

What does my licence fee pay for and why do I have to pay it now?

Why now?

For decades local and national ratepayers have been subsidising the upkeep of the navigation because the legislation that controlled it was outdated and only allowed charges for navigation related to the value of the cargo being carried. This harked back to pre-industrial times when the primary use of waterways was for the movement of goods.

To address this and in recognition of the push from government for a move to a more justified position where the beneficiary should at least be contributing towards the cost borne by a public authority the Commissioners felt the time was right to go through the costly and time-consuming procedure of updating the legislation to put them in line with other navigation authorities.

All this work culminated in November 2018 when the Middle Level Act was passed.

What does it cost to run the navigation?

To maintain our one hundred miles of navigable watercourse, the six locks, employ two lock keepers and a navigation officer and cut weed and grass for navigation purposes the cost is on average in excess of two hundred thousand pounds per annum. The figure will vary of course dependent upon the year and the remedial or improvement works required.

In this calendar year in addition to the normal expenditure as examples we have spent twenty-four thousand pounds on dredging works for navigators on Well Creek, we are looking at spending a further twenty thousand pounds on Salters Lode lock service and replacement moorings (on the lock approach). Five thousand pounds has been spent refurbishing the moorings at Lodes End lock. Over the last five years two hundred and twenty-nine thousand pounds has been spent on dredging for navigation in the Well Creek and when the guillotine gate was replaced at Salters Lode this cost over a quarter of a million pounds. These are just a few examples of the MLC's continuing commitment to navigation.

Over the next few years major repairs to (or replacement of) gates will be needed at Marmont Priory, Stanground and Ashline lock. A new set of lock gates typically cost between fifty and a hundred thousand to manufacture and install.

Will the Middle Level Make a Profit from Charging for Navigation?

No, there is no likelihood of the licence fee covering anywhere near the cost of running the navigation, especially with the added commitment to improve it (described below) and there was an undertaking given to the House of Lords that would actually at this time preclude us from doing so. In addition, there is a commitment to spend 25% of all income on improving facilities on the link route to meet the current minimum recommendations of the IWA which remains in place until these are delivered.

Are the MLC only going to meet the IWA minimum standards?

No, this is not the intention. In addition to this we have the following projects we are working on or supporting;

- Improved moorings on High Lode Ramsey, we have been working jointly with the District council on the provision of moorings along the Lode at the town end and were instrumental in making arrangements for the ring fencing of section 106 moneys to help towards this.
- Improved mooring in March town, we have been working with Fenland District Council on opportunities for improving the water frontage through town and fully support their market town bid.
- We are looking at defining locations for temporary overnight rural moorings where marked locations will have the banksides cut to allow moorings and signs added to alert boaters to their presence
- We are looking longer term to develop a residential mooring strategy working with Fenland District Council to address the need which exists for permanent moorings and for long stay moorings.
- We are project partners in the Great Fen and are in discussions with its team over what moorings can be provided within the Great Fen to allow visitors travelling by boat access to this unique area.
- We have agreed with the Well Creek Trust to replace and take on their moorings at Salters Lode lock. This work, referred to earlier, will take place this winter.
- Longer term we have started to look at plans for phased dredging through March, estimated to cost in excess of one hundred thousand pounds to undertake.

Why are the charges for navigation aligned to those of the Environment Agency?

It has been pointed out that the EA Anglian area have three and a half times as many navigable miles as exist in the Middle Level. But they also have 7000 vessels registered which is 14 times as many as within the MLC waters hence to operate our waters and to invest in them we do need to levy reasonable charges.

Where are you with negotiations with CRT and the EA on combined licences?

We are in advanced discussions with the EA and the Cambs Conservators over implementing an arrangement that will, for a small additional charge, allow vessel owners access to all three waters throughout a licensing year. We are also in discussion with CRT in a similar light in respect of arrangements in regard to their Gold licences.

I have further questions who should I ask?

The MLC now employ a full time Navigation Officer, Kevin who can be contacted by email using the enquiries@middlelevel.gov.uk or by phone on 07725 134170