

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Minutes for the GCBA committee meeting held on Zoom on Tuesday 16 July 2024 at 7pm

In attendance were Patrick Shields (President), Caroline Hartley (Secretary), Michael Wright (Treasurer), Paul Denning (Vice-President), Ian Sidgwick, Alan Stanfield, and Richard Barlow, the GCBA "Bridge – It's A Big Deal" Festival Manager (part of the meeting).

Apologies received from: Jan Bailey and Richard Butland

Finance

Michael had circulated the Q1 figures to 30 June 2024 prior to the meeting.

It was agreed that:

- The treasurer and congress treasurer could initiate payments for the GCBA main bank account and these could be authorised by the President, Ian Sidgwick or Val Constable (a former treasurer).
- The grant to Churchdown Bridge Club of £500 for the purchase of a dealing machine, which was paid on 1 September 2023, be recognised as "GCBA support" in the 2024-5 accounts. The loan of £3,000 paid on the same date is being repaid at £100 per month.
- As authorised by the AGM, the County UMS Fee was reviewed in light of the current financial position of the GCBA and will be reduced to 1p.

"Bridge – It's A Big Deal" Festival

Patrick welcomed Richard Barlow to the meeting.

Patrick wishes to report back to the EBU on planned events in the County.

Ian reported that Winchcombe and Campden will discuss BIABD at their upcoming committee meetings. North Cotswolds are hosting a sandwich and cake tea with table money and donations going to BIABD.

Patrick confirmed that Cheltenham will open up their Grade II listed property as part of Heritage week on Saturday 14 September. (Note: The event is publicised in the Heritage Week brochure). There will be mini bridge taster sessions running during the course of the day.

Ian reported that EBED will shortly be issuing a video on how to run a taster session.

Alan confirmed that Churchdown and Gloucester are each running two taster sessions. Both clubs will have one session where bridge will be played alongside the taster and the other session stand-alone. Ian suggested that the offer of refreshments at all taster events might help to draw people in and GCBA could assist with the cost if necessary.

Stroud will be making a donation (having recently put their efforts into a café bridge event raising over £1000 for charity) and Tudor Bridge Club will donate the takings of their regular session on 12th September to Cancer Research.

Wotton are planning a full day of bridge with lunch and afternoon tea on Sunday 15 September with a capacity of 64 players and 32 tickets already sold. The Club is grateful to the Civic Centre who are providing the venue FOC.

Patrick can circulate details of events via email and Ian can promote events on FB. Ian has bunting, a banner and pop ups that can be borrowed for events. Patrick has CRUK collection boxes that he will distribute to Clubs.

There are some larger Clubs which have not yet responded to the approach made, Newent, Twynning and Tewkesbury. If the cost of running an event is prohibiting participation then GCBA may be able to help and also assist in setting up taster sessions. Patrick will explain this in his next email.

Patrick will check which Clubs in the County will be participating in the EBED SIMS events and will add these to the BIABD page on the GCBA website.

It was agreed that the GCBA will donate to CRUK one eighth of the online pairs fee for the autumn season representing income for the week of the festival. As the online pairs is run on Real Bridge, Patrick will aim to open up the game that week to others who may wish to play in support of the Festival.

Richard Barlow was thanked for attending and for his work on BIABD, and left the meeting.

Committee management and activities

Patrick explained that there were many ideas put forward at the last meeting but landing them was not covered. It would be useful to allocate responsibility for actions and set up a Club buddy system with the buddy being covering an area based roughly on one of the county's District Councils ([see this map](#)) and responsible to buddying affiliated and non-affiliated Clubs.

Ian agreed to take the North & East Cotswolds clubs as he is already in touch with them and Paul to take Tewkesbury and clubs to the North. Alan Wearmouth will be approached to cover the Forest of Dean; if he is unwilling to take this on then Alan will cover the Forest as well as Gloucester. Caroline will buddy Cheltenham Clubs. Patrick will cover Stroud and the south.

It was agreed that where possible actions should be attributed in the minutes.

