

Oxfordshire Bridge Association
Minutes of the Management Committee Meeting
held on Wednesday 19 March 2014 at 7.30 p.m. at Horspath Village Hall

PRESENT:

Robert Procter [RP]	Chairman		
Sandra Nicholson [SN]	Secretary/EBU Shareholder		
Claire MacDonagh [CM]	Treasurer/Tournament Secretary		
Ian Angus [IA]	Match Secretary		
Sandra Claridge [SC]	EBU Shareholder/Menagerie rep.		
Brenda Harris[BH]	Publicity Officer		
Barbara Jordan [BJ]	Team Leader, Social		
Diana Nettleton [DN]	Team Leader, County Night & Competitions/ County Night Co-ordinator (<i>appointed during meeting</i>)		
Peter Sherry [PS]	Club Committee representative		
Alan Wilson [AW]	Team Leader, County Team /EBU Shareholder		
Michael Allen	Blewbury	Richard Sills	Oxford
Esme Alden	Oxford	Sue Smith	Oxford
Chris Dawe	Oxford	Kathy Talbot	Oxford
John Fleming	Oxford	Matthew Wilkinson	Oxford
Chris Kerr	Oxford	Robert Gasser	Summertown

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from:

Stephen Brown [SB]	Chief Tournament Director		
Rob Dixon [RD]	Assistant Chief Tournament Director		
Mike Dobson [MD]	Presidents/Chester Cup Secretary		
Peter Finbow [PF]	Congress Organiser		
Mike Fletcher [MF]	Team Leader, Duplicate Bridge Promotion & Youth Team		
Clive Keep [CK]	County Pairs Organiser		
Hugh Thomson [HT]	Wessex League Secretary		
Geoff Nicholas	Aylesbury	Steven Bliss	Summertown
Mike Webley	Aylesbury	Erica Sheppard	Summertown
Pat Lewis	Oxford	Gillian Weatherley	Wallingford
Peter Stevenson	Oxford		

2. Minutes of Management Committee meeting held on 12 December 2013

MF had asked for a correction to item 3a of the previous minutes since the date of the Junior Congress had been stated as 14th March, whereas in fact it had been held on 9th March. With this amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 December 2013 were unanimously approved and signed.

3. Action points and other matters arising from those and previous Management Committee meetings, not otherwise on the agenda

a. Action Points

Changes to competition by-laws: Issues of eligibility to play for the county team appeared to have been resolved (AW to confirm this with KT and report back to next meeting), but criteria for eligibility still needed to be published.

Website: A new hosting arrangement had been identified but could not yet be implemented as ownership of the old hosting space still needed to be transferred to OBA before the migration could take place. Alan Grunwald will be asked to authorise the previous hosting company to release the password. In the meanwhile, SB will be asked to put a direct link on the old website to the Congress entry details, for the benefit of those responding to our ad. in English Bridge.

Definition of “friendly” bridge events: This was still outstanding. It was noted that it should be included in the next review of the by-laws.

Selection and County Team Management: Most points previously discussed were still outstanding, although Rob Dixon had succeeded in setting up an online “Doodle poll” where players could provide details of their availability for each match date.

Duplicate Bridge Promotion & Youth: Awaiting further details from MF (*who later confirmed that more volunteers in the north of the county, and a schools bridge co-ordinator for that area, were still required*).

Infrastructure - Honours boards: No progress to date. SN to check the situation with Lynne Hayes, and also confirm that no old boards belonging to OBA are still on OBC premises.

All areas - Progress reports: Team leaders were asked to include a review of progress against their original objectives (as given on the website under “development”) in their reports for the AGM.

b. Other matters arising

None were raised.

4. Reports from Chairman, Secretary, EBU Shareholders

Chairman: RP was pleased to report that two new volunteers had offered their services. Diana Nettleton [DN] was willing to take over the role of Team Leader for the County Night and Competitions team, with special responsibility for co-ordinating the administration and organisation of County Night events. Jonathan Price [JP] had offered to act as Education Officer. He was not a teacher but had learnt to play relatively recently and was very enthusiastic about helping others to learn and improve. Both offers were unanimously accepted, with JP’s appointment to be formally confirmed at the AGM. His first task would be to review information about teaching on the County website, with a further action plan to be agreed with RP.

