



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY CHAIR'S MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM
ON THURSDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER 2022**

1. Attendance EBU representatives

Board Members		Board Members			
Ian Payn	Chair	Tony Russ	Patrick Shields	Sam Kelly	EBU Communications
Cath Fox	Vice-Chair	Gayle Webb			
Kay Preddy	Treasurer				
Gordon Rainsford	Chief Executive				

County Attendance

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Berks and Bucks	Michael Green	Lancashire	Andrew Petrie	Oxfordshire	Kathy Talbot
Devon	Jacqui Munns	Lincolnshire	Mark Wardell	Suffolk	Richard Evans
Essex	John McCoy	Manchester	Alan Mould	Surrey	Tim Warren
Gloucestershire	Ian Sidgwick	Merseyside & Cheshire	Paul Roberts	Sussex	Peter Clinch
Hertfordshire	Chris Chowney	NEBA	Sue Davies	Warwickshire	Myra Scott
Hertfordshire	Paul Littlewood	Norfolk	Robert Smith	Wiltshire	Lucy Cross
Kent	Norman Inniss	Northamptonshire	Chris Wormeleighton		

Apologies

Board Members					
Adrian Darnell	Rob Lawy				
County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Channel Islands	Norman Le Cocq	London	James Smith	Warwickshire	Darren Evetts
Channel Islands	Hugh Bacon	Middlesex	Lyn Fry	Yorkshire	Nick Woolven
Lancashire	Brian Irlam	Manchester	Irene Davies		

Absence – no apologies

Avon	Peter Shelley	Dorset	Mark Hooper	Nottinghamshire	Mark Goddard
Bedfordshire	Colin O'Hara	Hants & IOW	Mike Kinsey	Staffs & Shrops	Pamela Booth-Jones
Cambs & Hunts	Adam Bowden	Hertfordshire	Keith Strait	Westmoreland	John Ellwood

Cornwall	Liz Perry	Isle of Man	John Large	Worcestershire	Eddy Blackburn
Cumbria	Christine Ward	Kent	Malcolm Lewis		
Derbyshire	Alastair McCance	Leicestershire	Dean Benton		

2 Welcome and Introduction

Ian Payn (IP) opened the meeting and welcomed all County Chairs or their representatives, especially the new County Chairs. IP thanked John McCoy (JmC) (Essex), who volunteered to run the meeting with the help of Doug Dunn (DD) (Devon). IP passed the meeting over to JmC who acted as Chair for the meeting.

Members were asked to add names and counties into their zoom profile and mute if not speaking to avoid unnecessary distractions.

3 Apologies

See above.

4 Presentation Libraries and the Social Aspect by Richard Evans (RE) (Suffolk)

RE gave a short presentation about the success of the Deben Project in Suffolk (appendix B). The project was started after a local club folded and left a sum of money for the county to invest in a bridge membership campaign. The CBA worked with Suffolk libraries to hold a ten-week free teaching course for new members. The courses have been well attended, with over 200 people registered.

For the initial ten-week course, the libraries provided the space for free, and the teachers were only paid in expenses. Following the initial ten weeks, the students will be charged a small fee, this will be used to pay the libraries for the spaces and the teachers for their time.

RE noted that one problem facing clubs is they are often seen as being overly serious. He suggested clubs that are thriving are those that are more fun and sociable, for example having a break for wine and food during sessions.

5 Discussion on the Presentation – Chaired by Doug Dunn (DD) – Devon

DD invited questions and comments from those present.

Alan Mould (AM) (Manchester) stated he has asked the same of libraries in Manchester with no response. He is unsure why there is such a difference between the two counties.

Paul Roberts (PR) (Merseyside & Cheshire) advised counties to check their areas for any bridge members who are also councilors or who have ties to the local council as this may help open relationships between the CBA and the council for libraries access.

Jacqui Munns (JM) (Devon) asked RE how Suffolk advertised their courses. RE confirmed they used websites such as Facebook and NextDoor with additional advertising in local magazines, radio programs and newspapers.

Robert Smith (RS) (Norfolk) said that a survey of affiliated and non-affiliated clubs in Norfolk found that new and improving players to the game were put off by the attitude of some more established players. He asked if the EBU would consider a campaign promoting Best Behaviour @ Bridge. RE advised that having a half-time break in sessions could counteract any seriousness and grumpiness from some players.

