

Oxfordshire Chess Association
May Committee Meeting
Held by Zoom Video Conference
7.30pm, Wednesday 19 May 2021

Abbreviations used: ECF = English Chess Federation

Present: Ian Bush (Chair/Online Chess Officer), Roger Thetford (Secretary/Webmaster), Sara Sengenberger (Treasurer), Peter Hemmings (Grading Officer), Will Burt (Minutes Secretary), Steve Rumsby (U150 Team Captain), John Place (President)

1. Apologies for Absence: Rod Langham (Open Team Captain), Mike Truran (ECF Representative), Gerard O'Reilly (County Individual Championship Organiser), Kevin Henbest (University Representative/Vice-Chair)

2. Minutes of 2020 May Committee

These were approved and there were no matters arising.

3. County Matters

The 2020/21 season Chiltern League did not take place because of the coronavirus pandemic. Steve Rumsby, captain of the U150 Chiltern team, ran Oxfordshire teams in an online county competition. Open team captain Rod Langham is standing down. Steve will continue to run his online teams if people want to play for them. There has been no indication from the Chiltern League about a resumption in 2021/22. The Chair asked Steve to check if there is any further news about this.

4. League Matters

Online Chess Officer Ian Bush reported on the Mike Duck competitions. These were played on the Lichess platform and organised using the ECF's league management system. Full details can be found on that system. The first competition had 14 six board teams and was won by University 1. The second had 22 four board teams (thus improving the operation of the Swiss pairing system) and Oxford City 1 were the winners. There were not too many problems or defaulted games and, more importantly, some good chess was played. President John Place thanked Ian for his work in making these events happen.

Secretary Roger Thetford informed the meeting of the numbers of teams clubs expected to be able to field, should over the board chess resume in 2021/22. A total of 22–24 teams is anticipated and Roger showed how this level of participation would look when imposed on the structure in place at the end of the 2019/20 season. As this only leaves a

few teams in the third and fourth divisions, Roger proposed we merge these, obtaining a three division structure as follows:

- Division I (8 teams): Banbury 1, Cowley 1, Cowley 2, Cumnor 1, Didcot 1, Oxford City 1, Oxford University 1, Witney 1.
- Division II (8 teams): Banbury 2 (possible), Bicester 1, Cowley 3, Didcot 2, Oxford City 2, Oxford University 2, Witney 2, Wantage 1.
- Division III (8 teams): Abingdon School, Cowley 4, Cumnor 2, Oxford Brookes (possible), Oxford City 3, Oxford University 3, Wantage 2, Witney 3.

Ian Bush thanked Roger for his input and put these proposals up for debate, suggesting we might give clubs until the end of June to declare any changes in the number of teams they could run. The meeting agreed this approach. Steve Rumsby clarified that if Banbury were only able to run one team it would be Division II strength.

Ian Bush said he would look at what rules might need amending to accommodate three rather than four divisions. He also asked Roger Thetford to circulate the proposals to club representatives for feedback by the end of June.

5. Fixtures

Addressed by the above league structure proposals—we would also continue to run the Frank Wood Shield.

6. Awards

Last season's different format meant it was not possible to award the usual 'best in division' trophies. The Lester Millin trophy for the best junior was awarded on the basis of performances across the two Mike Duck competitions. It was won by Ross Tselos (Oxford City) with $4\frac{1}{2}/7$, who narrowly beat Josh Soanes (Witney), Arya Cont, Jan Murawski (both Oxford City) and Seb Watkins (Abingdon) all of whom scored 6/10. The Ray Starkie best game trophy was again adjudicated by Matt Rose, who has awarded it to Oscar Idle (Cowley) for his win against Oxford City's Jon Manley.

7. ECF Matters

ECF representative Mike Truran did not write a report but indicated that the main news is that the Finance Council has frozen membership fees. He provided a report from this meeting which is included alongside these minutes.

8. AGM Date and Venue

It was agreed to hold this meeting face-to-face if possible and it was scheduled for Thursday 16 September 2021 at Rose Hill Methodist Church (pending confirmation that this venue is available).

9. Proposals for Rule Changes

Formal proposals to the AGM are to be received by 24 August 2021. As we could not run our usual competitions last season the 2020 AGM deferred decisions on rule changes. These concerned playing all matches with incremental time limits, revising board order rules and accommodating the new four digit ECF ratings.

10. Any Other Business

Following the sad news of the death of Ian Brooke, who did so much for chess in the county, the association sent flowers to his funeral service, at a cost of £25.

There was a recent (unsuccessful and very inept) attempt at a ‘phishing’ scam against the association.

Junior Liaison officer Andrew Varney plans to run chess coaching for children, as part of the ‘Alice Day’ celebrations in the grounds of Oxford Castle on 3 July 2021, should coronavirus restrictions be sufficiently lifted for this event to take place.

The meeting closed at 8.21pm.

Will Burt (Minutes Secretary)

13 June 2021, small typos corrected July/August 2021

Finance Council Meeting

The ECF Council met on Saturday 24 April, this meeting being termed the 'Finance' Council and has the particular responsibility to approve the Board's budget for the year ahead as well as dealing with any other business brought to it or raised by members of the Council. It is made up of local representatives of counties, unions, leagues and congresses and direct members as well as the directors of the ECF and some other officers.

This year the financial side of things was unusually free of controversy with a decision to freeze membership fees and with a careful budget designed to allow support for a comeback of chess but with an eye on the difficult financial situation the last year has presented. The only issue of debate was a resolution making the Board free to vary the budget in the light of changing circumstances, though such changes would have to be brought before a further Council meeting. In the end, however, this motion was passed with overwhelming support, perhaps reflecting the recognition by Council that the Board really does need some wriggle room in these uncertain times.

Another block of business centred around constitutional issues, probably of little interest to the bulk of members but, of course, considered vital and essential by the political side of the chess world! One special motion effectively froze for a year the Council's own voting register which determines how many votes members of Council carry and in normal times depends essentially on the number of chess games they have organised. Another issue was whether directors of the ECF should be allowed to stay in office if regularly re-elected or if, like American Presidents, they should be limited in the number of terms they could serve. A variety of options on terms of service were offered but in the end Council decided that there should be no limits.

Of perhaps slightly more interest was a motion to include 'rating' as we must now call 'grading' of online games and blitz games as worthy of being included in the criteria for representation on Council. This narrowly, but clearly, reached the 75% in favour that is required for constitutional changes of this sort.

And finally, and at least of interest to a few hundred of the membership, was a motion to change the rating boundaries in the County Council championship. This was inspired by the need once again to move to rating and a belief that advertising something like an "under 1642" competition as a translation of a grade of "under 140" was somehow unsatisfactory. I didn't personally see it mattered that much: after all we all cope quite happily with cans containing 454 grams! No, seriously it needed to be done, but was surprisingly controversial. Those that organise these teams were worried that certain of the new ranges would prevent some teams being fielded at all and that other players would find themselves unused for want of a section of appropriate standard. Sadly, after all the other business had been completed little time was left for discussion. However, it was agreed that those with knowledge of the problems (principally the county and union reps or their proxies) should meet again separately with Nigel Towers, the ECF Director responsible, and Mark Murrell, the County Championship controller, with the brief to hammer out the matter in a smaller and slightly more informal Zoom meeting. I'm delighted to say that these good people have indeed met after the main meeting and achieved success in their endeavours. The 2021-22 County Championship is set to roll!

Michael Farthing, Chair of Council