

West of England Bridge Club

Minutes of a Committee meeting held Wednesday 19th February 2020

Present: Alan Evans (Chair), Bridget Johnson, Chris Frew, Laurie Barth, Jan Duncan, Jen Challoner, Bill Ashford, Bernice Horseman, David Jones, Dinah Moore.

Apologies: Jane Chapman

The meeting began with Alan welcoming three members co-opted to the Committee, viz. Bernice Horseman, David Jones and Dinah Moore, who will help with the search for possible new premises.

1 Minutes of 12th December meeting

The minutes were approved.

2 Actions arising from 11th December meeting (and not covered elsewhere).

2.1 Date of AGM. Jan has fixed on Wednesday 20th May. Action complete.

2.2 Membership Subs. Action on Bridget and Bill; Bridget produced a series of proposals (see attached) and these were discussed. We agreed:

2.2.1 We will use the renewal feature of Pianola this year, so the great majority of members can renew on-line.

We should therefore get members to check and agree that we have their correct email address. **Action Bridget** to sort out how.

2.2.2 We will have a single rate for full membership, i.e. the concessionary rate of £5 for first full year membership is withdrawn.

There was discussion as to whether this would be offputting to those who first come to the Club via the Thursday afternoon Improvers session – the prime gateway for new members. It was agreed that the limit of three attendances as a non-member prior to being required to join should be abolished. Non-members will be allowed to continue playing – and paying an extra £1 per session to do so – until they felt sufficiently comfortable and committed to formally join the Club. This compromise was agreed.

2.2.3 The headline annual Membership Fee of £25 should be reduced to £24, to make for a simple, monthly pro-rata calculation when new members join mid-year.

2.2.4 The ‘membership year’ will continue to be from 1st April to the following 31st March. However the concessionary rate of £20 for existing members renewing promptly will now be available only before the year commences, i.e. up to 31st March. (Previously this was allowed up to 30th April.)

2.2.5 The thought that we may have to consider refunds if we are homeless from July was not discussed.

3 New/Major Business items

3.1 Report on latest transactions with the GHS Trustees and our next actions

Alan reported that the GHS Trustees had just notified him that they had rejected our BAFO (Best And Final Offer) of increased rental under a new Lease Agreement, and had given us a deadline of 31st March to accept their financial terms, after which they will start taking bookings from other groups, in replacement of our current sessions, from 1st July.

The Treasurer summarised various projections he has made. (i) other things being equal, our BAFO would lead to a c. £1,300 annual loss. (ii) the rates GHS are demanding would wipe out our small annual profit and lead to a loss of c. £4,500 pa. (iii) whereas, under our BAFO,

we could modestly increase membership fees and tweak other costs to mitigate a small loss, under the GHS demand there would be only one way to achieve financial stability: increase table money from £4 to £5 per session for members. In Bill's view this is not justified and may not even be viable; it would make us the most expensive bridge game in town. More particularly, we would be charging more than Bristol BC for distinctly inferior facilities and he would vote against such a move.

Dinah said that the Thursday afternoon sessions were so good and unique in Bristol that they are worth £5 a session, and most attenders would be able and willing to pay that. Noted, but Thursdays are unique. We left the issue of whether to charge more for Thursdays to another meeting.

Bridget produced a note of a paper exercise she has done to compare what GHS are demanding with what similar venues charge. She summarised that what GHS are now asking is not way out of line with quoted rates elsewhere; and elsewhere often had pre-existing long-term hires that would prevent us booking our five sessions in the same slots anyway. Dinah also felt that GHS's financial terms may be fair value.

Chris suggested that we should proceed simultaneously with three options:

1 Stick with GHS. Even if we accede to GHS headline rates, there is plenty to be negotiated, such as reducing payable hours for existing sessions, stopping payments for sessions not held, etc. Chris suggested that Alan should negotiate a Lease Agreement on GHS financial terms, by 31st March, so that we may have the fallback option of staying at GHS for the time being. With the offered three-month notice period, we could start the new Lease from 1st July but give notice on that day. Alan and Chris have met with Henleaze Bowling Club Committee representatives who confirmed that they were unable to find a way for us to coexist during their summer season but would be happy to host us from October 2020 to March 2021, so we could buy ourselves some breathing space if necessary.

2 Find alternative venues Given the urgency, Chris suggested we should urgently visit and talk turkey with likely venues, to understand whether a venue is a 'runner'. We should meet again in a fortnight to compare notes. This was agreed, and venues were allocated thus:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Redland Green Club | Bernice and Jan |
| BAWA | David and Jan |
| RAFA Club | Chris (and full Committee) |
| Black Swan | Alan |
| Eastfield Inn | Alan |
| The Ardagh Community Centre | Jen and Laurie |
| Redland Parish Church Hall | Bernice and Dinah |
| Filton Community Centre | David |
| Newman Hall | David and Jan |
| Bristol Memorial Ground | Chris |
| Church of the Good Shepherd | Alan |

Others were considered, or have been visited, but it was agreed that the above should be our focus for now.

3 Wind up, or transmogrify

Chris put two 'nuclear' options:

(a) wind up and try to fold in to Bristol Bridge Club. They may be amenable to changing some of their weekly sessions' characteristics to accommodate us. David thought this impractical in physical space terms; and parking would inevitably be a problem. Dinah felt our distinct culture would be lost.

(b) merge in some way with Gareth's Friendly Bridge. After discussion, it was concluded that this should be parked as inferior to finding a satisfactory alternative venue and continuing as an independent entity.

3.2 Burns night

Jen reported that Burns' Night had been a great success, and broke even financially in spite of 8.25 bottles of spirits – mostly malt whisky – being provided free. This followed on from the success of the Xmas Party, which also delivered a £200 profit.

4 Review calendar dates of upcoming competitions, etc

Jan provided a list of proposed dates for all WoE competitions in 2020, which was agreed..

5 Any Other Business, including Members' reports

None

6 Date of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 4th March, **6:00 pm**, at GHS.

Agreed

Date

West of England Bridge Club membership and renewals

I would make the following points for consideration by the Committee:

1. We have 220 members (as of 11 February).
2. There is little overlap between Monday afternoons/Thursdays and the other sessions, Wednesday evening being a mixed bag, making oral renewal reminders very inefficient.
3. This past year renewals were still being collected in July due to people not being aware of their need to pay.
4. The renewal feature on Pianola is the only feasible way to notify all members and collect renewals within a reasonable time period.
5. People can be reminded before 1 March by e-mail (or Pianola-generated letter if no e-mail) and given the option to pay directly **on-line** if they wish. Members should be reminded when possible (e.g. pre-session announcements) to make sure their Pianola contact details are up to date.
6. Due to the way Pianola works it would be very laborious to do the renewals if there were two levels of payment for ordinary members. This would carry over each year.
7. We need all the money we can get, and the £5 rate is losing us a lot. I suggest therefore that we abolish the £5 rate for new members and charge them pro rata as in point 9.
8. For all existing members renewing we can slightly reduce our subs to £24/year, or £20 for those who pay by 31 MARCH.
9. People who join during the year will pay pro rata: in April £24/May £22/June £20 etc. This can be spelt out on the website (as BBC do for their subs) and/or on the membership forms.
10. If this is agreed we could get the e-mails/letters out before the beginning of March.
11. If we are without premises come July then we may have to do some sort of refund(!).