Tim Warren (TW) (Surrey) noted that in Surrey there is a high attrition rate of students not transferring to playing in clubs. RE stated that this is one reason that Suffolk are looking to create starter clubs from each of their teaching groups. JM agreed that starter clubs are a good idea but that new players should still be encouraged to integrate into pre-established clubs. Sue Davies (SD) (NEBA) confirmed that people tend to be more comfortable playing bridge with the group they started learning with and these groups make lasting friendships.

6. Potential changes to Green Points: Raised by Mick Green (MG) – Berks &

Bucks

Michael Green (MG) (Berks & Bucks) opened by saying he believes the proposals from the Board opposed by some counties because these counties are still struggling to run events following Covid and members are not ready for a full return to face-to-face congresses. He stated that counties are still struggling to run events following Covid and members are not ready for a full return to face-to-face congresses. He said that people are now used to playing online and are reluctant to return to clubs, especially with Covid cases on the rise in autumn. Prior to Covid, Berks & Bucks would run county events with up to 60 tables. They have had to abandon their recent face-to-face competition due to having only 9 tables.

Norman Inniss (NI) (Kent) said he disagreed with MG. He noted that while currently the numbers are low, online bridge is a threat to the game as a whole. Online events drive down prices and have more competition for players between counties hosting events at the same time as people can play from their own home in any event across the country. NI stated that bridge is a social game and that without the social aspect of meeting in person, numbers will decline rapidly.

Paul Littlewood (PL) (Hertfordshire) agreed with MG and argued that counties would make a loss if forced to only host face-to-face Green Pointed events.

Gordon Rainsford (GR) (EBU Chief Executive) stated that the proposal from the Board came about from a review of the competition's strategy as a whole. He noted that national events and smaller counties' events suffer from county events being held online. The Board would like national events to be run by the EBU and regional events to be held by counties. Counties will also be able to run Blue Pointed events online. The EBU plan to run one Green Pointed event online each month, but these events will be planned so that they do not clash with face-to-face county events. He stated that the EBU are trying to provide a wide range of events for all members. The EBU Board also propose to cut county representative fees in half to ease the financial burden.

Kay Preddy (KP) (EBU Treasurer) stated that when counties run online games cheaply, it takes money away from the game.

TW said he also agreed with the EBU's proposal. He noted that for the local pairs county event online, only approximately 25% of players were local. He stated that for some events the CBA would get up to 25 tables, but this is now down to 9 tables. This decline started prior to Covid, with the main affect being aging players.

PR asked if the EBU could provide a separate vote on this point at the AGM, rather than having it combined with the whole financial package. IP stated the Board would discuss this as a possibility.

AM said the main concern from Manchester would be having the Pachabo and Corwen events run online rather than face-to-face.

7. Presentation: CBA's their role and how they can change the image of

Bridge – John McCoy (JmC) - Essex

JmC gave a short presentation about the current image of bridge in society and how we can change this to entice more people to the game. JmC stated that currently bridge is seen as a game somewhere between snap and poker or played in country houses by the likes of Poirot.

He gave a number of ideas to help change the image of the game. County websites should be colourful and enticing, teaching should be highlighted on the home page. All links should be up to date. He also encouraged counties to promote the EBU national events on the county websites.

8. Discussion on the Presentation – Chaired by Doug Dunn (DD) – Devon

RS asked if photos of international players could be more professional. IP noted that photos of players are taken following long hours of play and that they wear comfortable clothes but that all players wear their EBU polo shirts.

JM suggested that stock images are taken of all international players, with these images being used for all events.

Ian Sidgwick (IS) (Gloucestershire) stated that the 9-high and jack-high events are good events to run in parallel with the main events. These events encourage newer players to join without the pressure of a main event.

DD said that in Devon, three teams with a lower NGS average entered the current county events, with one team winning.

TW said in Surrey, events for lower NGS players have been reasonably successful, but that some events for 9 & below NGS players have had disappointing numbers, even when run for free.

JmC finished by saying that the National Handicap Pairs Championship was a very successful event and he hoped more counties could encourage players to join in next year.

TR thanked all those present for attending. He stated that there may be interest in running a website design seminar for counties, he will look at running this next year.

