

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MIDLANDS COUNTIES WORKING GROUP

via a Zoom conference call

on Thursday 4th January 2024 at 10.00am

PRESENT:

Gloucestershire	Patrick Shields (PS)	Oxfordshire	Rob Procter (RP)
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick (IS)	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot (KT)
Herefordshire	Rob Wilkinson (RW)	Staffs & Shrops	Paul Cutler (PC)
Leicestershire	Dean Benton (DB)	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley (MT)
Lincolnshire	Rodney Mitchell (RM)	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby (MW)
Northamptonshire	Fred Davis (FD)	REALBRIDGE	Shireen Mohandes (SM)
Nottinghamshire	Julia Staniforth (JS)		

Apologies: Jim Parker (Derbyshire), John Fairhurst (Hampshire), Keith Stait (Herefordshire)

CHAIR: Patrick Shields

ITEM 1: Welcome & Admin Issues

1. We approved the minutes from the 7th December 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.
2. It was suggested that different members act as Chair for occasional meetings. **PS** to arrange.

ITEM 2: BRIDGE TEACHING

3. **IS** reported that in recent weeks he had contacted all higher education establishments in the county and is awaiting their expression of interest in enabling bridge learning to take place within. **PS** noted that there is [a BAMSAs paper which discusses such ventures](#). **MT** reported that Warwickshire CBA had been very frustrated in years gone by in their unsuccessful attempts to re-establish bridge at Birmingham University, finding that access to the Freshers' fair was only allowed if a club was already established.
4. **PS** reported that a task on the EBU and EBED for this year is the development of a Youth Bridge Strategy, and asked for thoughts on this. The following emerged:
 - **FD** highlighted the importance of continuity, and the losses seen in Northamptonshire when those learning at primary school were dispersed at secondary school and lost the chance to play bridge there.
 - Different experiences were reported on the integration of youngsters to club duplicates, an issue which needs to be managed carefully. **IS** and **KT** reported weekly sessions for youngsters in their top club.

ITEM 3: ONLINE BRIDGE

5. **SM** reminded us of a variety of events on Realbridge that are deserving of advertising:
 - The new "[Generation Game](#)" (child + relative) has started and will continue monthly.
 - The Camrose is running this weekend with multiple tables shown on RealBridge and with expert commentaries that should be interesting to our club players.

- There is a new [world-wide bidding competition](#) managed by Marc Smith (author of many books) and hosted by RealBridge. As well as problems to ponder and the experts' thinking to learn from, there is a video discussion of the problems to start you off ([click here](#)).
- The next Jack-High Pairs on RealBridge (run by Cumbria CBA on behalf of the EBU) is on Sunday 21st January (after that 20th April). [There is still time to enter](#).

We should look to be advertising all these opportunities on CBA websites.

6. **SM** reported also that she is planning another (world-wide) conference, this time tackling the related questions of rewards and retention.
7. **PS** reported that over the holidays he had played in one of the free BBO Daylong games and was amazed to find at the end of the day that there were over 15000 competitors. **SM** noted that the large number of opportunities with robots was a key differentiator between BBO and RealBridge.

ITEM 4: FACE TO FACE BRIDGE

8. NTR

ITEM 5: MIDLANDS COUNTIES GAMES

9. The next Staffs & Shrops Midlands County League match will be on BBO, the first we have had this season. **PS** will provide the spreadsheet in support of this.
10. **MW** had circulated a proposal about the Midlands 9-High Swiss Pairs and raised some questions about how we proceed. We agreed that it was right to keep the event as open nation-wide, and that the entries should all be done through the [entry form on the MidlandCC website](#). We noted that the timing of the next event is quite close to the J-High event, and we will try to avoid that in the future.
11. Charlie Bucknell will host a Q&A session after this month's event (27th Jan) and we will proceed with this but will consider whether a commentary of the hands to read afterwards would be more appealing to this audience. If we do that, we shall look to each Midlands County to provide one commentary every second year. We agreed that it was not appropriate to be awarding Blue Points for this event, and we will stick to Black Master Points.

ITEM 6: ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL BRIDGE PLAYERS

12. **RP** provided an update on the discussion we had started at our November meeting. The OBA committee and subgroup have agreed to trial the creation of a structure (organisation, website, newsletter) independent of the existing County Association, to work with bridge players of all types in promotion of the game. It is deemed important that the bridge players currently outside our EBU-led structures play a serious part in creating this new world.
13. The group discussed the idea and the following thoughts emerged:
 - The Festival in September (BIABD) is an ideal route through which to reach out to non-affiliated clubs and get them involved in the promotion of the game, and to other bridge players.

- We need to recognise that there are different bridge-playing communities which we want to bring together, but that their interests will not be identical.
- Café Bridge was highlighted as an excellent tool for outreach, and it was pointed out that the popularity of café bridge is a strong indicator that price is not a barrier to people engaging with the game.
- We noted that several CBAs were providing help to non-affiliated clubs and were advertising the existence of these clubs on their websites.

ITEM 7: COUNTY UPDATES

14. In general, there was little new to report, but we heard from:

- Staffs & Shrops: PC told us that a “No Fear” pairs event is being organised for February.
- Warwickshire: **MT** reminded us that the [Midlands County Congress starts tomorrow and runs 5-7th January](#).

ITEM 8: AOB & DONM

15. **SM** asked if anyone had useful contacts in the National Trust, as that organisation has a large membership who might be interested in playing bridge, and she reminded us that her offer to help generate videos for advertising bridge events was still open – and the ambition to get an advert onto TV still stands.

16. We agreed that we would continue meeting monthly, and that the next meeting will be the first Thursday of the month, 1st February 2024, now at 10:00am. The link for the Zoom conference will be distributed the day before.

END OF MINUTES