

EBU Revised Strategy Proposal: Feedback from Busbridge Duplicate Bridge Club (BDBC)

Background on BDBC

BDBC has 105 members divided equally between EBU members and non-EBU members. The club charges a flat rate annual subscription of £35 per annum for which members can play up to 3 times a week. There are no table money charges, except for visitors, and this contributes strongly to the relaxed accessible ethos of the club. EBU Master Points are awarded at all sessions.

Feedback on EBU Strategy

BDBC provided detailed feedback dated 17th July 2007 on the original EBU Strategy Proposal based on careful analysis and consultation with members. A copy of this original feedback is attached as an appendix to this document.

The EBU has now (October 2007) updated its proposals following the consultation phase. The revised proposals have been reviewed in the light of our original consultation and comments.

Whilst welcoming the revisions that have been made, these unfortunately fail to address many of the central issues raised in our feedback and create a number of new concerns for BDBC.

1. The financial model remains weak and needs much more work

The income of the EBU will be almost totally dependent on the number of EBU members and P2P sessions. The proposal is designed to significantly increase membership, but carries the risk that it will achieve the opposite, Yet there is no sensitivity or risk analysis provided.

Implementation will undoubtedly be expensive, but remains totally uncosted. Some of the additional services will incur ongoing costs and in other areas the changes are expected to deliver savings, but again no financial estimates are provided.

2. The P2P fee is unknown making it impossible to assess the impact of the proposals on membership levels. Suggestions that the P2P fee will fall as additional players opt in seem optimistic

The original proposals suggested a fee of 43p (more for non-EBU members). Sally Budgen's letter of 2 November now suggests a fee in the range 33p to 13p. This range is so wide that it is impossible for clubs and members to assess the financial impact of the proposals.

The revised proposals suggest that a 'substantial decrease' in the original P2P figure will be achieved by including the significant number of bridge sessions that are played outside the Master Points scheme. However, it seems highly optimistic to assume that clubs and members who have opted out of Master Point charges will now choose to opt in to the (most probably higher, even at the "social" level) P2P charge. Instead of the P2P charge turning out to be lower than costed, it may well finish up significantly higher with the EBU losing members and income as clubs and individuals opt out.

3. If implemented, these proposals would significantly impact BDBC, particularly through those of our members who have chosen not to join the EBU

BDBC is made up of a mix of EBU members and non-EBU members, balanced almost 50:50. Although somewhat diluted in the revised proposals, the financial impact of these changes continues to fall most heavily on non-EBU members. Other than coercion, there is still nothing in these proposals to make our non-EBU members want to join the EBU.

The lower P2P charge for “social” members seems to be an ineffective compromise. It does not help clubs which mix “competitive” and “social” players, and / or EBU members and non-EBU members. At BDBC we seek to accommodate both these groups but the EBU proposals would force us to select one group over the other.

4. The quest for Universal Membership is divisive and could possibly lead to disaffiliation from the EBU and / or affect the viability of the club

A significant change made to the proposals has been to explicitly make “Universal Membership” the foremost objective, replacing the earlier objective which was merely “to strengthen the membership base”. Accordingly, the revised proposals appear to seek to remove objections that may have been raised by non-EBU members. The financial penalty on non-EBU members has been removed, as has the EBU joining fee; new provisions have been made for anonymous membership.

Accordingly, there seems to be an assumption that there is no longer a need to accommodate non-EBU members in EBU-affiliated clubs. However, this is not the case. Some of our members have expressed the view that they will under no circumstances join the EBU; many more are likely to prefer not to be part of the EBU given the costs involved. If continued, the quest for Universal Membership will certainly force a significant number of players and clubs away from the EBU and jeopardise clubs where EBU members and non-members currently play together.

5. The club services still offer little of value to BDBC

The revised proposals highlight the need to make the EBU relevant to the club player, but seem to offer nothing new in this area. Indeed the revised proposals implicitly recognise this by reducing the club affiliation fee to a token sum, whilst making individual EBU membership mandatory.