The date of the next meeting will be decided in the next week or so.

Appendix A - Meeting Chat:

- 00:10:49 Alan Mould - Manchester: Where in the agenda is the item on the paper Gordon circulated on changes in EBU events and changes in county GP events going to be taken? It is not obvious to me where it sits in the agenda and is obvious very important.
- 00:11:06 Sam Kelly EBU Communications Officer: Agenda Link: <https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/minutes-and-reports/county-chairmens-conference/2022/Agenda-CCM-29-sept.pdf>
- 00:11:44 Gordon Rainsford EBU: Under Mick Green's question.
- 00:12:59 Alan Mould - Manchester: Oh, Ok item 5 - fair enough
- 00:13:47 Gordon Rainsford EBU: It sounds from what Ian said as though I was not correct and it will be sooner
- 00:19:10 Alan Mould - Manchester: MCBA went to every library in Manchester to put leaflets and talk to the librarians and ask to teach in the libraries. The result was 0 interest - not a single person came forward :-(
- 00:22:55 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Excellent
- 00:24:57 David Guild- Yorkshire: Do libraries have separate play rooms? Space availability? Noise factor?
- 00:25:04 Lucy Cross Wiltshire: There are around 11 library "trusts", some volunteer libraries and the rest local authority run, this web site has a full list <https://www.publiclibrariesnews.com/about-public-libraries-news>
- 00:26:39 Ian Payn, Chair EBU: @david guild. Not every library would have suitable space, it's true. Certainly the one closest to me doesn't. It's also around the corner from Andrew Robson's club...
- 00:27:15 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: The publicity way more key than the library?
- 00:27:30 rob lawy: Can you give some indication of retention.
- 00:27:43 Norman Inniss Kent: Finding enough teachers who are willing to do it for free would be very challenging!
- 00:28:31 David Guild- Yorkshire: Yorkshire used the same free first term model during covid and we had 350 students. Perhaps this is more pertinent than the location
- 00:29:25 Norman Inniss Kent: It will be interesting to see how many students stay when they have to pay in the 2nd term
- 00:29:46 Alan Mould - Manchester: Sorry to be a damp squib again, but we have tried all those publicity avenues with 0 success. For example we advertised in the local free delivered newspapers for a few months at the cost of several hundred pounds. Precisely 1 enquiry ensued.
- 00:30:29 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Need relaxed sessions for new players
- 00:30:52 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Maybe there's a different psychology in a very urban area vs a very rural area?
- 00:31:29 Alan Mould - Manchester: Yes could be. I am just in despair as to how to get beginners
- 00:32:05 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Alan: if libraries don't work, how about pubs?
- 00:32:28 Lucy Cross Wiltshire: My husband and I introduce our students to the club, by playing with them for the first 2/3 times until they find a regular partner. This way we can introduce them to other members and "squash" hopefully any rudeness/snobbery
- 00:32:50 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Pubs good idea Kathy
- 00:33:07 Patrick Shields EBU Board: Basingstoke use pubs for events
- 00:33:54 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Odd these differences, interesting

