

MEETING OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 7th OCTOBER 2019 AT THE MIDDLE LEVEL OFFICES

Present

M E Heading	-	Middle Level Commissioners
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
N Arnold	-	Environment Agency
Dr I Hirst	-	Environment Agency – Fisheries Team (representing Kye Jerrom)
P Syred	-	Fox Narrowboats Ltd

1. Apologies for absence

J Brown (Middle Level Commissioners), P Hughes (Fenland District Council) and K Jerrom (Environment Agency – Fisheries Team).

1. Minutes

The minutes of the Navigation Advisory Committee held on the 5th August 2019 were approved, subject to an amendment to change the reference from residential to casual mooring.

2. Byelaws

(i) Statutory Notices in Press & Boating Publications

Lorna McShane gave an update on the steps that had been taken to advertise the making of the Byelaws and the Commissioners intention to submit them to Defra for confirmation. The Byelaws had been advertised in the Cambs Times and the Wisbech Standard on the 13th September 2019. In both these publications the Editor had included a page of editorial with photographs. A notice had been published in the Towpath Talk in the October 2019 edition, Waterways World published on the 3rd October 2019 and Canal Boat Times published on the 17th October 2019. The last day for submission of comments on the Byelaws was the 18th November 2019. The Byelaws had also been published on the Commissioners' website.

(ii) Consideration of any representations received about the Byelaws

As of the date of the meeting, 7th October 2019, the Commissioners had received no representations on the detail of the Byelaws. However, as had previously been agreed, if there were any substantive responses these would be circulated to members of the Committee prior to the next meeting.

3. Update on Registration/Charging/Reciprocal arrangements

Although the Environment Agency's response to the suggestion that they carry out registration on behalf of the Commissioners had been very positive they were unable to comply with the timescale of the 1st April 2020 and had proposed that a more likely date for the Environment Agency doing the registration would be the 1st April 2021. This date would work better for the Environment Agency as this was also the target date they have on the introduction of a revised charging framework and changes to their registration system to become fully electronic.

Cam Conservators

David Thomas reported that he had had discussions with the River Manager at Cam Conservators with a view to the option of their taking over the registration of boats for the first year and a meeting had been arranged for the 26th September 2019. However, due to a bereavement, this meeting had had to be postponed and another meeting was to be arranged.

MLC – Registration

David Thomas stated that the third option was for the Middle Level Commissioners to do their own licencing although this was the least preferred option.

Discussions had taken place with the Environment Agency on reciprocal arrangements for registration and these had also been very positive. The Environment Agency were to send a copy of the arrangements they have between the Cam Conservators and themselves in which either the Middle Level Commissioners could be annexed to this agreement or this document could be used as a template for a further agreement with the Middle Level Commissioners.

Nathan Arnold reported that he was having meetings with the Environment Agency legal team to discuss the agreement on the 8th October.

Chris Howes said they he had recently used the Cam Conservators system and whilst he found the website difficult to use it did have the advantage of allowing you to apply for a 90 day licence.

The Committee gave some consideration to offering a discount if boaters pre-registered. This would assist with collecting information about boats on the system. David Thomas advised the Committee that he was currently engaging a member of staff in looking at where boats were currently moored and how many were on the system and it was agreed that this information was needed as soon as possible to assist with future decision making.

Nathan Arnold stated that the Environment Agency registration took place from the 1st April in each year and that during February and March renewals were sent out and that his experience was that most boats had registered by mid-April. The Environment Agency currently process in the region of 7000 applications. It was acknowledged by the Committee that there was a lot of work to be done in the first year to obtain boaters details. Consideration was given to an Anglian licence which would be one licence to use the Cams, Middle Level Commissioners and Environment Agency waters. This was currently being considered.

David Thomas said it was his intention to recommend to the November board meeting that the Commissioners approve a pricing structure which mirrors the Environment Agency's Registration costs with a small percentage increase for a combined Environment Agency/Middle Level Commissioners licence option. The Committee approved this and the

principle of a discount of up to 25% for pre-registration for Middle Level boat owners who will only use the Middle Level system. David Thomas reminded the Committee that no Safety Certificate was to be compulsory for the first year which would give a period of 12 months to assist people working on project boats.

4. Facility provision

The provision of facilities at Stanground Lock, Salters Lode and Whittlesey were currently being considered and there were some discussion concerning the entrance and access for septic tanking emptying lorries at Stanground Lock. David Thomas reminded the meeting of the undertaking given to the House of Lord Opposed Bill Committee that 25% of income was to be spent on providing facilities, meeting the Inland Waterways Association minimum standards and that once this had been achieved the Commissioners could look at the provision of further moorings. The possibilities of the provision of future moorings at Chatteris was discussed (at the Old Dock), with the provision of a turning head at the Jack's store. The provision of moorings at Ramsey was also discussed and David Thomas agreed to try and engage with Ramsey Town Council to ascertain whether any progress could be made with this matter.

5. Other user interest – fishing/recreation/tourism

The Chairman congratulated Paula on her initiative for arranging the boat trip along the Old Course of the River Nene drawing attention to the need to tidy up the river in March town centre. It was hoped that some improvement could be made to the river before the Nene Cruising Club's rally which was to be held in the West End area on the late May bank holiday. The possibility of using volunteers for this work was considered as was the possibility of using some of the Middle Level Commissioners' operatives during the quiet winter period to assist with this work.

Fishing

Ian Hirst referred to the research into the Social/Economic value of Fishing in the Fens and reference was made to recent problems with fishermen on the moorings at Well Creek. This appeared to be generally a problem for boaters in the Fens area with fishermen using the moorings.

Project Hereward

Roger Sexton gave an update on this project and that costings had been obtained for the Welches Dam Lock refurbishment and he advised that soil sampling was now necessary. Roger Sexton asked if he could be provided with the names of any consultants/contractors who could carry out sampling on behalf of the Project. The group were in the process of changing from a working group to a Community Interest Company and were obtaining a lease from the Environment Agency to allow them access to carry out the works.

6. There was no other business.

7. Dates of next meetings

The next meetings of the Navigation Advisory Committee are:-

13th January 2020 (Paula Syred – apologies)

23rd March 2020.

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Chairman