

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Bridge players form a broad church. They range from Aces who have the honour to represent our county or country to those who enjoy a gentle game of social bridge at home with friends. The expectations and aspirations of these diverse groups are worlds apart.

As a county association, we aim in Suffolk to cater for the wishes of the many, as well as the few. In addition, we see it as our responsibility to appeal to an even broader audience. Namely those who have never played bridge before - in some cases never played cards before - and encourage them to take up the game and thereby guarantee a healthy future for bridge in our county.

To complicate matters in the post-lockdown era, the Suffolk bridge association has had to ensure our menu of events caters for all tastes, including the dedicated 'Onliners', if I can call them that, as well as the 'Face2Facers', and those with a leg in both camps

How has your committee of volunteers tried to meet such a varied range of targets? Has it succeeded or failed?

Let me start beyond our relatively small community. As you know, money generously given to Suffolk by Deben bridge club following its closure resulted in us joining forces with Suffolk Libraries last spring to offer free bridge lessons to beginners in their premises.

The Deben Project has surpassed all expectations with an estimated 200 pupils being taught in nine towns across our patch with more still enrolling. Colchester bridge club, which sadly closed last year, generously followed the example of Deben and donated their cash to the county, which is already being put into use in a similar way, including paying for a teacher course for a player in north east Essex.

Such has been its trailblazing success, other counties have adopted our blueprint and the Deben Project has contributed to the EBU realising that attracting and teaching new players is now the number one priority.

There is now a clear consensus: clubs who do not have a teaching programme or access to one face a very uncertain future.

Rolling out the Deben project would not have succeeded without an amazing amount of time given freely by a number of key people.

I wish to place on record the immense contribution made by Jacks Morcombe, whose brainwave this was and who has taken on the brunt of teaching in east Suffolk, and the other teachers who have worked so hard to attract new players and lead the teaching....Tim Evans and Helen Mason in Bury St Edmunds, Nancy Williams and Andy Billinge in Thurston and Stowmarket, Dave Allen in Haverhill, Norbert Voelker in Sudbury, the two Chris's (Green and Chambers) in Ipswich, Mike Sherer and Emma Fowler in north-east Essex, and, in advance of him starting this autumn, Tony Shearman in Felixstowe. A heartfelt thank you to all of them.

The second stage of the Deben project, to encourage students to play in our clubs, is already underway. This is where we all have a part to play. above all, please be kind and welcoming.

With an eye to the future, Jacks, our chief tournament director, ran a director training course at Newmarket last autumn so there are more directors in our clubs. She also helped to organise a teacher trainer course at Kesgrave in February attended by eight local players.

The vast majority of Suffolk members are, like me, not world beaters, although they enjoy their moment in the sun. In recent years the range of events in Suffolk has been deliberately tweaked to ensure more players have a chance to shine.

Having handicap prizes, where everyone has an equal chance of success, is an example. 9 High events, championed by Paul and Chris Rickard, is another. Bridge lunches and, for the first time last year, a golf bridge day widens our appeal and underlines the importance of the social side of bridge.

It is also right we do everything possible to assist our best players, in particular those who are selected and are willing to represent Suffolk. With that in mind, recently the county has paid for four teams of players to compete regularly in an EBU league and thereby hopefully enhance their skills against good competition. This initiative came from our county captain, Rick Hanley, and I would like to thank him and Jeff Orton who promptly turned this idea into reality.

So, in different ways, we have tried to assist and encourage those within bridge's broad church. Have we got it right? You will be the judge of that but we conducted a survey of members a few months back which suggested you believe the mixture of events organised by the county is about right.

Returning to the county side for a moment, it enjoyed mixed fortunes during the year. Following the sad death of David Price and the move to the West Country by Malcolm Pryor, the A team has struggled, understandably. The B team held its own while the C team recorded its best results for more than a decade. As many of you will know our county captain, Rick Hanley, is not enjoying good health but he has shown remarkable fortitude to continue organising the Suffolk teams and playing for the county. Rick, thank you.

Malcolm Pryor's legacy of setting up the online teams of four continues to flourish and on a personal note he was a member of the team which won the EBU Seniors Congress Teams for the second year running. He also represented England in the Senior Camrose.

As I mentioned earlier, my colleagues on the Suffolk committee are all volunteers. I read recently that the number of people volunteering to help run clubs and organisations such as ours is on the decline. It is easy to understand why. The role of the volunteer is not always straightforward or appreciated.

David Unwin, an accountant of long standing, became our Treasurer a year ago and due to appalling inefficiency by Lloyds Bank he had no online access to the SCBA account or ability to pay money for more than four months. As a result he and I had to pay bills out of our own pocket to keep the show on the road for a while.

He has produced a simplified set of accounts which underline the rude health of the association's finances. Indeed, with almost £27,000 in the bank your committee has discussed, without success, what it should do with so much money.

So a big thank you to him and to all members of the committee for the work they do, particularly those who organise and run individual events, such as the pairs competition which follows this meeting.

In a few minutes you will be invited to vote in officers and a committee for the year. I am delighted to say that for what I believe is the first time the committee will be evenly split between men and women... which is far removed from the days not so long ago when there was only one woman present... and, reportedly, her job was to make the tea for her male colleagues!