Programme for next year

The normal pattern for Monday evenings over the Autumn/Winter has been:

Week 1, Swiss Teams, face to face

Weeks 3 and 5, the County League, either online (Real Bridge) or face to face

Weeks 2 and 4, the Pairs League on Real Bridge

Paul suggested that the current 9-High teams could be approached to form a third division of the County League. Patrick agreed to talk to the team captains during the break at the next 9-High event to judge interest.

Paul also suggested that the First Monday teams event could be an open rather than Swiss event. Patrick will look at how the First Monday event could be structured to ensure teams played a wider group of opposing teams.

Ian questioned whether the County could hold some face to face pairs events which would allow pairs to dip in and out. Perhaps these could be special events that are promoted in a full year programme. Patrick would consider this but is conscious that the County should be not be running activities in competition with Clubs.

Paul noted the lower level of attendance at training events (previously 20-30; last year half that). Alan suggested that buddies could make their clubs aware of the training and encourage participation. He suggested a get together of Club chairs to promote GCBA training and to also build a dialogue to ask Clubs how GCBA can help them.

Patrick agreed to set out a programme in the next month and set up dates for meetings of Club chairs and separately local teachers.

Cheltenham congress

Michael and Patrick met with Ro Kaye, Congress Chair, earlier in the day. The congress will take place at Dean Close School over the August Bank holiday; congresses now attract fewer players and it is unlikely they will return to larger hotel venues. Most of the work is undertaken by Cheltenham Bridge Club, but Michael will attend Congress meetings to provide financial input, Patrick will assist by collecting boards from Aylesbury and GCBA will assign one of the County's Green Point Day allocations to the congress and arrange that Herefordshire provides another.

The venue can hold 30 tables in the main room and last year on Sunday there were also 18 tables for the 9-High competition. There is some participation from outside of the County but the interest is not as wide as pre-covid.

The 2024 budget predicts a surplus as administration has been moved in-house. Pre-covid the Congress was a fundraiser for both GCBA and CBC, however it was agreed that Congress should continue to receive the support of the GCBA even if running at a small loss as the mission of GCBA is to support bridge in the County.

An advertising invoice from the EBU was discussed. The congress committee had decided that the quote for the advert was too expensive and not to proceed. However, it was put in the EBU magazine. It was agreed that there may have been a benefit from the advert therefore the invoice should be settled.

Strategy/plans for the coming year

Alan and Patrick had met to follow up on the discussion at the last committee meeting, and had distributed to the committee some thoughts (attached, Appendix 1) on the following topics, which the committee now considered.

Enabling more people to play bridge. Working with unaffiliated clubs. How can GCBA persuade these Clubs to take up affiliation? Ian suggested a sales pack to include the value of masterpoints and an NGS score. Patrick suggested that the magazine and diary had a value in excess of the cost of UMS for those playing just once a week. Alan preferred a softer approach using the buddy system of working with Club chairs to assist Clubs to grow and then EBU affiliation may become more attractive. It was agreed that the way forward was a more general engagement with Clubs as a first step.

Enabling more people to play bridge. Teaching adults. Teaching in the County is very scattered and little is available in sparsely populated areas of the County. Aim is to reach out to those who have attended taster sessions and ensure there is something available to them. It was agreed that the website should have a page "Learn Bridge in Gloucestershire". Learners could be invited to spectate at a session to gain an understanding of the game or could be directed to online learning or playing online against 3 robots. The GCBA will discuss this with Club chairs at the next meeting to establish what Clubs are looking for and how GCBA could go about assisting.

Enabling more people to play bridge. Teaching in senior schools. Alan explained that at Denmark Road School there had been space in the curriculum for activities and bridge was included, supported by the headteacher and staff. There are 40 secondary schools in the area for which a similar approach might work. Patrick and Alan will reach out to them after talking to the Clubs to ensure there is no duplication of effort.

Expansion of the committee and task allocation. Buddies already discussed. Allocating other identified task areas was not covered.

BIABD. Already discussed.

AOB

Patrick reported that the YB volunteers for Saturdays at CBC were standing down. These sessions were volunteer heavy and the future will be school based, approaching schools and running inter-school events. Once there is sufficient interest then a return to bridge at a Club may be considered.

Future meeting dates

Next meeting 7pm Tuesday 17 September 2024 at CBC (Patrick will book the room).