Sandra Claridge [SC], already one of our EBU Shareholders, had offered in addition to take over running the President’s and Chester Cups next season, since Mike Dobson would be leaving the area. More volunteers were still needed, particularly a new Membership Secretary to replace Emily Middleton who would be going to Australia in April, and a new Publicity Officer to replace BH who had decided to stand down at the AGM. It would be useful to have more people prepared to organise Café Bridge events in different parts of the county.

RP also reported that he had received a complaint about an item published on the county website. This had now been resolved, but had led to the development of guidelines indicating that authors of website articles must be identified, and anyone identifiably mentioned in them (including players cited in county match reports) must have given their permission before publication.

Treasurer: CM was still unable to access the existing deposit account but was in the process of opening a new one to make better use of funds held in the current account, which presently stood at around £9k. She issued a warning that we may be moving into a net deficit, largely because revenues from Tuesday nights have fallen substantially, while the costs of running county competitions (including the Congress) have correspondingly risen.

Secretary: SN reported that two nominations had been received for the new Oxfordshire Distinguished Service Award (previously referred to as the “Philip Simmonds award”). DN, IA, PS and Robert Gasser agreed to join SN in reviewing the nominations against the criteria.

5. Team reports and recommendations - *Please see written reports already circulated*

i. Education

Nothing to report other than the appointment of JP as Education Officer (see above).

ii. Competitions and County Nights

The Competitions Brochure had been published on the website but had not been printed. This needed to be reviewed in good time for next year. It was noted that some other counties had decided to stop printing booklets for everyone but instead offered to print out copies on request for anyone without internet access.

Following the appointment of DN to the new role of County Night Co-ordinator, a detailed discussion took place on the organisation of County Nights. Attendance had been falling and there was an urgent need to make County Night more welcoming, more interesting, and generally “the place to be” for all good players in Oxfordshire. DN felt that, whilst it was important not to discourage less experienced players, there should be more incentive for people who wanted to play for the County to attend: this could be achieved through the introduction of flighted events, both for teams and pairs, with a link between performance in the top flight and selection for the County Midlands League teams or even the Tollemache team. She hoped to introduce a new schedule, with different events on each Tuesday of the month, from the beginning of May. Each monthly event would have a different person responsible for running it and she suggested that if one of them could be run by Menagerie, this would avoid the current situation where their sessions appeared to draw players away from Tuesday nights. It was also recognised that some of the better players were being attracted to the Tuesday duplicate at Abingdon, and we need to make changes so that our events can also attract such players.

RP stated that, whilst the County Night and Competitions team had been given delegated responsibility for most matters in their area, he believed DN’s proposals involved some major changes of policy which needed to be approved by the Management Committee. These were: the introduction of flighting; the link to selection for the County team (which he was aware had been rejected in the past by the selectors); and the principle of running certain events in co-operation with an individual club.

After discussion it was agreed that: flighting should go ahead, but not for all events; there should be some form of link to selection for the County team, details to be agreed between the two teams; and the principle of co-operation with individual clubs was worth pursuing, with the expectation that in the first instance, Menagerie would be invited to run a teams league once a month for a trial period. It was noted that if this went ahead, Menagerie would be responsible for paying the rent on any nights run by them, but would not be able to issue Master Points at County (double) rate, and would have to pay the full Pay to Play rate rather than the half rate paid by the County [*although subsequent discussion has made it clear that this was not everybody’s understanding of the points – see minutes of meeting held on 17 July 2104*].

Possible further developments to be considered in the future might include seeking some form of co-operation with Abingdon; and/or holding some County Night events on another evening of the week.

In the meanwhile, DN was authorised to implement her proposed changes from 1 May with as much publicity as possible, including a clear indication that these were events run by OBA and not by the Oxford Bridge Club.

iii. Selection and County Team Management

AW introduced a short discussion on the role of the County captain. The meeting confirmed that the selection committee was responsible for the appointment of the County captain and the definition of his/her role and responsibilities. It was noted that other members of the selection committee had taken on many of the administrative functions previously performed by the captain, but the post holder was still responsible for initial suggestions for the selected teams for each match and this was currently creating delays in announcing the selection. It also appeared that no one was taking any responsibility for maintaining and improving team morale and motivation.

