO-DE	WO-DE	DE-GL	WO-GL
OX-NO	WO-LE	LE-OX	GL-LE	SS-LE	NO-SS	LE-NO
WO-SS	GL-NO	DE-WA	SS-OX	WA-NO	LE-WA	DE-SS
GL-WA	WA-SS	NO-WO	WA-WO	GL-OX	OX-WO	OX-WA

12. We discussed the question of which online platform should be the default if one team prefers BBO and one team prefers RealBridge. **JP** expressed concerns about lack of any RealBridge TDs in Derbyshire, but he was given several offers of help. We agreed to adopt the following set of words:

- Online matches will be played on RealBridge unless both participating counties agree to play on BBO. The RealBridge costs will be met by the home team. Where not enough RealBridge players are available, then teams may be reduced to four players if either team Manager declares this to be necessary.

13. The Inter-County Mixed Teams will go ahead on 9th July on RealBridge as planned; a straw poll suggested there would be enough entries for this to go ahead.

ITEM 7: AOB & DONM

14. Three items were raised by SM:

- Helen Erichson, who plays for the Kent County team, has just published a book based on the game of bridge – called “Murder by Natural Causes”.
- Many EBU player biographies need updating; anything you can do to progress these, reminding/complimenting players of what is said about them, etc. would be helpful.
- Wikipedia has many entries related to the game of bridge; if anyone is interested in becoming a Wikipedia Author to help maintain these, please speak to **SM**.

15. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, 6th July 2023, again at 10:30am. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES