



**Minutes of Council Meeting held at West Midlands Bridge Club
Wednesday 28 November 2007**

Present:

Colin Lang (Chairman), Darren Evetts (Secretary), Leslie Reece (Treasurer) Carolyn Fisher, Stephanie Galvin, Barry Holloway, Roy Moore (WMBC), John Pyner, John Robbins, Pip Whitehouse

1. Apologies

Jon Downing, Dodo Georgevic, Jane Hall, Beryl Latham, Myra Scott, Hylda Townsend

2. Minutes of last meeting (130607)

One correction Higher to Hire in Item 5. The minutes agreed and signed.

3. Matters Arising

EBU Accounts (Shareholders report) – felt they were not showing an accurate reflection.

4. Treasurer's Report – Leslie Reece

We are mid way through the year and most changes are adverse. One area which has remained unchanged is membership subscriptions. Income from the Green Pointed Teams was down due to new payment structure to EBU (£14.80 per table compared with 50% of the profits!). Entries in the Warwickshire Pairs League in Coventry is down. Other Competition entries are all down to date. Goodman has only 4 entries! Expenditure rises with inflation (including EBU fees), Hire of one venue has increased from £75 to £85 per night. Sponsorship income still to be allocated. Looks like there will be a deficit over the year of between £300 and £400, excluding sponsorship.

The question of what clubs charge for using their premises was raised again. It was noted that there can be a £100 difference in the costs of using some clubs for county events.

5. Feedback from MDAG Meeting 060907 – Colin Lang

I attended at Aylesbury with Roy Moore, who kindly accepted my invitation as Chair of one of our largest Clubs. Also present were representatives from Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Berks & Bucks and Sally Bugden (Vice Chair EBU) and John Carter (Board member).

This was the second round of County meetings, and the first opportunity for discussion of the EBU Strategy proposals. Concern was expressed that P2P had not been mentioned at the previous meeting of our group on 8 March 2007, and some explanation of it's the rationale was required.

Sally's view is that "something must be done" to combat decline in membership. It was not explained in my view how this would be achieved by P2P. It was stated to be used successfully in some countries in Europe. However it was admitted that its introduction in Poland had caused problems for 5 years.

Other concerns expressed were as to financial risks in adopting the scheme, and impact on Clubs, and members. It was also of concern that software would have to be compatible throughout, and that all results of every session everywhere would be sent to the EBU electronically for scoring, and publication, subject to appeal. The session score would automatically adjust a new National Rating system to be introduced.

I expressed concern that in general, our playing membership did not support the proposals, and that Universal membership by other means might now appear an attractive alternative. I was told that this was a negative view!

I expressed concern at the level of disaffiliation which might result, and Roy Moore spoke of the discussions to this end which had already taken place at his Club. He presented a very clear picture as to the risk involved. Neither Sally nor John had any positive response to make to this, except to hope that losses will be kept to a minimum.

Other issues raised were: Teaching materials, role of EBU Communication officer, appointment of Club liaison officers, limited space in 'English Bridge' for County news, unpopularity of announcements, and high cost of TD Training courses.

A full account of this round of meetings was prepared by John Carter, and a copy is available from me or Darren on request.

6. Feedback from Club Secretary's Meeting 120907 – Colin Lang

Meeting well attended by about 2/3rds of clubs throughout County. In addition, 4 detailed written submissions from Clubs not represented, and 11 from individuals were received. Each Club representative gave a brief summary of his/her Club's make-up and response.

It was clear that the proposals had been carefully considered, and discussed. The package of proposals was roundly rejected in its entirety, as was the principle of P2P. Among major criticisms were over-reliance on inconsistent and poor quality software, and lack of interest in proposed 'services' to Clubs.

Several Clubs were already discussing disaffiliation if the changes as proposed were implemented, and from comments made, others would also have to consider doing so. This is highly relevant as many affiliated clubs now have a high proportion of non-EBU members.

EBU finances must be seen to be brought under control! Representatives repeatedly referred to this aspect in derogatory terms, in particular the absence of any business plan or 5 year forecast, the cost of employing more liaison officers, and the future of English Bridge magazine.

The idea that the P2P proposals were "revenue neutral" was scornfully rejected by many present. In any event, a limitation of EBU expenditure was seen as a necessary trade-off if UM was to be got through.

