

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 5th January 2023 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Somerset	Tony Russ (TR)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)	REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
Apologies: John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Rodney Mitchell (Lincolnshire), Myra Scott (Warwickshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEMS 1/2: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 1st December 2022 meeting. Note that all past minutes (including the latest draft) are on the EBU website.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

2. **SM** gave us an update on what is happening with RealBridge:
 - a. There will be Vugraph from Belfast for the Camrose match this coming weekend, with ten video commentators providing entertainment. Access is, as always, through the kibitz.realbridge.online interface.
 - b. RealBridge is facilitating a set of teacher talks for EBUTA – with a focus on teaching skills and situation rather than on course content.
 - c. RealBridge are hosting a match between USBF juniors and the ACBL staff, with commentary. [**PS** sounded out the EBU Board about an English version but the silence was deafening]
 - d. RealBridge is organising a world-wide competition for Spanish speakers.
3. **PS** asked whether County Associations were thinking about how the lack of geographical constraints for their online games was affecting their thinking about membership of the CBA. A few visitors are always welcome, but is there a time when the fact of too many visitors makes the CBA into an international bridge club, and breaks the sense of community that we currently have in county games. Satisfying our CBA members' desires was identified as key, and it was suggested that it is up to the organiser of any game to make it attractive: interfering with an open market here would be counter-productive. In some senses the CBA is squashed between club games and national games – is there a space for online county games?

4. If the top-end players in any county are only a small subset of the total membership, and there are many online options for these people – should the CBA be focused on lower-end face-to-face games? Offering opportunities for new players to get hooked on the game is important – although for many the roadmap of progress is far from clear. There have been attempts at the Acol Bridge Club and at Oxford BC (with its colour coding of sessions) to suggest a path to those developing their skills. The [list of RealBridge sessions built by the EBU](#) has colour coded sessions by average NGS to hint at how one might “move up”.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

5. There was little change to report after the quietest month of the year. **PS** asked whether any counties were considering parallel activities – for example an online league in parallel with a face-to-face league. Such an event is happening in Warwickshire, but for most counties, leagues are run on the basis of face-to-face only if both teams agree, with a default of online. There are a small number of bridge clubs which have become online-only and some were created online-only, but most have their base firmly in the face-to-face camp. The fact that a club has an online element is much appreciated by members of the club who move to a new location and cannot attend face-to-face.

ITEM 5: BRIDGE TEACHING

6. The only news was of a monthly Monday evening session in Nottinghamshire to review the deals from each County match, and of a plan for the NCBA to offer some free improvers sessions.

ITEM 6: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES LEAGUE

7. It was noted that the recent Derbyshire – Leicestershire MCL match was the first face-to-face encounter since February 2020, and the plan is for some more matches in coming months to be face-to-face. It was suggested – and agreed by all – to schedule the matches between adjacent counties to be in the first two months and last month of the season, to minimise the inconvenience of travelling for a face-to-face encounter.
8. **PS** asked about the appetite for a Midlands Counties Mixed Teams championship. One difficulty was pointed out – that we have a busy calendar and some existing events are struggling. The counter is that one reason many events struggle is because so many of our players can say “been there, done that” – and having a new event of a new type might just get them going again. It was agreed that **PS** will prepare a proposal for a 1-day event in early summer and bring it to the next meeting.

ITEM 7: THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES NO FEAR SWISS EVENTS

9. Plans for the next event on the 28th January are in place, and Ben Norton has agreed to do some commentary and attend an online Question & Answer session just as the event finishes, to provide advice to anyone who desires it. **SM** pointed out that livestreaming from Zoom to Youtube is quite simple, and doing that might allow participants who cannot stay to view the Q&A session later.

ITEM 8: OTHER TOPICS

10. On behalf of Warwickshire, **MT** had asked about the EBU's strategy for funding junior events, having seen some negative comments in the press and not being able to find any official policy statement. **PS** had investigated and was able to clarify that:

- When last discussed (middle of 2021) the EBU Board had agreed that
 - i) Travel & accommodation funding was to be available for the Open team and four categories of Junior Teams in European and World championships, and to cover NPCs (and chaperones for Junior events).
 - ii) A limited amount of such funding, to be determined on a year-by-year basis, was to be available for the Home Internationals and for Women and Seniors and Mixed at European+ level.
- Income for the EBU between 2019-20 and 2021-22 was down by £242k even though profit from competitions rose by £93k. In order to make 2022-2023 budget viable, it was agreed that funding for Juniors at the European and World championships had to be restricted to entry fees, uniforms and the expenses of any necessary officials. Some money would be set aside for cases of juniors where fund raising or other avenues had not enabled a wanted person to participate.
- This year EBU pays accommodation for Lady Milne team, Camrose teams, Teltscher team, plus travel for Camrose teams. Funding to cover the entry fee continues to be available for all representative events. Funding to cover EBU responsibility to host events (eg 2023 Junior Camrose) is available.

11. It was agreed that the that the transparency of the decision-making needed to be improved. Furthermore, **MT** requested that the detailed current policy arrangements for funding of all teams, not just juniors, should be made readily accessible to members on the EBU website.

12. **SM** noted that there was a new European Bridge League initiative offering Women players training. It takes place on occasional Monday evening and [details can be found here](#).

ITEM 9: NEXT MEETING

13. **DB** reminded us of the Leicestershire face-to-face Swiss Pairs taking place at the wonderful new premises of the County Club, on Saturday 4th March.

14. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, on 2nd February 2023, again at 1030. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES