

MEETING OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5th AUGUST 2019 AT THE MIDDLE LEVEL OFFICES

Present

M E Heading		Middle Level Commissioners
J L Brown	-	" " "
S W Whittome	-	" " "
D C Thomas	-	" " "
L McShane	-	" " "
R Sexton	-	East Anglian Waterways Association
A Wildman	-	Residential Boat Owners' Association
C Howes	-	Inland Waterways Association
P Separovic	-	Environment Agency
P Syred	-	Fox Narrowboats Ltd

Kye Jerrom and Phil Hughes were not in attendance.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Navigation Advisory Committee held on the 12th June 2019 were approved, subject to the amendment of two typographical errors.

2. Byelaws

Lorna McShane reported that a press release had been prepared and once this was approved it would be sent to Alan Wildman, Chris Howes and Paula Syred as they had offered to put a copy on their websites. It was agreed that once the Byelaws had been advertised any substantive responses would be circulated to Members of the Committee in order that they could consider them prior to the next meeting.

ACTION

- Press Release/Editorial to be prepared and sent to Alan Wildman and Chris Howes
- Circulate any responses to the Statutory Notices in the press and Boating Publications

3. House of Lords undertakings

Lorna McShane reported that she had made a start on the protocol for removal of boats. She expressed her concerns on the need for the protocol to be flexible and generic and that no two situations were expected to be the same. Whilst the protocol should help guide actions it should not risk precluding the best action being taken which could be the case if it were over prescriptive and potentially a source of challenge if the protocol is not complied with in a particular situation.

With regard to the residential moorings strategy, the policy of the Canal & River Trust was discussed. The Trust have a policy that boats must be used for navigation i.e. the boat must move at least 20 miles during a pre-defined interval and must not just be left on a casual mooring. With regard to council tax, it was noted that it is the mooring that is covered by council tax and not the boat. Paula Syred commented on the increasing number of residential boats on the Middle Level system, and in particular the increase in wide beam boats. The introduction of a residential mooring strategy would need considerable input from Fenland District Council both from a planning point of view and also in terms of tourism and economic development policy.

The requirements for facilities for residential boats were considered including pump out facilities, electricity points and water supply.

Alan Wildman made reference to the policy of the Broads Authority who had identified 63 formal residential moorings. The Committee considered the various time limits for different authorities with regard to residential moorings and transitory moorings. The Canal and River Trust require that transitory boats must move at least every 14 days. On its temporary moorings the Environment Agency allows only a period of 48 hours and the Broads have a 24 hour restriction on moorings. David Thomas commented on the residential mooring strategy which was set out in the undertakings which require the Middle Level Commissioners to prepare and publish a strategy setting out how it intends to exercise the powers conferred by Section 15 of the new Act, with the aim of increasing availability of residential moorings (including transient and temporary moorings) on the waterways. The steps set out for the development of this residential mooring strategy were agreed to include that the Commissioners would identify potential residential moorings sites through discussions with the Local Planning Authority. Obviously it will be very important for Fenland District Council to be closely involved with its role as Local Planning Authority and Housing Authority.

Chris Howes said that water is the most important provision as everything else can normally be managed by boaters on their own boats for reasonable periods of time. There was some discussion on the provision of facilities at Whittlesey. These could be developed in the area of the centre. It would only be necessary to get the length of moorings extended and for Fenland District Council to adopt and maintain these moorings, The facilities at Whittlesey might need nothing more than the extra mooring and water provision. Consideration was also given to looking at the provision of moorings on the Forty Foot at Chatteris. With regard to residential mooring provision it was recognised that there was a need to identify common standard for those wishing to implement them and interested parties should be invited to submit proposals for residential moorings through a publicity campaign led by the Commissioners.

Consideration was given to over winter moorings that are permanent for winter and then revert to 48 hour moorings over the summer period. This is done elsewhere to get an income for temporary moorings by letting them in the winter.

4. Registration/charging/reciprocal arrangements

The aim is to get registration live by the 1st April 2020 but if this timescale cannot be met there are fall back options of 1) setting up the registration scheme but just charging a nominal amount in order to collect a database of users on the Middle Level system and 2) start from the 1st September 2020 and make a charge for 6 months only.