Further meeting w/c 20 November

AGM Monday 26 May 2025

Patrick thanked the committee for their contributions and the meeting closed at 8.30pm.

Caroline Hartley

Secretary

GCBA Strategy & Plans for 2024-25

[Following a session between PS & AS about the future]

Background

1. PS reported three thrusts to the developing EBU strategy – membership numbers, management of staff/volunteers, and governance. On the first of these the target is about 5% growth in distinct active players each year, recognising that there is in general a loss of 10%, so that this means bringing in 15% additional each year.
2. Bridge activity is present in all 6 major subsets (Gloucester City, Cheltenham Borough, Tewkesbury District, Cotswold District, Stroud District and Forest of Dean District) of the county of Gloucestershire, but the activity level is much higher in the three big centres of population (Gloucester, Cheltenham, Stroud). For teaching the imbalance towards the big centres is even stronger.
3. We have talked about the GCBA committee members acting as buddies to clubs (affiliated and non-affiliated); it hasn't got far off the ground, but we believe that personal touch is more likely than other means to encourage them to engage. We might want to consider a buddy taking responsibility/interest in one of the 6 major subsets of the county.

Enabling More People to Play Bridge – Unaffiliated Clubs

- We might do better in a particular year with a concentrated sell to a few, as opposed to a blanket approach (perhaps via the buddies as above).
- Removing the perception of an Affiliated Club as a serious, no-fun place needs to be dispelled, and one option for that is to encourage inter-club matches or participation. Managing these within a county region will lower travel requirements.
- Understanding how many members of a non-Affiliated club are already EBU members might/will affect the way we approach a club.

Enabling More People to Play Bridge – Teaching Adults

- We do have some teaching sparsity, particularly in the less populated parts of the county. An alternative to finding a teacher (sometimes hard to find, or unwilling to commit) is for a local enthusiast to organise a face-to-face session at which a video of a lesson from an online teacher is played, followed by a Q&A and then playing some boards. To make this work we need (a) identified online lessons to use and (b) materials/boards/etc which go with that. We are asking EBED what they can offer here, but there are many offerings outside EBED too. We would still have the issue of how to integrate on-line learners into F2F clubs
- We need to improve the ability of newcomers to find lessons. We might want a learnbridgegloucestershire.org.uk website.

Enabling More People to Play Bridge – Teaching in Senior Schools

- The Junior School efforts led by Jan are great and inevitably volunteer-heavy, and we don't want to disrupt those but an attempt at repeating the Denmark Road High School (DRHS) venture seems worthwhile. To do that we need a package to offer to headteachers covering – the activity will have these benefits, and this is how we will do it, and we have the three people with DBS checks necessary to run it, and (so that it sticks) when it is done here is a national competition your school can engage in online in the future. We are asking EBED whether such packages exist.

Engagement with Clubs

- We need to find a way to encourage clubs to talk to the GCBA and to talk to each other. We have good news for them soon about dropping UMS charges and we need to engage their enthusiasm for the game in spreading the word about the game. Would a physical get together in the autumn be appropriate. By adding on a talk about MiniBridge and a short game, we could make it into a half-day event. PS will take the lead.
- We need similarly to engage with teachers. AS will take the lead.
- We need to ensure that all non-affiliated clubs are aware of the offer of free affiliation for a year (to date two thirds of those taking the offer have continued beyond the first year)

The GCBA Committee & its Operation

- There are a number of regular tasks needed to keep things running as they currently are (the BAU agenda), and there are tasks such as those described above which are more one-off (the Change agenda). We need to establish a list of all these tasks and ensure that every task is owned by someone and that each committee member owns some tasks. This might involve expanding the committee. The BAU list included the role of the Treasurer and the Secretary and the CTD plus
 - Website management
 - Social media management
 - Membership list management
 - Schools coordinator
 - Adult teaching coordinator

BIABD

We discussed possibilities for county-wide publicity. One option is to get an article in all the local newspapers and/or radio – Patrick will consult Sam as to whether there are examples of that, or advice on that.

SUMMARY

We identified three main areas for focus

- Tackling the teaching sparsity within the county with some new approaches
- Finding one or more senior schools into which to introduce bridge as an activity
 - Engaging more thoroughly with the clubs (chairs, teachers)