

# MINUTES OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 22<sup>nd</sup> JANUARY 2021

### Present

|            |   |   |
|------------|---|---|
| J Brown    | - | Middle Level Commissioners                  |
| M Heading  | - | Middle Level Commissioners                  |
| D C Thomas | - | Middle Level Commissioners                  |
| L McShane  | - | Middle Level Commissioners                  |
| K Russell  | - | Middle Level Commissioners                  |
| N Arnold   | - | Environment Agency – Anglian Waterways Team |
| C Howes    | - | Inland Waterways Association                |
| P Hughes   | - | Fenland District Council                    |
| C Ovenden  | - | Middle Level Watermen’s Club                |
| R Sexton   | - | East Anglian Waterways Association          |
| P Syred    | - | Fox Narrowboats Ltd                         |
| A Wildman  | - | Residential Boat Owners Association         |

### 1. Apologies for absence

Councillor D Laws (Fenland District Council) but later joined the meeting.

### 2. Anglian Pass

David Thomas reported this was a Special Meeting of the Navigation Advisory Committee which was being held to consider the discussions which had taken place between the Environment Agency (EA), Conservators of the River Cam (CC) and the Middle Level Commissioners (MLC). There was a proposal to provide boaters with an option to navigate unrestricted across the neighbouring navigation authorities. From these discussions it appeared that the best solution was for a joint pass called an Anglian Pass. The option of an Anglian Pass would only be available to boaters with a valid annual vessel registration/licence with a statutory navigation authority. The proposal was that once you have obtained your registration/licence from your home authority, you could purchase the Anglian Pass which would allow unrestricted access to the waters of EA, MLC and CC during the year purchased. The cost of the Anglian Pass would depend on vessel length, and there would be four bandings of £25, £50, £75 and £100, and these costs were to include the administration costs which would be payable to the Environment Agency for issue of the licence.

Nathan Arnold explained that the short term licences previously issued by the Environment Agency of 1 day, 1 month, 3 month, would still be an option for boaters to purchase. The idea behind the Anglian Pass was that it would stop boaters having to have multiple passes for the various navigation waters which would work out to be very expensive and not very convenient for boaters. Nathan explained that the existing Cams Interchange Agreement with the Environment Agency expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 to the timing of entering into a new agreement was perfect.

Nathan stated it would be the National Customer Team at Anglian Water in Rotherham who would issue the licence as agent for the three navigation authorities. Paula Syred queried whether there would be a multiplier applied for trade boats. It was confirmed that there was no intention to use a multiplier for trade boats requiring the Anglian Pass.

David Thomas explained that these registration and joint arrangements had been delegated to the Navigation Advisory Committee by the Board and it was for NAC to make a decision on

the fees and arrangements. The Special Meeting were told that the proposals on the joint arrangements must be approved by all three authorities, the last to meet being the Anglian Water Group on February 12<sup>th</sup>.

Roger Sexton raised a concern about approving the Anglian Pass arrangement without boat users being consulted but it was agreed that the purpose of the NAC was to deal with such matters. However the proposals as agreed by the Navigation Advisory Committee should be published on the Middle Level Commissioners' website as soon as possible. It had proved impossible to give advance notice of the proposals to boat users because of the tight time schedule the three authorities were working to and the need to report to the respective committees and boards.

As soon as all three authorities had approved the Anglian Pass, it would be advertised and the EA communications team will issue a press release. Colin Ovenden thought the Anglian Pass was an excellent idea and he acknowledged the work done by all three authorities in achieving this arrangement which would assist boaters.

There was a discussion on the level of registration fees. David Thomas advised that income from the 82 boats which had registered amounted to approximately £28,000 however the expenditure on navigation was likely to be nearly £300,000 and this would not cover the additional costs of administration and employing the Navigation Officer. He considered that the MLC were not overcharging on registration fees when you compare with rates for the other navigation authorities throughout the country. Registration fees could possibly be re-visited at some stage in the future once facilities on the navigation system had been improved, and more boats were attracted to the area. If the Committee were serious about making improvements and providing extra facilities for boaters, the MLC need to keep the fees at their current rate.