David Thomas reported on the discussions that had taken place with the Environment Agency Navigation team who had been very keen and supportive but doubted if the National Navigation team had the capacity to undertake the work on behalf of the Commissioners at the present time.

The various options for charging for registration were considered:-

- 1) A separate licence for transition through the Middle Level system.
- 2) Having a joint licence with the Environment Agency and the Cams Conservators which mirrored their system of charges with enhancements for the Middle Level system.
- 3) How the Gold Licence which covers the Canal and Rivers Trust and the Environment Agency waters would be dealt with and if just a top up would be needed for the Middle Level system.

Consideration was given to visitor registration for boats which just needed occasional use of the Middle Level system.

The Environment Agency system was based on length and engine size of boats and there were in total about 30 categories of charges. Paddle boats currently require a licence but with regards canoeing and rowing these have a blanket cover with the respective associations paying the Environment Agency a block fee. If consideration was to be given to the use of the 48 hour moorings presently managed by Fenland District Council and winter moorings this would need to be discussed with Fenland District Council.

5. Timescales

The start of registration from the 1st April 2020 was dependent upon the Environment Agency being able to facilitate registration on behalf of the Commissioners and the Byelaws being approved by Defra. The Commissioners were currently working on an information flyer about the introduction of the registration and this would be delivered to all boats on the Middle Level system.

6. Facility provision

The Middle Level Commissioners are currently considering locations where additional facilities could be provided and are looking at what can be made available at Stanground and Salters Lode as March already has existing facilities. In order to comply with the undertakings of the House of Lords and with Inland Waterways Association minimum standards it is important that the Commissioners concentrated on the facility provision on the link route. Consideration was given to some of the other moorings within the area not on the link route which were Ramsey (which needs mooring provision) and Three Holes (which has Inland Waterways Association moorings). Consideration was given to the provision of moorings at Chatteris. Also, in the past, various riverside pubs had asked about the provision of moorings and this could be considered again as part of the provision of facilities and moorings.

The Committee suggested that the Chief Executive meet with Fenland District Council, in particular Phil Hughes, and his Director to initiate discussions with the District Council to determine what funds were available to the Council for riverside development. It was noted that £170,000 had been given to Fenland District Council to develop March further as a

market town and the Committee wondered whether some of this money could be spent on the development of navigation and provision of waterside facilities.

ACTION

- Meeting to be set up with representatives from Fenland District Council.

7. Other user interest – fishing/recreation/tourism

Kyle Jerrom was not present at the meeting and there was nothing further to report on this matter except that a meeting would be arranged with Fenland District Council to discuss tourism and facility provision.

8. Use of volunteers

David Thomas referred to a meeting he had attended with the Environment Agency and Cambridgeshire Acre who worked under an arrangement with Cambs Acre 2 days per week. The volunteers at the Environment Agency comply with the Environment Agency rules and regulations and some of the messages that came from the meeting were that you need to be clear on what you want to achieve from the use of volunteers and it was important to acknowledge that some of the volunteers giving their time were very skilled. Volunteers can be very useful for enhanced services but there needs to be a commitment in terms of management and defining the role of the volunteers. The Environment Agency currently have 24 volunteers. Some of the work that could be developed for volunteers was discussed including discussing future licence system with boat owners, assisting with boat passage through locks, assisting with enforcement including speeding vessels and power boats. The volunteers used by the Environment Agency currently work in pairs for health and safety reasons and the volunteer system seems to work very well. The Canal and River Trust also used volunteers extensively.

9. Any Other Business

- 1) As Phil Hughes had been unable to attend the meeting, a meeting is to be arranged with Fenland District with an invitation to Nathan Arnold to attend the meeting and that meeting is to take place outside of the Navigation Advisory Committee.
- 2) David Thomas is to contact Nathan Arnold to discuss further the possible arrangements for a registration system for the Middle Level system

10. Dates of next meeting

The next meeting of the Navigation Advisory Committee is the 7th October 2019.

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Chairman