Universal Membership (UM) by levy as part of Club membership was discussed, and accepted in principle by many present as an alternative to P2P. A small number of representatives spoke against, and a few others wanted time to consider, but all had reservations as to implementation. The principle of nominating a 'club of first preference' to avoid multiple fees by members of several Clubs was discussed. Calculation of any 'levy' must be 'transparent' and future increases limited to inflation.

The present system and cost of Master Points (to be included in P2P on present proposals) did not come in for criticism, with increased use of direct credit, which should also help to reduce cost.

The mandate to Warwickshire Shareholders for the EBU meeting on 3 October was clear. The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance.

7. EBU Shareholders Report – John Pyner

- Krys Kazmierczak visited Coventry BC and the feeling was that it was more of a sales pitch for the EBU than a constructive exchange of information pertaining to the EBU and the Strategy Proposals.
- Elections went through with nothing controversial to report. John Neville retired as Treasurer, and Michael Hill was elected in his place.
- Gerald Faulkner retired and was recognised for his 27 Years as a Board Member.
- Fees 2008-9: £17 = rise of 50p, Clubs Direct £41, Via County £20.50.
- Letter sent out to clubs inviting them to provide details of numbers of players and sessions to form basis of new p2p proposals - General discussion about the p2p proposals and how the board are seemingly ignoring the views of members.

The following is the **Strategic Proposal Discussion** extract from the EBU Shareholders minutes:

Opening the debate, the Chairman said that the consultation process with meetings attended by MDAG members and representatives of every county association, had proved very useful, the spectrum of opinion expressed being very wide indeed. It was clear that everybody conceded that the status quo was not acceptable, and that without radical change the future looked bleak. To stem the decline, the Board's vision was to attain universal membership by April 2010. A straw poll on the concept of universal membership, in one form or another, received overwhelming support, Leicestershire voting against.

The Chairman invited each county to give a résumé of its views, which were as follows:

- Avon:* P2P was viewed as a form of Poll Tax, particularly in relation to non-members. It therefore needed very sensitive marketing.
- Bedfordshire:* The County was basically in favour, but would prefer an earlier start-date. Approval was given to the offer of a scoring system and website being optional. The ranking system would only be of interest to tournament and county players, so suggested an opt-out for club level.
- Berks. & Bucks:* Meeting held with all clubs. Some distrust of the EBU, but general appreciation of the consultation process. Proposed services to clubs would benefit new as opposed to existing clubs. Absence of a budget and "vision" of how to attract new members was regretted.
- Cumbria:* Visits to clubs by the Club Liaison Officer much appreciated. Clubs voted 60/40 in favour of affiliation to the scheme, but for the most part were not interested in masterpoints and felt that the emphasis was wrong. Some concern that the figures wouldn't add up. Business plan requested.
- Devon:* Devon has a number of small clubs with 70% non-EBU membership, who would need convincing. Revisions to the plan had helped, but it needed expert marketing.
- Essex:* A meeting held with 21 clubs, a third of which, with high proportion of non-members, would disaffiliate. Concern expressed about escalating costs and difficulties in attracting new members. In general, limited support and interest in alternative options.
- Gloucestershire:* 50/50 split. No obvious benefit to the bridge community, and clubs would not affiliate unless the scheme was well marketed. The EBU needed to present itself more professionally.
- Hants. & IOW:* 53 clubs of which 35 responded. Original proposals were very unpopular in terms of cost, and viewed as "autocratic". Lack of business plan criticised, and if the EBU wanted to be revenue neutral it must spend more on revitalising clubs by putting less into international affairs and more into the teaching programme. The

- high cost of teaching materials was an issue. In general a lot of positive feedback, but the EBU mustn't force clubs to separate into social/competitive.
- Herefordshire:* 12 clubs indicating 50/50 support. Mustn't be separated. The EBU must make itself relevant and indicate how it would achieve this.
- Hertfordshire:* The initial proposals were not well received, and the new proposals must be presented a great deal better. If the overall strategy was to increase the membership, there must be more emphasis on teaching. Levy should be uniform.
- Isle of Man:* 5 affiliated clubs, mostly apathetic. The recruitment of younger members was very difficult. Split response.
- Kent:* Very broadly in favour, though concerned with some of the original detail. Club support divided, with clubs having more EBU members in favour. Must convince clubs with non-members of the benefits of affiliation. County committees had a duty to help the EBU to sell the strategy.
- Lancashire:* Meeting on 3rd September with clubs. Original proposals should not have included definitive figures. Needed specific information on leagues. Social clubs would disaffiliate, otherwise in favour.
- Leicestershire:* The fear was that the EBU was about to pursue a high-risk strategy, transferring responsibility for its income away from individuals and into clubs. 35% of members are EBU members and those clubs with large number of non-members would disaffiliate. More money needed to be spent on education and development.
- London:* Mildly in favour, and pleased with updated strategy. Weakness £170K migration cost. Needed better financial model and IT plan.
- Manchester:* 5 or 6 large clubs, the rest small with non-EBU members. The Committee was very enthusiastic, but in general clubs were not interested in the services offered, believing the strategy to be a revenue-seeking exercise, and the average players had no responsibility for the national effort.
- Middlesex:* The County supported universal membership, but might have preferred two-tier membership. Consulted all 25 clubs including proprietary clubs, and more than half would disaffiliate.
- Norfolk:* The new proposals had helped to convince people that universal membership was the way forward. Bridge was a cheap game and 40p extra should be acceptable, but the concept needed to be expertly sold.
- Northants:* Varied reaction. Concern over social evenings and possible split.
- North-east:* County committee very much in favour. However, consultation process indicated 2-1 against, larger clubs with higher EBU membership being in favour. Concerns were change to allow membership with affiliation fee - EBU was expecting a large number to join and pay £5 – and the financial projections – could the EBU afford to lose a significant amount?
- Nottinghamshire:* Perception is that the scheme shouldn't cost more. The EBU had to educate the membership.
- Oxfordshire:* Concerns about the 20,000 members at the bottom of the pyramid. Imperative that the EBU met with counties and clubs to answer concerns.
- Somerset:* 50/50 split between competitive and social, and the EBU must not antagonise the social clubs. Members would be reluctant to disclose personal details.
- Staffs.& Shrops:* 23 clubs. Spectrum of view in original proposals against, with no perceived benefits or value for money. 70% non-competitive. Supported universal membership, but how? Appreciate that EBU is now listening.
- Suffolk:* Committee very much in favour, and in general a fairly favourable reaction, but membership records at Aylesbury needed to be improved. 19 clubs with 17 likely to disaffiliate. Club discount for the *Bridge Shop* not realistic. Counties' finance might be a problem.
- Surrey:* 76 clubs, mixed reaction. Original concerns answered and more now in favour, but inescapable conclusion that there will be casualties. If the scheme is

successful what would it achieve? If revenue neutral and subscription and masterpoint income currently failing, where would new income be generated? Lack of business plan.

Sussex: Committee broadly in favour. Apathetic response from clubs. Difficulty with social members. Would market new proposals and hoped to lead in a proactive way.

Warwickshire: Strategy divisive. Needed to attract new members. 25 clubs consulted – two-thirds attended a meeting and others sent written submissions. Reaction mostly negative. Positive reaction from some individual members who feel that the status quo is not acceptable. Basically in favour of universal membership by levy as an alternative to P2P but with qualification and reservation. Concerned about finances, and, if revenue neutral, the level of EBU spending must be addressed.

Wiltshire: If the EBU had just been formed, this strategy might have been how to fund it. The transition would be difficult and needed expert marketing.

Worcestershire: In favour of universal membership and supported strategy statements and P2P, but would lose a number of clubs. Needed holistic approach to encourage new clubs to affiliate and retain existing clubs. Suggested three levels of P2P and three levels of affiliation, with the bottom level free. Needed excellent financial modelling, marketing and IT systems, and the EBU must not ignore the role of the county. Keep the proposals as simple as possible.

Yorkshire: 56 clubs. General feeling in favour provided revenue neutral and the EBU was financially transparent. Concerned with extra costs, and must convince the membership of value for money.

The Chairman thanked the counties for all their hard work, and was pleased to hear a basically positive response, albeit with considerable reservations. He assured everyone that the EBU was listening; the next move would be to provide more detail, and come back in the Spring with a thorough appraisal of the scheme. Sally Bugden supported the Chairman's comments. The way forward could not be gauged without consultation. Apart from the county meetings already held, it was now up to MDAG to consult with the clubs either direct, or via the counties, to gather the accurate information necessary to produce the final detailed financial plans, including the cost of IT systems, and the suggested transition process. To this end a final questionnaire would be produced, and clubs and counties would be asked how they wished their information-gathering to be handled. It was important to convince the bridge-playing public that the EBU had moved into a new era. Any ideas and suggestions on how to make the EBU more relevant to club players would be welcomed.