6. No consideration still seems to have been given to clubs that charge a flat rate membership fee rather than Table Money

BDBC currently charges a flat annual fee. This contributes to the relaxed, accessible ethos of the club as well as removing a significant administrative burden. Assuming the P2P fee is significantly higher than the current 13p per player Master Points cost, the proposals would probably force an unwelcome move to Table Money.

7. An important focus for the EBU should be introducing new and in particular younger players to the game, yet there is little in the strategy to achieve this

This focus still seems to be little more than wishful thinking ... “the new players which hopefully will be created with initiatives in future phases of the strategy....”

Gerald Searle, Chairman

John Spiers, Treasurer

On behalf of Busbridge Duplicate Bridge Club

20 November 2007

Appendix: Feedback provided to the original proposal

EBU Strategy Proposals: Feedback from Busbridge Duplicate Bridge Club (BDBC)

The potential impact of the EBU Proposals (dated June 2007) on BDBC have been carefully analysed by the club Chairman and Treasurer, and discussed at an Extraordinary General Meeting of club members.

Whilst accepting the need for change and revitalisation of the EBU, and recognising the work that has gone into these proposals, the strategy document has not been well-received by club members. Feedback from the club is as follows:

1. The financial model presented is weak and needs much more work

The income of the EBU will be almost totally dependent on the number of EBU members and P2P sessions. The proposal is designed to significantly increase membership, but carries the risk that it will achieve the opposite, Yet there is no sensitivity or risk analysis provided.

Although the proposal is designed to increase membership, the costings presented assume flat membership. Furthermore the proposed P2P charge includes a significant contingency suggesting that the EBU has little confidence that increased membership will be achieved.

FAQ 4 states that the P2P charge will include an element "to cover the additional costs of servicing the anticipated increase in membership." However, increased membership should lead to increased P2P income and an overall reduction in costs per member. If costs really will rise disproportionately with increased membership then the strategy of increasing membership is flawed.

Implementation will undoubtedly be expensive, but appears not to have been costed other than through a statement that the costs to other countries to introduce schemes that might or might not be comparable were of the order of £170,000. Implementation is simply too big and important an item to leave uncoded even at this early stage.

The concept of using the P2P fee as a "Volume Control" is alarming and must not become an alternative to sound planning, budgeting and financial management.

2. If implemented, these proposal would significantly impact BDBC, probably leading to loss of members, possibly leading to disaffiliation from the EBU and potentially affecting the viability of the club

BDBC is made up of a mix of EBU members (55%) and non-EBU members (45%). The financial impact of these changes falls most heavily on non-EBU members. Most of these have consciously elected not to join the EBU or to leave the EBU because they do not see the value they get from membership. Other than coercion, there is nothing in these proposals to make our non-EBU members want to join the EBU.

If the plans go ahead, the club would have no option but to consider the possibility of disaffiliation. In a straw poll conducted at the EGM, attendees were split more or less equally between those who would vote for the club staying in the EBU and those who would vote to leave if the changes come into effect. Whichever way the decision went, the club is likely to lose some members as a result. Loss of a significant number of members could affect the viability of the club and its very existence.

3. The club services offer little of value to BDBC

The club has already invested in scoring software and its own web-site, and doubts that the EBU will offer any advantages in this area. Rather than providing leadership in these areas,

the EBU is arriving late. The proposed rating system is a significant innovation but was not seen as a big attraction by our members. The other club services are insubstantial.

4. No consideration seems to have been given to clubs that charge a flat rate membership fee rather than Table Money

BDBC currently charges a flat annual fee. This contributes to the relaxed, accessible ethos of the club as well as removing a significant administrative burden. The proposals would probably force an unwelcome move to Table Money.

5. An important focus for the EBU should be introducing new and in particular younger players to the game, yet there is little in the strategy designed to achieve this

Members of BDBC recognise the importance of bringing new players into the game and believe that this should be a key objective of the EBU. However there seems to be little new thinking in this regard.

Gerald Searle, Chairman

John Spiers, Treasurer

On behalf of Busbridge Duplicate Bridge Club

17 July 2007