

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 7th December 2023 at 09.30am

PRESENT:

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

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 2nd November 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 2: BRIDGE TEACHING

2. **RW** noted that his county committee had been persuaded to advertise a learners' course happening nearby in Gloucestershire, and that the CBA was going to start an online learners' course around Easter.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

3. **PS** suggested that we had reached a steady state now, with which all agreed. **JF** asked if anyone had experimented with IntoBridge, but only one person present had tried it.
4. **SM** reminded us of a variety of events on Realbridge that merit advertising:
 - The next Junior event is 10 December; the last event had 53 tables but very few from England.
 - The EBL Women's events continue and are well supported, and there is space for more England teams (contact is roswolfarth4901@gmail.com).
 - The SBU are running online Red Point events, the next of which is Sunday 10th December.
 - RealBridge is, with EBED, organising an inter-generational game (playing with a parent or grandparent avoids safeguarding concerns) on 17th December, and once a month thereafter.
 - WBF is offering an [online Women's Teams event 16th-18th February](#), open to all.

5. **SM** described to the group a venture being undertaken by Wellington Bridge Club in New Zealand, aiming to generate a TV commercial (viewable also online) encouraging newcomers to take up playing bridge. She pointed out that – although it varies across the country and by time of day and more – it does not cost a lot to have an advert played (£3/thousand viewers for 30 seconds was quoted). There are legal and technical requirements, but these are manageable. It was suggested that the EBU should consider doing this, but the point was made that any such advert must finish with a clear call to action, and a local call to action is more effective; we need to test out the effectiveness in one region and then refine the offering before going national.
6. **SM** offered to help anyone interested in preparing a video for these purposes and mentioned that she was using the free/cheap tool from <https://biteable.com/> to create her samples. [Later: she distributed a sample of the output to the MCWG mailing list]

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

7. Here too, a steady state was reported. **IS** asked about how many sessions offered refreshments beyond the basic; the numbers suggested were low, but those which did offer food were reported as particularly successful.

ITEM 5: MIDLANDS COUNTIES GAMES

8. On the Midlands Counties League, for which the fourth round comes in a few weeks' time, there were no issues to raise. It was confirmed that these games were eligible for NGS and that **PS** submitted to the EBU all those which he had been able to merge, but that those which had used different boards or different movements needed to be submitted by the counties involved (using code 08).
9. **MW** reported that the Midlands 9-High Swiss pairs, having been opened nationwide, had 16 tables on Saturday 2nd December, with 10 of the pairs coming from one club in Worcestershire, and another 4 coming from Nottinghamshire. He asked whether the county effort in advertising these was time well spent, whether these events should be Blue Point, and whether it was worthwhile having an expert Q&A at the end (it was appreciated but sparsely attended). He offered to prepare a discussion paper (being distributed with these minutes) for consideration at our next meeting.
10. **SM** reported that the Cumbria J-High events are done jointly with the EBU on a profit-sharing scheme, so that the extra charge for Blue Points does not get noticed. It was suggested that not all these events might deserve an EBU flag. Concern was expressed about oversupply of online games, and whether this would hurt club bridge. It was agreed that we would continue the current series through to the end of March and then consider what is to be done in the future.

ITEM 6: AGM REACTIONS

11. **PS** asked for any thoughts or reactions following the EBU AGM of 29th November. **RP** asked about some questions which were raised prior to the AGM and somehow passed by unasked at the meeting; **PS** offered to chase these down.

12. **RP** commented that in Oxfordshire it was felt that the average club player financially supported the tournament player, and that this was wrong – was this the position EBU-wide? **PS** indicated that the EBU Board had decided that in early 2024 there would be a review of the services delivered by the EBU to clubs, and that this question naturally folded into that. It was suggested that the question of who pays for what has been a long-term concern, and it was noted that addressing this would also involve addressing the structure of UMS as a whole; it is difficult to apply different UMS levels on an individual basis.

13. **IS** pointed out, in response to a question, that any County Association is free to support non-affiliated clubs to the extent it likes, and several county representatives indicated that their county did support such clubs.

14. **MW** made the point that post-pandemic we have a much-improved set of tools for communication, and we should look to take advantage of these to improve the dialogue between County Associations and the EBU.

ITEM 7: COUNTY UPDATES

15. We heard from:

- Warwickshire: **MT** reported on little change and reminded us of the [Midland County Congress coming on 5-7th January](#). All those within driving distance of Solihull should be advertising this.
- Gloucestershire: **IS** reported that he now has 3 club managers for the Festival of Bridge next September.
- Wiltshire: **GW** reported that the county plans to run the Knock-Out face-to-face were beset by low entry numbers, and now that they have switched to make online the primary option, the numbers have risen again. A number noted the continued popularity of online for several events, although new learners often lean the other way with a sense of a face-to-face community.
- Nottinghamshire: **JS** reported that the County Night is being re-introduced alongside monthly training seminars.
- Northamptonshire: **FD** reported that several bridge clubs are now seeing increased rent costs, and this has a potential impact on table money. Despite the cost being so low, the reaction to increases is never good. He noted that the use of tablets for scoring is overtaking BridgeMates, although there is still the occasional club using travellers.
- Leicestershire: **DB** (who joined the meeting about this time) reported that finding newcomers for lessons was not a problem, which is an encouraging position to hold. The LCBA contact for the MCL is about to change from Simon Stokes to Tim Glover.

ITEM 8: DONM

16. **PS** reminded the meeting that he had been chairing and minuting these meetings for five years now, and it would be a Good Thing were someone else to take over. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, 4th January 2024, now at 10:00am. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES