Essex County Bridge Association

M I N U T E S

Meeting – 29th July 2026

Present	
Barry Capal	Chairman
Bernie Hunt	Tournament Secretary
Gemma Fewster	League Secretary
Ian Moss	Chair ECBA Selection Com
Marc Chawner	Education Officer
Pat Johnson	Committee Member
Jill Fletcher	Committee Member
Steve Abbott	Treasurer
Mary Perkin	Secretary
Sue Thorburn	Guest

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1. Apologies

No Apologies received

2. Welcome

The meeting was opened by the Chairman, Barry Capal who welcomed Sue Thorburn to what was going to be her last meeting..

3. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the AGM were agreed, there was one typo which has been corrected.

4. Selection Chair Report - IM

IM expressed concern going forward about the strength and depth of younger players. The results overall in Eastern Counties was poor and there will be a some 'luck' required to repeat last years results.

This generated a general discussion regarding several key elements to the game where there were obvious weaknesses. Slam bidding, defensive signalling and bidding were three major concerns.

MC's Boot Camp will address some of these issues. However, it was generally agreed that encouraging Essex players to represent the county remains a challenge. The consensus was that ECBA should remind players of the importance of giving back to the County, which has supported them over the years.

4.1 Spending The £5k from Silver Sale

The chairman interjected at this point because whilst this item was due to be discussed later – it dovetailed into this section and was relevant.

BC proposed that some of the £5k be used to sponsor non-elite players – to help develop them and bring them on – BC believes that by supporting the clubs in this way we will be able to develop players who may later be able to play at County level.

Specifically to use Barleylands as the venue as it is the most central Essex location and play tournaments/competitions there but only charge players what they would pay for a session at their own club – making up the difference to Barleylands. It is hoped that this will encourage more participation from the non-elite players – the details of eligibility to be fleshed out.

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4.1 cont'd This would be with the proviso that the clubs must be affiliated to the EBU and the players must be Essex players.

The meeting agreed that F2F play should be the gold standard and whilst everybody recognised the benefits of online play, particularly through COVID everybody also acknowledged that the game needs to survive with club participation.

There followed some discussion about approaching schools and universities – MGP noted that much of this had been done via EBED and whilst there were some successes – those mostly only occurred in education where there was a bridge playing member of the faculty.

IT WAS AGREED THAT – Some of the £5k will be earmarked for club/player development

5. Treasurer's Report - SA

The primary account holder needs to be updated to Steve Abbott (SA) and Barry Capal ()BC asked if there can be two primary account holders SA will find that out and report back.

SA requested that Sue Thorburn remain on the mandate until all other mandate issues have been resolved ie; removal of Marcia & Linda and inclusion of Mary Perkin.

IT WAS AGREED THAT – Sue Thorburn remain on the mandate. **IT WAS AGREED THAT** that a savings account be opened with Saffron Building Society and that Barry Capal (Chairman) and Stephen John Abbott (Treasurer) be authorised to open and operate the account.

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5.1 Account Change

The Skipton account will be closed and funds moved to Saffron – to attract a higher interest rate

AGREED

5.2 Barbara Cornell Contribution

There was a misunderstanding by a club who received the donation regarding the allocation of the £200 contribution from Barbara – the club who had received two lots of £200 have treated the sum as a prize awarded for playing in the Cornell, however, the money is donated to pay for expenses to the Garden Cities competition.

IT WAS AGREED THAT - BC will contact the club and make them aware of the error – it was also **AGREED** that ECBA would not ask for the money to be returned and that going forward the sum only be paid when the qualifying teams attend the Garden Cities.

6. Pionola

BC believes that in order to protect ECBA for the future we need to look at more straightforward ways to manage our systems. What we have, whilst adequate, is somewhat outdated and is lacking the various tools we need to be more effective in our communications with clubs and members.

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Pionola has been, in the past, reviewed by MC and ST – both thought at the time it was complicated, however, MC was impressed with the system overall. BC said that certain changes and innovations had been made since then and he would like to trial it.

IT WAS AGREED THAT – BC will contact Pianola and make arrangements to install part of the system specifically admin which is where we are having the biggest issues.

7. A.O.B.

7.1 League Rule Clarification

GF wanted to clarify rules regarding online Real Bridge play specifically related to League games. For example if a league player belongs to an Essex club but is affiliated to say, Lancashire, are they eligible to play for in an Essex League match online

IT WAS AGREED THAT – Members can play in the Essex Leagues with the proviso that the match is not a qualifier – then only affiliated Essex players would be allowed to play.

7.2 Jack High Competition

BH was overall happy with the Jack High there were only six tables but everyone had a good afternoon and there was positive feedback from the event. BH would like to hold the competition at least four times during the course of the year and felt that this was a competition that could dovetail with the proposed spending of the £5k to encourage the non-elite players to the tables.

IT WAS AGREED THAT – This was a competition eligible for a portion of the £5k spend and that holding it more often would be welcomed.

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7.3 Competition Prizes

MC said he would happily put himself forward as a prize to play in one session with a non-elite player.

JF would like to have certificates for the non-elite players -MGP said she would make some for her.

BH clarified that specific deals could be produced so that play could follow specific seminar discussions.

GF & MGP will collaborate and send an email to the lower two divisions to encourage them to play in the 8 High, JF feels that holding the competition in the school holidays was perhaps not the best idea because a number of players are of course now on grandparenting duty and so if she repeats the contest she will reconsider the time of year.

7.4 Archive Documents - Hardcopy

ST asked what her instructions were regarding the archived documents she had in her possession. These documents had been given to her some 10 or so years ago by Val Mollison and to her knowledge they had been gone through by Petra Bromfield but she herself had never gone through them.

IT WAS AGREED THAT - The documents could be destroyed.

To wrap up the meeting, BC presented ST with a beautiful floral tribute and shared his heartfelt thanks for all the time and dedication she has given over the years. Everyone present warmly applauded ST to show their appreciation.

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8. Date of the Next Meeting

The date for the next meeting to be held at Barleylands at 1.30pm., on the 11th November 2026.

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