

ELECTRONIC SCORING AT SEAFORD BRIDGE CLUB

Draft Procurement and Implementation Plan Discussion Document (for consideration at the Committee Meeting on 6.3.2018)

1. Introduction

At the Annual General Meeting of Seaford Bridge Club held on February 2018 Club members voted in favour of a proposal that gave approval to the Committee to *‘purchase an electronic scoring system for use at Club bridge sessions’* and that *‘the system selected would be appropriate to the needs of the Club both in terms of cost, support and functionality’*.

A number of potential systems have already been identified and there are undoubtedly others available. Those identified so far are BridgeMate, BridgePal and BridgeTab. They vary considerably in terms of cost and support but as far as can be seen to date, without having tested all three, the functionality appears to be similar.

The objective of this paper is to set out a plan for:

- examining these systems, and any others identified, more exhaustively
- deciding upon a system that meets the criteria set out in the proposal approved at the 2018 AGM
- procuring and implementing the chosen system

2. Information already to hand

BridgeMate

A number of club members already have experience of using BridgeMate at Eastbourne Bridge Club and at other clubs. Generally, feedback has been favourable.

A group of club members (Peter Parsons, Michele Conway, John Gillespie and Carol Gillespie) were invited to take part in a playing session at Eastbourne Bridge Club on 16 June 2016 with the specific objective of seeing BridgeMate in use. A report was produced by John Gillespie which was favourable although it did identify a number of potential problems. These problems have been subsequently considered and all have/can be resolved.

BridgeMate UK was invited by the Club to run the scheduled Tuesday afternoon club session on 16 January 2018. The session was intended to demonstrate the system rather than to provide a learning opportunity. There was a large turnout of members and some difficulties arose however the session was completed; a set of results produced; and a number of members who had not had previous experience of electronic scoring responded positively. What the session did clearly demonstrate was that the system worked at a Seaford Bridge Club venue and that communications and Wi-Fi availability was not an issue.

BridgeMate is the leader in the electronic scoring field however the major problem remains the cost. To meet the Club's current needs – a 15 table session – will cost £2377.

BridgePal

Less is known about BridgePal. It was developed in 2011 at Chislehurst BC by John and Mirna Goacher for use at that Club. Chislehurst meet twice weekly and the system has been in use since January 2012. BridgePal is not marketed commercially and can be acquired free of charge. There are no software purchase, licensing or usage charges of any kind. It is now used by approximately 20 clubs and its

spread appears to be ‘by word of mouth’. From 2018 it will be used on ‘Bridge Overseas’ bridge holidays.

I have spoken with a number of club secretaries where BridgePal is used all of whom are very happy with it and one of whom invited the Club to visit and take part in a playing session. Some secretaries did advise that some work is required to get the system up and running. Associated with these comments are those of the Goachers on the BridgePal website:

‘We are always prepared to answer questions by email, but obviously because we are not charging for this product we cannot provide unlimited technical support. Anyone who decides to use this software needs to be able to perform their own hardware selection and setup, be familiar with setting up a wifi network, and have the ability to resolve routine issues.’

The latest available set up cost for BridgePal is £760.

BridgeTab

This is the system we know least about. It was developed in Sweden and is distributed by BridgeTab UK in Cardiff. Whereas the major cost in using BridgeMate is the purchase of the tabletop handsets BridgeTab functions similarly to BridgePal by using low cost tablets (BridgePal uses low cost android mobiles).

As yet we have no idea of BridgeTab’s market penetration, any performance reviews or any club member who has personal experience. It does come with an annual support contract and the latest available installation cost is £1745 – some £600 cheaper than BridgeMate but over twice the cost of BridgePal.

3. Plan

Having been empowered by the membership to procure an electronic scoring system it is incumbent on the Committee to move forward with the project as quickly as time available and funds permit. My view is that we should aim to have a system in place and be running live by no later than January 2019 – earlier if that can be achieved. It would reflect poorly on the committee if it had to report to the 2019 AGM that the mandate given in 2018 had not been carried out. With this date in mind I propose the following timetable:

(i) By 31.5.2018

- make contact with the Goachers at Chislehurst BC to learn more about BridgePal
- learn more about implementation and running issues
- arrange a visit to a club using BridgePal and take part in a playing session
- approach BridgeTab UK to learn more about the system and user base
- arrange a reference site visit

It’s my view that we already know enough about BridgeMate to preclude the need for further investigation

(ii) By 30.6.2018

- make a decision about which system to proceed with

(iii) By 31.7.18

- complete the purchase of hardware and software (if applicable)

The next and most important task is to implement the chosen system at Seaford Bridge Club. Success will only come if there is confidence amongst directors, technicians, 'Norths' and other participants. Further consideration needs to be given to the role of directors and technicians and if indeed the technician role is required. Some Directors have expressed doubts about the need for this role but this decision will of course depend on the participation and cooperation of our officials.

For a successful implementation we will need to ensure that:

- the committee and club officials are entirely familiar with the system and their roles
- those required to troubleshoot know what they can do and how to do it
- there is documentation available to members and officials to assist them to understand the system
- there are practical opportunities to both test and to use the system before going live

Practical opportunities might include:

- bridge 8 equivalents where in a 'non-serious' environment the system can be tested
- larger trial events where the membership is invited to participate in a 'learning' session: both to test the system and for the membership to familiarise themselves before going live.

These activities can and should take as long as the committee feel is necessary. If all goes well, then the 'go live' date can be brought forward from 1.1.19. Otherwise we should take all the time needed to ensure a smooth implementation.

We will need to manage both the procurement and implementation. I would propose a sub-committee for both activities but not necessarily comprising the same personnel in each.

4. Conclusion

These are just my initial thoughts and they are set down merely with the objective of prompting further debate and discussion. We clearly need a plan – this document is an attempt at setting out the initial framework. The detail can come later. Over to you!

John Gillespie
Seaford Bridge Club
March 2018