

Notes on Open Meeting of the OBA Management Committee held at the Red Lion pub in Islip on Thursday July 18

Present:

Robert Procter, Alan Wilson, Frank and Brenda Harris, Peter Sherry, Hugh Thomson.

1. We discussed suggestions for cooperation between OBA and Berks & Bucks BA arising from a discussion between Sandra and Anders Wallen, the B&B chairman (see Annexe A)..
Competitions: People at a distance from county towns, where county bridge events in both counties are usually organised, would probably appreciate events run in their locality. It makes sense for two counties with a common border to work together to run events in such locations. Where OBA and B&B run events (e.g. Men's Pairs) that are poorly attended, there might be benefit in combining the two counties' events into one. County Champions for each county could of course still be identified whilst there would also be one overall winning pair or team.

Education: There is a possibility that teachers/players from our respective counties might not have sufficient "drawing power" in the neighbouring county - but definitely worth trying and so long as costs are kept in check the price would not need to be as much as Andrew Robson, for example, is able to command.

Social: We like the idea of doing things jointly with B&B and feel that stately homes bridge (Oxford Colleges also mentioned) would be attractive. Clearly B&B have to find people to organise their own events (not relying on Barbara Jordan), but working together if location is appropriate should be encouraged.

2. We discussed ideas emanating from the County Chairmen's Meeting as recorded by Sandra Nicholson (who attended on OBA's behalf), and contrastingly as recorded by the EBU (Annexes B and C).

We do feel that it is more important to be doing things that will enhance the attractiveness of EBU/county affiliation, rather than trying to sell what we already have to people who have decided they don't want it. Hence the ideas listed by Sandra in her notes of the meeting seem more relevant than the EBU's meeting record, which seems to concentrate on trying to persuade non-affiliated clubs of the merits of affiliation.

Referring to the points raised by Sandra:

- The chairman takes the point that direct communication by telephone may be better than E-mail when trying to get county/club cooperation.
- We felt that changing the constitution to emphasise the importance of clubs should not be a priority.
- We have already accepted the idea of sharing presenters - see above re B&B.
- We should talk to teachers and clubs about the novice-friendly events ideas - not necessarily a county task.
- We liked the idea of offering clubs the chance to give free entry to county competitions for say two pairs per event to people who have not previously played in a county competition
- Barbara should be encouraged to link social events to charity. RP has been saying the opposite but accepts he is probably wrong!
- Idea of conversion course for non-duplicate players should be discussed with teachers.
- Competitions team should be encouraged to look into the idea of inter-club competitions other than Wessex. For example, we could have a competition for the winners of each club's own pairs championships.

- Clubs "buddying up" to non-affiliated clubs. We could identify appropriate buddies - but need to specify ideas of method and objectives
- Not sure that we have the capacity to try to interest golf and bowls clubs in teaching them bridge unless individual teachers want to do this - it is the same problem as finding minibridge teachers for schools.

3. Questions raised by RP in Chairman's Report to AGM (see the AGM papers on the county website).

Note that Brenda, Frank and Peter left at this stage and discussion was brief.

Competitions: Alan undertook to pass on some thoughts about County night to the Competitions Team – including some linkage to county selection, and Gloucestershire's rolling Swiss Pairs.

Social: The new Social Teams League would be a start towards encouraging inexperienced players to step out of the security of their local club. The point about novice-friendly events in section 2 above could also help.

County Team: Hugh gave Alan some useful feedback about team spirit in county matches which Alan will think about.

Education: We do think we should try to organise a get-together of teachers - RP needs to find someone to organise this.

Promotion: Alan and Hugh did not think we should be spending county money on external advertising but should be putting something on the website addressed at the casual non-bridge player who find the website because he/she might be interested in taking up the game.

Infrastructure: Hugh expressed the view that our charges were reasonable as they stood and we should not be worried about the fact that we have built up a considerable surplus as this puts us in a position of strength if we want to do something new - e.g. moving towards dedicated county-owned or leased premises."