David Thomas said that fees would be an item on the next full meeting of the Navigation Advisory Committee.

RESOLVED that proposals for the introduction of the Anglian Pass by the three navigation authorities for the cost of £25, £50, £75 and £100 be approved.

Roger Sexton abstained from voting as did Phil Hughes.

### 3. Any Other Business

#### (i) Updates

David Thomas updated on the Navigation Byelaws which were still with Defra for confirmation. Following a query by Ms McShane yesterday, the latest information from Defra was that now that the EU Brexit legislation had been completed they would now be able to deal with their other normal departmental work although there were still delays due to the Covid 19 restrictions.

David Thomas also reported on the response recently received from the House of Lords about the allegation made by third parties about Breach of Undertakings. The House of Lords had found the complaints about the Breach of Undertakings to be unfounded and premature and had asked that the House of Lords be updated about the Undertakings and the Byelaws in six months' time.

David Thomas commented on a letter he had received from a boater requesting a refund on licence fees as he could not use his boat throughout the year because of the Covid restrictions. It was confirmed that all neighbouring navigation authorities, including the EA, the Broads

Authority, the Cams Conservators and the Canal and Rivers Trust were offering no concessions because of the Covid restrictions other than to offer the spread of the costs. The costs of providing navigation waters had remained the same, water levels had to be maintained and locks needed maintenance. David Thomas confirmed that for next year 21/22 there was to be no increase in EA charges which are currently being aligned with.

(ii) Announcement on the Market Town Bid

Councillor Laws and Philip Hughes confirmed the award of the bid to Fenland District Council. Councillor Laws stated that this was excellent news and would bring money into the north of the county. The announcement had been made on Boxing Day however the amount awarded had been £2.8m less than the bid but the reduction in the award would not affect the town centre or riverside proposals. The overall cost of the Project was £8.4m

(iii) Piling to River Bank

It was reported that Cambridgeshire County Council were to arrange piling works to the river bank and in order to carry out this piling, the navigation would probably be closed just before Easter. The proposed work would be carried out on the landing stage/gardens between numbers 87 and 97 Nene Parade.

(iv) Youth water related activities/March Watermens Club

David Thomas reported that following discussions with Colin Ovenden at the Watermens Club, a tri-partite meeting had been arranged with the Middle Level Commissioners, the Middle Level Watermens Club and Fenland District Council on a community based project which would involve young people being involved in the waterways and the possible re-location of the sanitation point.

(v) Replacement Moorings at Well Creek

It was reported that materials had now been ordered for the replacement of moorings which had originally been constructed by the Well Creek Trust but were now being refurbished by Middle Level Commissioners and would be maintained by the Commissioners going forward. The Commissioners were working to a budget of £15,000 and they would do as much work as possible working within that budget.

(vi) Fenland Moorings Adjacent to the Library

Phil Hughes confirmed that these moorings had been damaged and been taken out of use. He confirmed that the proposals contained in the Market Town bid would increase the number of moorings on the riverside by the bridge and that because of this it may be the case that the damaged moorings would not be replaced in the future, however this would depend on funding.

(vii) Minutes of the Meeting

Roger Sexton asked if the minutes could be circulated shortly after the Navigation Advisory Committee in draft before they were confirmed at the next meeting of the Navigation Advisory Committee.

(viii) Recent High Rainfall Events

David Thomas advised that two boats had sunk in Bill Fen Marina because of heavy rainfall. Boaters should be aware that water levels can change rapidly in the Middle Level

Commissioners waters and when boats are moored, allowance should be made for this. Two other recovered sunken boats are being stored in the Middle Level Commissioners depot.

(ix) Residential Boat Moorings Sub Committee

David Thomas reported that this meeting had taken place attended by Alan Wildman himself and the Assistant Clerk and there had been useful discussions about what was required of boaters for residential moorings. David Thomas stated he was to hold a meeting with RRR Consultants who were acting as consultants for Fenland District Council on the need for residential moorings as this work was necessary for the Fenland District Council Local Plan.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 10.00 am.

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Chairman