

Submission by Hitchin Bridge Club

Life as a virtual bridge club. – a short update.

Due to Covid19 the Hitchin Bridge Club went entirely online in April 2020.

We now run 9 ordinary sessions online each week and a further 2 on a monthly basis some of which are open to non-members. This is nearly twice as much bridge as we could provide from the church hall because of the restricted availability there. The number of players participating each week has more than doubled which again confirms the unmet need.

The sessions cover all levels of experience from social and relaxed to the more competitive.

In addition, one of the club trustees continues to hold a supervised game for less confident members.

Hitchin was one of the first bridge clubs in Hertfordshire to embrace virtual bridge. It is the only online bridge club in North Herts and is the highest attended online club in Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, and Cambridgeshire.

In a typical week we have more than 480 players enjoying a game. (120 tables of bridge). This is not 480 different individuals as some play more than once each week but it usually at least 250 separate players.

We continue to hold a weekly session which is open at all bridge players. As well as providing an online platform for the smaller North Herts clubs (in particular Royston and Letchworth) players from Luton and Stevenage (which are also too small to move online) participate. All profit from this session is donated to the North Herts Hospice. Our donation at Christmas was £3800 and we anticipate being able to donate £600 per month whilst this pandemic lasts. Over 100 players support this session each week.

To keep members occupied we introduced an Isolation Corner section onto the club website. This features quizzes, trivia, jokes, interesting articles and facts, bridge tips, photographs, and messages. It helps members keep in touch with friends they cannot meet.

Unfortunately, the pandemic probably means that some of the smaller bridge clubs in the country and county, which generally meet only once a week in hired premises will close for good. It therefore becomes even more important to have a dedicated centrally based bridge hub serving all the district where players can get together, keep their brains active and their friendships buoyant.

There have been a couple of unexpected effects of going online.

1. Players have been able to join our sessions from all over the country and partner relatives, friends and former partners who have left the area. This has enabled members to keep in touch with people they have been unable to meet or visit during lockdown and has given them all a much needed boost.
2. A lot of members who are not currently playing online have chosen to renew their club membership for 2021 showing their appreciation that the club is more than just a place to play bridge but a caring and supportive community.

Margaret Eddleston 20th February 2021