Notes prepared by RP, July 2013

Annexe A

Notes on a meeting between Sandra Nicholson and Anders Wallen, Chairman of Berks & Bucks BA,
26 June 2013

We are both keen to encourage more co-operation between our respective counties. Three possible ideas that came up were:

- introducing inter-county competition in some shape or form, to be run somewhere near the county boundary so it would be accessible for members of both counties. This could be a single event perhaps scored like the "BanBic" pairs, a new league of some kind, an "invitation" event for the top team/s in each division of our existing leagues or something completely different! I said I would ask our Competitions team whether in principle they would be in favour of this idea and if so, Anders will put it to his Committee. If we both agree then there can be more detailed liaison over the form it should take.

- sharing resources (particularly, presenters) to run educational events, e.g. some of our top players would develop a seminar to give to our members and then deliver the same one to their members at one of their venues, and vice versa

- sharing "social bridge" events such as bridge in a stately home, which I think was one of Barbara's possible future ideas - as long as B&B could find an organiser to run it from their end - it wasn't meant just to create twice as much work for Barbara!

SN, June 2013

Annexe B

Notes/ideas from EBU Chairmen's Meeting attended by Sandra Nicholson, 26 June 2013

The meeting started with a "plenary" inviting us to identify what we thought was going well about organised bridge in the UK at the moment, and what wasn't. These were written up on flip charts. We were then split into 5 groups and each group was invited to identify two or three key issues from the list and bring back some ideas for improvement.

Notes were taken centrally so I won't try to reproduce everything, but here are a few ideas that I thought were particularly of interest to us as a county (and may not all be in the central notes, as some of them came up as side issues in our group) :

- Links with clubs need to be proactively cultivated through human contact. Build relationships. When you need help, direct phone calls from the county chairman to the club chairmen get a much better response than emails
- The constitution may need to be checked and clarified to emphasise the importance of clubs and their activities (although NB, not all counties have direct club representation on their management committees as we do)
- It may be possible to exchange presenters with other nearby counties in order to run seminars led by top players. Otherwise, such an initiative tends to run out of steam after a year or two – but if someone has a presentation ready prepared, they may be willing to deliver it again to different audiences. This came from Surrey.
- To encourage novice players, think about getting several clubs within the county each to offer one novice-friendly event a month on different weeks/ evenings – preferably, hosted - then have a "county novice" members card which would enable you to go and play at any of them. Perhaps this could involve some subsidy?
- To encourage more club players to enter county events, think about offering each affiliated club two free entries a year for such an event (either a particular one, or any?), to be given at the club's discretion to a pair who have not previously entered such a competition.
- Experience shows that linking events to a charity greatly increases participation from less experienced/non-affiliated players
- Think about running short conversion courses for non-duplicate players
- Possibility of inter-club competitions other than leagues. One county runs a series of five different events, some of which are deliberately targeted at less experienced players, and then adds up all the results to give an overall winning club.
- Competitive and more social clubs near each other could be encouraged to "buddy up" in some sort of partnership
- Consider establishing links with local golf and bowls clubs, perhaps offer teaching??



**NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNTY CHAIRMAN'S CONFERENCE
HELD AT IMPERIAL HOTEL, RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON WC1
ON WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE 2013**

1. Attendance EBU representatives

Board Members	Board Members	Karen Durrell	EBU Reception
Sally Bugden Chairman	Jerry Cope	Kay Carter	EBU Reception
Andrew Petrie Treasurer	Darren Evetts	John Pain	Secretary
Barry Capal General Manager	Michael Hill		
	Ian Payn		

