

MINUTES OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 23rd MARCH 2020

Present

M Heading	-	Middle Level Commissioners
D C Thomas	-	" " "
L McShane	-	" " "
K Russell	-	" " "
C Howes	-	Inland Waterways Association
R Sexton	-	East Anglian Waterways Association
A Wildman	-	Residential Boat Owners' Association
N Arnold	-	Environment Agency
P Syred	-	Fox Narrowboats Ltd

1. Apologies for absence

Messrs J Brown (Middle Level Commissioners) Kye Jerrom (Environment Agency – Fisheries Team) and P Hughes (Fenland District Council). Apologies also from Councillor Dee Laws who experience difficulties in joining the meeting online.

David Thomas introduced Councillor Dee Laws as a member of the Navigation Advisory Committee who is a member of Fenland District Council and a Middle Level Commissioners Board member.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the Navigation Advisory Committee held on the 10th February 2020 were approved.

Chris Howes referred to his comments on considering scope in the future for electricity charging points, which had been omitted from the item on facilities provision.

3. Byelaws

Lorna McShane advised that the amendment to the Byelaws proposed and approved by the NAC, regarding the use of two ropes when using the locks had been made. The Byelaws needed to be re-printed and sealed and would be sent to the Middle Level Commissioners Chairman, Mr Marc Heading for signature ready for them to be submitted to Defra.

4. Update on Registration/Charging/Reciprocal arrangements

David Thomas advised that an Agreement was to be signed and submitted to the Environment Agency which would allow the Middle Level Commissioners to sell temporary vessel registrations on behalf of the Environment Agency.

David Thomas outlined the steps taken to date to deal with Covid-19.

A Risk Assessment had been carried out and as far as possible staff were now working from home and measures had been put in operation in the office to ensure the safety of the staff when there.

With regard to licensing, all enquiries were being dealt with either by telephone or email as the offices were closed to the public. The MLC website and Twitter were being used to keep waterway users updated.

Nathan Arnold advised that the Environment Agency were following Government guidelines. They were discouraging the public coming into the offices and not handling cash but were awaiting further advice from National Head Office.

Restrictions had been imposed on locks and it was accepted that there would be severe difficulties with enforcement. It was also noted that boaters may be reluctant to licence their vessels for the first time if they could not use them.

In the present circumstances it was considered that it would be very difficult to implement the new licencing system from 1st April 2020. The Navigation Committee's recommendation was that the requirement for licencing should therefore be postponed until the 1st September 2020. It was further recommended that fees now be set at 50% of the Environment Agency's fees for each category of boat and Nathan Arnold agreed that the previously agreed capped proposal for Environment Agency visitor licence costs should not be progressed this year.

The Committee considered possible financial difficulties which could arise for boaters during the Covid-19 lockdown.

The Committee suggested that arrangements for persons in financial difficulty be that there should be some discretion and flexibility and that a Direct Debit arrangement for example would allow boaters to spread the registration fee over a period of months.

With regard to the Temporary Licence arrangement with the Environment Agency, Middle Level Commissioners would not be selling these Licences on behalf of the Environment Agency this year. Temporary Licences for Environment Agency waters would therefore only be available from the EA.

5. Other Covid-19 Action Plan Matters

It was noted that a number of organisations had extended the time boats can remain on moorings during the Covid-19 period.

David Thomas confirmed that the Middle Level Commissioners had only restricted access to locks and that all the non-lock side moorings in the Middle Level system were either private or owned by Parish/Town Councils or Fenland District Council.

6. Other user interest – fishing/recreation/tourism

Although there was nothing to report on these matters at the current meeting, it was agreed that this item should remain on the agenda for future meetings.

7. Any other business

- Kevin Russell is dealing with enquiries from boaters on registration. Kevin's Mobile number is 07725 134170 and it was agreed that this number could be passed to boaters who may need advice and assistance on the new registration arrangements.
- Ramsey Moorings – there was nothing further to report but Roger Sexton advised that this matter had been discussed at the IWA meeting and it was felt that the winding hole must be enlarged to accommodate 70 foot plus boats.
- David Thomas updated the meeting on the Fenland District Council Market Towns bid and advised that there were navigation elements in the bid including the provision of an improved water frontage in the town centre and moorings.

8. Date of next meeting

28th May 2020.

.....
Chairman