

GLOUCESTERSHIRE COUNTY BRIDGE ASSOCIATION

Minutes for the GCBA committee meeting held at Cheltenham Bridge Club on Monday 6th March 2023

In attendance were Ian Sidgwick (President), Andrew Bull (Secretary), Ben Ritacca (Treasurer), Hylary Kingham, Patrick Shields, Alan Stanfield, Richard Butland, Jan Bailey, Peter Waggett (REC chair) and Toby Roberts (CBC rep). Apologies were received from Paul Denning and Roger Williams.

This was a special meeting devoted entirely to discussing the GCBA strategy regarding player recruitment.

1. It was noted that the amount of face-to-face bridge being played is generally lower than was the case before the pandemic, with many more people now playing online. This is particularly an issue for local clubs because their players can then choose to play in online games hosted elsewhere - and will be more inclined to find a game at the best level for them. We think about 9 clubs have closed down recently due to this issue. It was suggested that we could consolidate online games across the county, but there was no certainty that this would help.
2. It was noted that many face-to-face players are more concerned with the social aspect of playing than the actual game, so we need to ensure that they find it a pleasant experience.
3. Hylary suggested that most teaching programmes take a long time to bring players into the game, and that many people might prefer a shorter course, or bespoke lessons, so they could take up playing quickly.
4. Richard noted that there was no article in the local paper after Gloucestershire's recent success in the Tollemache Cup (as there had been in previous years), and it was suggested that we need a Publicity Officer to provide articles for them, preferably on a regular basis. We could also try to do more to promote the game on social media online. It was stressed that if we want people to take up the game, it needs to be advertised regularly, not just on an occasional or one-off basis.
5. Various ideas were suggested for promoting the game, including:
 - a) Encouraging people to spread the game via word-of-mouth, e.g. by offering vouchers to people who introduce new members to local clubs
 - b) Use of Facebook and Nextdoor
 - c) Giving talks/presentations to local groups (e.g. WI, Rotary Club) - maybe paying an expert to do this
 - d) A poster at (e.g.) the East Gloucestershire tennis club, maybe as a quid pro quo with a poster for them at CBC [Note: the East Glos tennis club were approached after the meeting, and they would be willing to do this]
 - e) One-off taster sessions, at a pub/sport club/village hall
 - f) Teaching the game as a bridge holidayIt was felt that it we could try to prepare for such occasions by putting together a package taster session and presentation.
6. It was suggested that Patrick should arrange another get-together with the local teachers to find out what scope there is for some of the ideas mentioned above.
7. It was felt that we should be promoting the game both towards people approaching retirement age (whose children are now grown up), and towards younger people, e.g. schoolchildren, students and recent graduates.
8. It was agreed that we need to engage the local clubs, and that we should arrange a group chat with a couple of representatives from each club. Ideally, this would help us make a start towards setting up a committee of people who would be responsible for promoting the game within Gloucestershire (with GCBA providing the funding they require).