County Attendance

County	Name	County	Name	County	Name
Avon	Andrew Urbanski	Herefordshire	Ben Britton	Staffs and Shrops	Geoff Davies
Bedfordshire	Michael Collins	Hertfordshire	Mike Minting	Suffolk	Jeff Orton
Berks & Bucks	Anders Wallen	Kent	Geoff Smith	Surrey	Mac Derwig
Cambs and Hunts	Chris Jagger	Lancashire	Jeff Smith	Sussex	Joy Mayall
Cornwall	Jenny Cant	Leicestershire	John Wilcox	Warwickshire	Mike Thorley
Derbyshire	Arnold Chandler	London	Guy Hart	Wiltshire	Colin Webb
Dorset	Ann Sharples	Merseyside and Cheshire	Paul Roberts	Worcestershire	Mike Willoughby
Essex	John Williams	North East	Ann Caygill	Yorkshire	Philip Mason
Gloucestershire	Alan Wearmouth	Oxfordshire	Sandra Nicholson		
Hants & IOW	Andy Hughes	Somerset	Michael Whittaker		

Apologies

Board Members	Jeremy Dhondy (Vice-Chairman)	Heather Dhondy	Ron Millet	Malcolm Oliver	
Channel Islands	Norman Le Cocq Robert Plumley	Isle of Man	John Large	Middlesex	Richard Hillman
Cumbria	John Maclachlan	Lincolnshire	Glynn Elwick	Norfolk	Peter Cotes
Devon	Howard Kent-Webster	Manchester	Bob Cooke	Westmorland	Peter Jeffreys

Absence – no apologies

Northamptonshire	Trevor Thrower	Nottinghamshire	Keith Rodgers	
------------------	----------------	-----------------	---------------	--

2 Introduction and Welcome

Sally Bugden opened the meeting and welcomed all County Chairmen or their representatives.

She said that this would be a very different meeting to previous County Chairman's conferences in that the aim was to discuss and bring forward ideas for consideration arising from the new EBU 5-year strategic plan outlined in the document *Bidding for the Future 2013 – 2018*.

She introduced the five group leaders, all chairmen of their respective counties – Ann Caygill (North East), Chris Jagger (Cambs and Hunts), Paul Roberts (Merseyside and Cheshire), Geoff Smith (Kent) and Mike Whittaker (Somerset) and thanked them in advance for leading the groups.

She mentioned that the Shareholders had already seen *Bidding for the Future* and she hoped discussions today would focus on Relations with Counties and Clubs hoping to establish a county led working group to increase the number of affiliated clubs and improve education provision and other appropriate services. She said that this meeting was taking the first steps to 'fleshing out the bones' of this initiative. She introduced Darren Evetts as the Board Member who would be driving this forward and Jerry Cope as the Board Member who would be leading today's discussions.

3 Introductory Plenary Session

Jerry Cope invited the delegates to brainstorm ideas as to a) What was going well and b) What was not going well. These lists represent the items raised:

What is going well?

- Inter-county competitions
- EBU Magazine
- Minibridge
- EBU website
- Hardware provision
- Systems around membership
- Daytime bridge participation is up
- County events well run (One Day Green Point events)
- NGS and Stratified events
- League management system
- Laws and Ethics and TDs
- Keeping county event costs down.

What is not going well?

- Competition entries for county and EBU events
- Resourcing education – patchy, smaller counties experiencing difficulty
- Ageing membership
- Significant number of clubs unaffiliated
- Failure to put over the EBU's membership message
- Communicating back to clubs
- Profile of bridge nationally (e.g. European Championships – no media coverage)
- Regional Club Committee

- Interest in bridge in universities and schools
- Where are those in the 45+ age groups
- Pay to Play fees
- Simultaneous Pairs participation and volume
- Lack of events such as the Golf Print and events for Bowling Clubs
- Gulf between social and duplicate bridge
- Communicating with and listening to clubs.

4 *Group Sessions*

The meeting now broke into the five groups for discussion:

Group Caygill:

Ann Caygill (North East), John Williams (Essex), Ben Britton (Herefordshire), Guy Hart (London), Ann Sharples (Dorset), Alan Wearmouth (Gloucs).