It was agreed that a revised document, based on all the information received from clubs, would be available by 1st May and published on the EBU website, together with costings and a business plan. The Shareholders' meeting scheduled for 5th March would be for normal business and an update on the club consultation process. The final decision on the proposed strategy would then be voted on at the Extraordinary General Meeting on 4th June.

Philip Mason thanked all MDAG members for the immense amount of work they had undertaken. There was still a long way to go, mistakes had been made, but all comments would be taken on board so that the final document would hopefully encapsulate the wishes of all.

8. League Secretary's Report – Jon Downing

After getting off to a slightly late start Divisions Two and Three are well on target. I know matches have taken place in Division One but nobody has as yet let me have a result. The handicap knockout has five matches that should be completed by the end of November, but as yet none have been played. The Birmingham students are to be congratulated on a swift (albeit unsuccessful) start to their campaign this year - traditionally a difficult team to arrange matches against. Leslie commented that this was a typical start of the season!

9. Tournament Secretary's Report – Pip Whitehouse

- **Midland Circle Teams (230907)** – 8 Teams competed including 2 from outside Warwickshire. Winners were the Robbins team.
- **Goodman Cup** – Only 4 teams entered - Question about seeding confirmed that meeting agreed not to seed with less than 8 teams.
- **Garden Cities (021207)** – 4 teams, 1 from Moseley and West Midlands and 2 from Coventry.
- **GolfPrint (150107)** – 1 entry to date.
- **Future of the Foster Cups & Midland Circle** - It was confirmed that the Foster Cups and Midland Circle events will cease and a new Midland Counties Pairs and Teams event would replace these. The counties involved will include Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Staffordshire & Shropshire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. Our thanks to Susan Sharp of Worcestershire for her work on this topic.

10. Match/Selection Committee Report – John Robbins

- **County Match v Worcestershire** ~ Dawes 20-0, Porter 20-0, Markham 8-12, – Problem getting three teams. Problem getting pairs for the Dawes team.
- **Tollemache** – Warwickshire finished 3rd and did not qualify. Thanks to the team of Steve Green & Graham Link, David Jones & Gary Watson, Roger Bryant & Rob Helle, Peter Heatherington & Glyn Preece, Susan Stockdale & Dave Cropper and Mike Leese & Steve Wood (non playing reserves). The question was raised about the number of pairs sent to the event. Four pairs were sent and two pairs were reserves.

11. Secretary's Report – Darren Evetts

- **Correspondence:**
 - Number regarding EBU proposals – passed to shareholders
- **Calendar Updates**
 - Foster Cups – 4 May 2008 - Cancelled
 - WMBC Congress – 13-15 June 2008
 - Midland Counties Pairs – 27 July 2008 @ Staffs
 - Midland Counties Teams – 2nd Sunday in September to replace Midland Circle
- **2008/9 Programme - Circulated and now being amended**
- **Website:** Hits since May 2005 are 26394
- **Midland Counties Congress** - 2008 Brochure available on Website – Format and arrangements proceeding as in 2007.

12. Warwickshire Pairs League – Darren Evetts

The WPL Committee met last week to review the league. Following a number of communications about various aspects of the event the committee agreed the following:

Background

Generally the new format has been recognised as a success. Today's meeting aimed to build upon this and take into account individual proposals for further improvements. Unfortunately the lack of suitable premises in Warwickshire (ie in a central area and with 22 tables considerably restricts our available options).

