

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 7th September 2023 at 10.30am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Herefordshire	Rob Wilkinson (RW)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Worcestershire	Paul Hammond (PH)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)		
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
Apologies: Jim Parker (Derbyshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire), Mike Thorley (Warwickshire), Rob Procter (Oxfordshire)			

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 3rd August 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. We heard reports of activity restarting in various counties. **RM** has just started a Year-2 course with 25 signed up (three quarters returning after Year-1 and the others on a refresher). **KT** reported that Oxford BC had about 25 on Year-2 and 15 on Year-1 courses, including some re-learning after a long break from the game. **PS** reported that some Cheltenham BC seminars were over-subscribed and now being run in multiple sessions.
3. **PS** reported that he had offered MiniBridge as a Cheltenham U3A activity and asked if any others had taught MiniBridge as a game worth playing even if you lack ambitions to move on to play bridge. The answer was negative, but **FD** endorsed the idea of more focus on MiniBridge.
4. **SM** reminded us that the timetable for the RealBridge-led Teaching Conference has now been settled (7-8 October) and that information about this is [now available from the RealBridge website](#) (under the Events menu) and people can sign up for the event there. There are three sessions each with five speakers, and they have been told that no selling or fund raising is to be done – this is all about sharing experiences. Topics include the approach in different countries to accreditation of teachers, and **SM** encouraged those present to advertise it wherever possible.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

5. **SM** reported that an online platform [Swan Games](#) had relaunched their online bridge platform; this is one of the few (with BBO, OKBridge) who can issue ACBL Master Points for online games, and it now offers integrated audio/video. There were early concerns about the video rights the company was claiming, which might now have been resolved; claims of such rights have never been an issue for RealBridge. SwanBridge uses the Q-Plus robot, and offers casual games and ACBL duplicate. The general feedback on its interface is positive.

6. **SM** reminded us of the learning opportunity on offer from the EBL [Women's Coaching sessions](#) and that there are often unused places. County Associations are encouraged to advertise this to their top female players, who should contact roswolfarth4901@gmail.com if they are interested. Another learning option is expected when Andrew Robson produces a commentary on the Children-in-Need Simultaneous Pairs (on a day within 6-10 November) – so do encourage your clubs to sign up for this. More puzzles and other props for teachers are available now at [the RealBridge website](#).

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

7. Some local congresses have taken place face-to-face recently (Oxford with 21 tables, and Cheltenham slightly more but still only half the pre-Covid numbers). It was noted that the Malvern Congress is coming at the end of October, and the Midlands Counties Congress is reverting to face-to-face in January 2024 at West Midlands BC. **FD** commented that although it was difficult to get club players to congresses, they responded well to any charity events.
8. **PS** noted that the 9-High Pairs running alongside the Cheltenham Congress Swiss teams had almost matched it in entries (18 tables as opposed to 24) but **KT** reported that in the case of the Oxford Congress the 9-High event was pulled when entries were too low (and then of course more people wanted to play!).

ITEM 5: MIDLANDS COUNTIES GAMES

9. We noted the proposal which had been put forward to expand the eligibility options for players in the Midlands Counties League, but of the relevant counties a majority had indicated that they preferred no change, so the regulation remains – all players must be EBU members and have Primary Allegiance to the County they are representing.
10. The proposal made at the last meeting that we should aim to incorporate the Midlands Counties 9-High Swiss Pairs events into a calendar being created of online NGS-restricted events run by County Associations was agreed between meetings, and the details were circulated with the agenda for this meeting (and are copied as Appendix A). In response to a question, **PS** replied that the extent to which the NGS restriction on entry was policed varied between organisers, with checks being made sometimes before the event and sometimes only on the winners afterwards.
11. **JS** suggested that we ought to organise a prize for performance across our set of four games, and the meeting agreed that this was a good idea, as it would encourage repeat participation. It could be based on something as simple as scoring 12 points for winning, down to 1 point for 12th place – and accumulating that across sessions. **PS** agreed to administer this.

ITEM 6: COUNTY UPDATES

12. At the meeting, in addition to the above, we heard from

- Gloucestershire: **IS** reported that the Cheltenham Congress, played for the first time in a school hall, had been successful and turned a decent profit. He reported also that the club cluster mentioned at the previous meeting had been successful in advertising and was starting a bridge class this month.
- Leicestershire: **DB** reported that the LCBA AGM had taken place the week before and a good management team remained in charge; all teaching centres (4) were starting classes, but there was still uncertainty about the usefulness of some of the County Competitions which had last been run pre-pandemic.

- Northamptonshire: **FD** reported that the County Association still lacked a Chair or Secretary.
- Nottinghamshire: **JS** reported that the county has settled dates for a further series of free seminars for top players. Consideration was being given to re-instating some county events which had stopped with the pandemic.
- Oxfordshire: **KT** reported that small increases were seen in face-to-face numbers, but that the bridge timetable across the county remains incoherent, and that there was a shortage of volunteers in general. The County Association still runs a large league, plus a teams' game monthly on RealBridge, and a monthly cross-imp pairs on BBO.
- Staffs & Shropshire: **PC** reported that the CBAAGM on Zoom last week was not quorate, and that lack of a Treasurer was generating problems with the bank.
- Worcestershire: **PH** reported that some new initiatives were underway – a monthly face-to-face County night was one (online had been tried and failed) and another was a roving county competition which takes place at a different club each session, but with cumulative scores, thereby encouraging players to visit different clubs.

13. Offline, by email we heard from Jim Parker in Derbyshire:

- Things in Derbyshire are much the same, the interclub league event has only attracted 12 entries (about 40% of the number pre-covid). The DCBA is trying to introduce some pro-am type events to entice players to try and improve and is running an inter-club teams-of-4 knockout cup/plate event.

ITEM 9: AOB & DONM

14. We agreed that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, 5th October 2023, again at 10:30am. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES

APPENDIX A

PROPOSED CHANGES TO MIDLAND COUNTIES 9-HIGH EVENTS

The background to these proposed changes was set out in the APPENDIX A to the minutes of the meeting of 3rd August. Following feedback from members of the MCWG the following is proposed.

- The events are included on the EBU calendar.
- Entries may be made via the form on the Midland Counties Congress with direct payment to our bank account. However, the point has been made that, for the Midland Counties, the involvement of County Organisers has been, and will continue to be, beneficial. It is, therefore, proposed that, for the Midland Counties only, entries may be made to the County Organisers and the total payment remitted to our bank account.
- While the Q&A sessions with Ben Norton have not been as well-attended as we had hoped, they have been well-received and have undoubtedly been beneficial to those who have attended. Therefore we will continue with them for now, possibly in a slightly different format.
- In light of the above point, and the cost implications, the entry fee will be raised to £4 per player. In the past, some counties have subsidised the entry fee for their players and, for counties wishing to encourage entries, this option remains an option (counties will simply charge their players what they like and remit £4 pp to the bank account).

Mike Willoughby
27th August 2023