Group Jagger:

Chris Jagger (Cambs & Hunts), Philip Mason (Yorks), Michael Collins (Bedfordshire), Anders Wallen (Berks & Bucks), Andrew Urbanski (Avon)

Group Roberts

Paul Roberts (Merseyside & Cheshire), Sandra Nicholson (Oxford), Mac Derwig (Surrey), Geoff Davies (Staffs & Shrops), Colin Webb (Wilts)

Group Smith

Geoff Smith (Kent), Mike Minting (Herts), Andy Hughes (Hants & IOW), Mike Willoughby (Worcs), John Wilcox (Leics), Jeff Smith (Lancs)

Group Whittaker

Mike Whittaker (Somerset), Jeff Orton (Suffolk), Joy Mayall (Sussex), Mike Thorley (Warks), Jenny Cant (Cornwall), Arnold Chandler (Derbys)

5 *Feedback from Group Sessions*

Each group leader made a short presentation on the discussions within each group. The group discussions can be summarised as follows:

Value of the EBU

- Make a fresh approach to non-affiliated clubs by sending County Committee members to engage and play.
- Ensure there is a simple message that the membership will understand
- Identifying who does what at Aylesbury and in the Counties
- Selling the positive side of affiliating to non-affiliated clubs and those who dropped out.

County Satisfaction survey

- Several counties have successfully surveyed their membership through computer surveys. Returns vary from around 5% to something slightly better.

EBU Competitions

- Do more research through surveys

Club Regional Committees

- There was a general view that these were not working and many clubs were not interested in taking part. A new method of communicating with clubs should be developed via counties.

Communications between EBU, Counties and Clubs

- Strengthen EBU / County links
- Targeting non-affiliated clubs on a personal basis
- County constitutions generally focussed on the rights and contributions of individual members rather than clubs
- Incentivise participation e.g. charity events
- Human contact – county committee in clubs (also EBU personnel in clubs)
- Use clubs to stimulate county competitions
- Quick briefing documents from meetings rather than waiting for full minutes
- Individual Board Directors to liaise with Counties.

Education

- Target tennis / golf and bowls clubs – rich source of potential members
- Have more online training available
- Approaching University of the Third Age (U3A)
- Transition of non-duplicate players to duplicate bridge
- Importance of dedicated bridge centres
- Produce a model of how to introduce bridge into schools
- Stimulate teaching in the evening to the 30-55 age bracket
- Larger counties assisting small neighbouring counties with equipment
- Target 50+ age group with qualified teachers
- Funding a teacher through training and development.

6 Next Steps

Sally thanked all the groups for their input. She said she was delighted by the response. It was very clear that we had the same problems at the EBU and at County level and there were issues we could face together. She was sure that many members are unaware of the work that goes on at Board level and the Board had identified many of the issues raised during the meeting. She felt that working towards 'the value of the EBU' was of prime importance. From October she would be focussing on education where formation of the charity to oversee education would be taken forward.

She said that communication was a huge problem from minutes, strategy documents and English Bridge which many members were not aware of. A face-to-face approach was often more successful.

Darren Evetts will be working with the counties to oversee and move things forward hoping to be able to find solutions to the majority of issues over a period of one to two years; some areas, e.g. the message conveying the value of belonging to the EBU, should be progressed faster than that. Sally acknowledged that effective communications with clubs in a way they perceive as worthwhile needed to be addressed, and this too would be part of Darren's remit of work with the counties.

There was a short discussion on 'the worth of the EBU' and raising the profile amongst the general membership who were often unaware of the amount of work done at both national and county levels. There was agreement that unaffiliated clubs benefit from EBU initiatives (such as TD training) but do not contribute to these initiatives provided by the national body. The answer was to make non-affiliated clubs aware of the benefits of membership.

She again thanked the group leaders for their assistance with the day.

8 *Any other business*

Sally asked counties to be aware that the deadline for nominations for Dimmie Fleming award and the EBU Silver Award was approaching and urged counties to consider likely candidates by the end of July.

She advised counties that there was currently a 50% reduction for county adverts in English Bridge.

She asked counties to consider investigating their own archives. Kent, Manchester and Hertfordshire had already done some work in this area. She reminded the meeting that Jeremy Dhondy was especially keen on making sure that both national and county archives represented the full history of bridge in England.

The meeting closed at 4.00pm, with a vote of thanks from the floor.