

MINUTES OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 28th MAY 2020

Present

M Heading	-	Middle Level Commissioners
D C Thomas	-	" " "
L McShane	-	" " "
K Russell	-	" " "
D Laws	-	Fenland District Council
C Howes	-	Inland Waterways Association
R Sexton	-	East Anglian Waterways Association
P Syred	-	Fox Narrowboats Ltd

1. Apologies for absence

J Brown (Middle Level Commissioners), N Arnold (Environment Agency – Anglian Waterways Team) and A Wildman (RBOA).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the Navigation Advisory Committee held on the 23rd March 2020 were approved.

3. Resolutions from the Board

David Thomas confirmed that the Middle Level Commissioners Board had approved the Navigation Committee's recommendations which had been made to date and which had been reported to the Board. In particular, the Board had approved the changes that were necessary to the implementation date of the registration system which was necessary because of the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

4. COVID-19 Actions Update

David Thomas reported that the Board had made a decision to align as closely as possible with the Environment Agency with regard to their COVID-19 actions for operation of the navigation and this was supported by the Navigation Advisory Committee.

The Middle Level Commissioners locks had been closed except for emergency. David Thomas reported that the Middle Level Commissioners waterways were reopened on Saturday the 23rd May, but boats could not be used on the system for overnight stays unless the boat was the primary residence of the boat owners.

David Thomas reported on the other COVID-19 measures which had been put in place. The office was closed to the public although it was manned on a daily basis by a limited number of staff with the remaining staff working from home but contactable. Access by the public to the office could in certain circumstances be arranged but this was by appointment only.

With regard to boat licencing it was acknowledged that although much of the process could be done on line and through contactless payments there would be some boat owners who would want to pay by cash and collect their forms from the office and where possible this would be accommodated.

Paula Syred advised that day boats would be operating on the Canal and River Trusts waters from the 5th June 2020 and although her staff were returning on the 1st June she did not anticipate being fully operative until the 15th July 2020. With regard to the two manned locks on the Middle Level system it was recognised that the greatest risk was at the Stanground Lock at Peterborough as this was frequented by numerous members of public and protection measures were therefore to be implemented for the lock keeper, including the marking of a yellow grid stay clear area and a erection of a perspex screen.

5. Byelaws

Lorna McShane reported that there had been no contact from Defra with regard to the confirmation of the Byelaws. Chris Howes stated that the National Chairmen of the IWA have regular meetings with Defra and if necessary he could raise this matter on behalf of the Middle Level Commissioners

6. Boat Removal Protocol

Lorna McShane advised that she had delayed drafting the protocol as the Environment Agency had currently revised their boat removal protocol and it was currently with EA appointed Counsel for comment. The Environment Agency had offered to share this with us when they had approval from Counsel to their revised Protocol.

7. Update on Licencing

David Thomas said that the revised licencing date had been agreed by the Board. It was proposed that licencing of boats should commence from 1st September 2020 and would be charged at 50% of the Environment Agency licencing fee for a year. He reported that one payment had already been made and there had been lots of enquiries from boaters about registration. In view of the COVID-19 restrictions the Environment Agency were now not going to be review their charging structure until 2021/2022 but they were still proposing to go fully digital with their registration system in 2021. Arrangements were now in place for the Middle Level Commissioners being agents of the Environment Agency for the selling of temporary licences to enter the Environment Agency waters, but in view of the revised licencing arrangements it was not at this stage known whether this necessary or desirable to implement it this year. The Environment Agency were about to look at their existing arrangements with the Cam Conservators and would involve the Middle Level Commissioners in these discussions.

8. Engagement with Waterways Users – including residential boaters

David Thomas referred to the information to be discussed at item 10 which dealt with the March Town Bid. The rationale behind the proposals being put forward were to encourage the general public to come down to the river to open up the river for more leisure

9. Facilities Provision

David Thomas said there was nothing further to report on this matter but advised that he had attended a meeting with Skylark Garden centre who were looking at outline proposals to develop moorings on the Sixteen Foot River. Discussions had taken place with the Well Creek Trust and a sum of money had been allocated by the Middle Level Commissioners Board for additional moorings at Salters Lode Lock and it was considered that this may be a location to look at the provision of additional facilities.

10. March Town and Ramsey Market Town District Council Bids

David Thomas said that he had written in support of March's Town Bid and had now seen the proposals which had been drawn up to support the Bid which all looked very positive and included a terrace from the main town down to the riverside. He also reported that Huntingdonshire District Council had supported a Market Town Bid for High Lode and Ramsey moorings and that he had attended several meeting on this.

11. Interests of non-boat users– fishing/recreation/tourism

Tourism had been dealt with under item 10 and there was no representative at the meeting to discuss fishing interests.

12. Recommendations to the Board

The Navigation Advisory Committee were very supportive of the improvements which had been proposed by the March Town Bid and also support the provision of moorings and improved turning facilities at Ramsey moorings. The Committee were supportive of the Middle Level Commissioners being involved in both Bids.

David Thomas advised that monies with regard to Tesco Section 106 agreement (for improved connectivity between the two sides of High Lode), which had been left after installation of a new bridge and hence set aside for improved moorings, were currently being held by Cambridgeshire County Council.

13. Any other business

- Councillor Dee Laws thanked the Board for inviting her to join the meeting and updated Members on the Market Town Bid. She stated that if it was successful it would be very positive for the future development of the town centre, it would open up the river frontage with a ramped pedestrian walkway with seats to encourage people to sit by the river. Dee Laws went on to advise that Fenland District Council own some moorings at the leisure centre in Whittlesey and were looking at proposals to extend these moorings which would also need the consent of the Middle Level Commissioners. She thought it would be helpful to look at the joint operations of the Middle Level Commissioners and Fenland District Council with regard to waterway users and the development of more moorings in the towns.
- There was some discussion about the possible loss of the pump out facilities in March town centre and the proposals being put forward as part of the Towns Bid. Councillor Laws said she was not sure about the future of these and would make enquiries and

report back to the Committee. Paula Syred said she would be interested to know about Fenland District Council's future proposals for the pump out.

- Roger Sexton raised an issue regarding some of the fishing points along the river where fishermen were leaving litter after matches and stated that from his point of view he would not wish to see fishing extended on this stretch of river, although he was generally supportive of the development of the riverside.
- An additional matter was raised about the Market Towns Bid and moorings at Ramsey. Roger Sexton advised that the width of the turning head needs to be increased to 70 feet and that discussions need to take place with the new developer of the adjacent land.
- Councillor Laws suggested inviting a Huntingdonshire District Council Councillor to be a member of the Navigation Advisory Committee. David Thomas advised that this was a matter that would need to be reported to the Middle Level Commissioners' Board for consideration and approval.

14. Date of next meeting

Thursday 13th August 2020 at 2.00pm.

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Chairman