Nevertheless the changes agreed aim to take steps to address the common themes in the feedback both to and within the Committee:

- The standard of play within the top divisions is too wide
- The rules for substitution of players are too loose
- The jump for players in Division II from Pairs scoring in short encounters to IMPs over long matches is too wide

- The VPs awarded to absent players can encourage non-attendance in the final sessions of a series
- Players may prefer shorter matches in Division I
- A 3-session qualification for promotion is too low

The Committee considered but rejected other proposals:

- More Pairs scoring, rather than IMPs
- Changes to the assignment rules for the first evening

The following amendments/additions would be made to the existing WPL rules for September 2008:

Basic Format of Event/Size of Divisions

It was agreed that for September 2008 the following would be implemented:

- **Premier** – A fixed number of 24 Pairs
- **Division I** – Either:
 - A. One division playing 3 x 8 board matches per evening – pre assigned. The number of pairs will be an even number and capped at 32.
 - I. Match 1 & 2 - A random draw
 - II. Match 3 - A random draw in two sections (a pair from the top half drawn against a pair from the bottom half) based on the previous series ranking. New pairings will be drawn in the top half and promoted pairs in the bottom half.
 - B. Two divisions of 14 or 16 pairs playing 2 long matches per evening – as current. (Assignments on the final evening are likely to involve playing a second match against the same opponent)
- **Division II** – Butler Pairs with 3 board rounds scored using Net IMPs converted to VPs - TBC

Substitutes/Absence Scores

The current substitute rules will be replaced with:

- Players are responsible for arranging substitutes ~ the Competition Manager or Divisional Tournament Director can provide assistance.
- There may be opportunities for pairs to pair off instead of providing substitute pairs. The TD will post a list for players to sign up however it remains the player's responsibility to ensure that either a substitute is provided or they communicate which two pairs will not be playing.
- All substitutes must be approved by either the Competition Manager or the Divisional Tournament Director(s).
- In the event of pairs not playing the following scores will be assigned:
 - Sessions 1-4: 8VPs per match with prior notification
 - Final Session: 8VPs per match or Average to Date, whichever is lower
 - Without prior notification 0VPs per match subject to the current conditions.

Qualification Promotion/Relegation

- Current promotion/relegation will apply for the current series.
- For the Feb-Jun Series the following promotions/relegations will be made:
 - Premier – 6 Relegations (or fewer to allow 24 pairs to be achieved)

- Division I – 1 Promotion from Birmingham and 1 from Coventry. Two relegations will be made (fewer relegations may be allowed to achieve an even number)
- Division II – 2 Promotions
- Including substitutes, the number of qualifying sessions for promotion and prizes will be increased from 3 to 4

Communication Plan

- Premier – Announcements at the remaining sessions this series and the first at the beginning of next (Feb). Emails.
- Division I – A questionnaire will be circulated (December) offering the two proposals.
- Division II - Announcements at the remaining sessions this series and the first at the beginning of next (Feb). Emails.

Discussion as to the format of the WPL ensued. The Chairman expressed the view (having been present) that the WPL Sub-Committee had conducted a thorough review of this competition, and taken account of feedback from players. The Sub Committee were thanked for their work.

Minutes of WPL Discussed. Question of Team selection process was discussed and affirmed that the selection committee use a variety of county events to select pairs/teams for events.

13. Newcomers Development Officer's Report – Myra Scott (Written Report)

The Newcomers' event in July was cancelled due to poor numbers. The meeting in September for teachers generated interest from a small number of clubs and/or individuals. We will try to arrange an event in the New Year.

14. Green Point Event – Sunday 11 May 2008 – West Midlands BC – Darren Evetts

All proceeding as expected. The menu for food will be: Lasagne, Steak & Ale Pie, Chicken Curry, Vegetable & Pasta Bake (served with a mixture of Jacket Potato, Salad or Vegetables) or Ham, Salmon, Turkey or Egg & Cheese Salad. Desserts offered will be Apple Pie, Fresh Fruit Salad, Cherry Cheesecake (served with Cream or Ice Cream) or Cheese and Biscuits. The cost for the two courses will be £8.50.

15. AOB

- EBU – Membership Centralisation Project (assuming continued payment of subs). Counties asked to agree to transfer its membership administration to EBU HQ. We felt that this would not be appropriate at this time.
- Proposal from EBU for Club Newsletters – No real interest, and no indication as to how cost of publication and circulation will be borne.
- Representatives on Council – Concern expressed that not enough people attending were representative of clubs. Many questions now being asked about the structure of the EBU of which Counties are an important part on behalf of Clubs and their members. It was agreed to ask Club secretaries to update representation.
- Concern expressed that some Clubs do not consult the WCBA calendar before organising events.

16. Date of next Council Meeting – Wednesday 27 February 2008 @ 7.00pm – West Midlands Bridge Club. Coffee available upon arrival.

D Evetts - November 2007