- 00:34:13 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: My local runs an afternoon session once per week, specifically aimed at people who've graduated from being learners. Seems to work well, with a few of the Wed afternoon people subsequently trying regular duplicates
- 00:36:45 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Sorry, Local Club
- 00:36:57 Alan Mould - Manchester: That is another problem. Before the pandemic we had 28 registered in Manchester, now we have 11.
- 00:37:16 Alan Mould - Manchester: registered teachers I meant to say
- 00:37:48 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Is there a club called the social bridge club?
- 00:40:20 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Oxford Bridge Club has a very good model of lessons, Learn and Play, then Gentle duplicate. It is often difficult to get players to leave their comfort zone and move to the next level. But there is a steady trickle thorough to main sessions
- 00:40:50 Gordon Rainsford EBU: We have 7 clubs on our database who have social in their names, but none of them are currently affiliated.
- 00:40:51 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Even some players in gentle duplicate, once established, can be quite unwelcoming!
- 00:41:56 Alan Mould - Manchester: I agree with Sue - there are many "beginners" and "improvers" groups in clubs in Manchester whose members just never ever progress. All they want to do is play with the same people year after year, and will often go through the same set of classes year after year
- 00:46:45 Tim Warren, Surrey: Surrey's experience is the same, last weekend we had 12 tables for our F2F Swiss Teams vs run-rate of 70+ pre-2017
- 00:46:59 Patrick Shields EBU Board: The number of online County GP events makes the success of F2F more difficult
- 00:47:50 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: I agree with Norman, so not just one!
- 00:48:03 Lucy Cross Wiltshire: I also agree with Norman
- 00:48:24 Kathy Talbot Oxon: We need to provide games for all players: both online and F2F
- 00:49:22 Patrick Shields EBU Board: But do locals in a local event deserve National (Green) Master Points?
- 00:49:27 David Guild- Yorkshire: Green point date conflict will not be solved by stopping Counties' involvement. It just moves the issue to blue point overlaps.
- 00:49:50 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Agree with David G
- 00:49:55 Patrick Shields EBU Board: Currently about 18 weekends have County run GP events
- 00:50:40 Kathy Talbot Oxon: I agree: the counties need the GP events
- 00:51:22 Tim Warren, Surrey: Our % was <33
- 00:51:28 Lyn Fry Middlesex: Couldn't agree more. Our revenue will dry up with no on, one green pointed events. We won't be able to afford to pay for the Corwen, Pachabo, Tollemache etc. They will have to be self-funded.
- 00:52:31 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: GP events limited to those with that county membership?
- 00:52:48 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Absolutely not
- 00:53:01 Norman Inniss Kent: That would really limit numbers
- 00:53:44 Lyn Fry Middlesex: Not SOME of our income. It's almost ALL of our income.

- 00:53:55 Ian Payn, Chair EBU: @Ian Sidgwick interesting idea, not sure a) about the technicalities and b) would lose a lot of bordering entries.
- 00:55:32 Mark Hooper, Dorset: Dorset experience was on-line became a much higher percentage from outside of the county. We support on-line GP events being run by the EBU
- 00:56:23 Patrick Shields EBU Board: In any change, or with no change, there are some losers and the proposal aims to limit the hurts and give players an attractive competition in which to compete
- 00:57:21 Kathy Talbot Oxon: We could consider a different model for County GP events. Groups of Counties sharing events?
- 01:01:22 Patrick Shields EBU Board: drivers for change (a) congestion on calendar (b) GP inflation
- 01:02:38 Mark Wardell Lincolnshire: Agree that the Corwen and Pachabo should be f2f
- 01:05:55 Norman Inniss Kent: I agree with Alan. It is part of an overall competitions package and should not be judged alone
- 01:11:13 Tim Warren, Surrey: Yesterday, I told someone I'd just met that I played bridge. He thought it was a game where you knocked a ball through hoops
- 01:12:18 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Photos of winners often look scruffy lot !
- 01:14:46 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Some very good points here
- 01:18:50 Paul Roberts Merseyside & Cheshire: Do you have any indication of the impact of the "sexier" websites?
- 01:20:43 Kathy Talbot Oxon: OBA experience was that it was very difficult to run a different website that incorporated the required functionality for results etc. Perhaps it's easier nowadays but we gave up and went to Bridgewebs.
- 01:25:49 Kathy Talbot Oxon: Whilst it's good to see people smartly dressed, it may put people off who will think it's not for them
- 01:27:34 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: Maybe just show tops not the shorts!
- 01:27:49 Ian Sidgwick Glos CBA: No need for ties
- 01:28:14 Alan Mould - Manchester: As a sometime international I agree with Ian. If the photos are taken at the closing banquet, then we are all in jackets, ties and similar trousers. But they are taken immediately after play, when you have played 10 hours usually at 30-degree temperature. Also, the image of the "dinner jacket" event is an issue.
- 01:28:27 Gayle Webb EBU Board: I agree - crop the photos to be waist up only!
- 01:28:48 Paul Littlewood - Hertfordshire: The Usual Suspects!
- 01:31:38 David Guild- Yorkhire: What is the future for handicapped competitions, Tony?
- 01:31:53 Norman Inniss Kent: In our experience the 9 high people are even more reluctant to play F2F than teams in open events.
- 01:32:39 Alan Mould - Manchester: Same experience in Manchester. WE have had to cancel our last 4 intermediate events through lack of interest.