SC suggested that, in line with EBU practice, team members should be invited to send comments to the selection committee on a confidential basis. AW said that he was hoping to set up “talk through” sessions after matches, when players from all three teams could meet to discuss some of the hands and benefit from different viewpoints. It was agreed that this would be valuable, particularly for the less experienced members.

iv. Infrastructure

Website: RP said that he had recently had a meeting with AL at which it had been agreed that a complete set of documentation should be drawn up (and published on the site itself) explaining how it works and how to use it. They had also prepared a list of editing points for the existing site, and a list of development points to be actioned after migration.

[At this point RP left the meeting and Richard Sills took over the chair.]

v. Duplicate Bridge Promotion and Youth

The Junior Congress had been a great success and was now featured on the website.

vi. Social

BJ reported that the Henley Café Bridge event was full, with a waiting list. Thame would like to make it an annual event but she was not yet sure whether this would be possible.

The Blewbury “social teams” event had been very successful and it was hoped that similar events could be run in other parts of the county: Abbey Smith was keen to be involved if something could be organised in the north. SN commented that the less experienced players from her club seemed to be wary of playing matches in their own homes, which biased them against the idea of participating in a teams-of-4 league, but that those who had come to Blewbury had greatly enjoyed the event and would welcome more along the same lines.

6. Appointment of new Education Officer and Team Leader for Competitions and County Nights Team

See under Chairman’s Report, above.

7. Relationship with unaffiliated clubs

A discussion document prepared by the Duplicate Bridge Promotion and Youth team had already been circulated. SN filled in some of the background explaining that when Pay to Play had first been introduced, the EBU had been very much against extending any help to unaffiliated clubs, but that this attitude was now softening and it was recognised that bridges needed to be built.

The general feeling was that we did have something to offer to unaffiliated clubs, but we needed to be wary of trying to “sell” the benefits of affiliation. It was recognised that many unaffiliated clubs had been hostile to the EBU even before Pay to Play and did not want to be regulated in any way. However, if we were to stress that the aim is to provide a point of contact and possible support without looking for affiliation, but with a joint goal of encouraging the future of bridge, this might be more acceptable.

The meeting agreed in principle that we should include details of non-affiliated Oxfordshire clubs on our website, and advertise their events, if they wish us to do so. As a first step, SN would write to secretaries of affiliated clubs asking them to gather and send through details of non-affiliated clubs in their areas. We could then contact them to ask what they would like.

8. Preparation for AGM and County Congress

AGM: RP will be away on the date of the AGM. SN would ask SB if he was willing to take the chair, with Richard Sills as reserve in case of any problems.

Officers willing to continue in post were asked to arrange for nominations and seconders.

As the advance notice of the meeting contained in the brochure had not been sent out in printed format, BH agreed to produce a flyer. SN would ask club secretaries to announce it and put it on their websites/notice boards. DB will also be asked to include it in the Newsletter if one is being prepared at a suitable time. For the future, clubs will be asked to include notification of the County AGM with the notification of their club’s AGM (if they have one – some clubs are run by owners not members).

When writing to secretaries, SN would also ask them to request their members to update their EBU account with their current email address since this would help the county to keep in touch with them – and to ensure that, if they have recently moved from another area, they update their county of primary affiliation.

Congress – SB would be asked whether he needed a caddy. If we were hoping to use both rooms (PF to confirm), we should produce printed brochures for distribution at other similar events between now and June. Pat Lewis could print these if required.

AW offered to join the group helping with preparation of the venue on Saturday morning.

9. Dates and timing of Management Committee meetings/date and venue of next meeting

Following the extremely poor attendance at the previous meeting, members were asked for their views on the frequency and timing of future Management Committee meetings. The consensus was that there should be three meetings a year, held in March, July and November, on days/dates that avoid clashes with any important event in any of our affiliated clubs. SN would research this and suggest some possible dates. If available, the Village Hall at Horspath was agreed to be a suitable venue.