

MINUTES OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 16th FEBRUARY 2021

Present

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

1. Apologies for absence

P Hughes (Fenland District Council) and C Middleton (Environment Agency).

2. Declarations of Interests

Councillor Laws declared an interest in any matter which involved a planning application as she was a member of Fenland District Council’ Planning Committee.

Lorna McShane reminded members of the Committee that before each of them had taken up their appointment to the Committee they had completed a Members’ Interests form which would need to be updated by members if any of their interests changed. David Thomas stated he held a number of positions on outside bodies and if required he was quite happy to list these for inspection but also noted that he attended the meetings as an officer of the Board, rather than an appointed member and that he had no voting rights.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the Navigation Advisory Committee held on the 10th November 2020 and the 22nd January 2021 were approved.

4. COVID-19 Action Plan Update

David Thomas gave an update on the COVID-19 situation as regards to the offices. The offices remained closed to the public; staff were in the office to take calls and direct them to the appropriate member of staff and as previously advised the waterways remained closed except for essential travel.

5. Resolutions from the Board meeting

David Thomas explained that the Board held two meetings annually; in April and November each year. There had been no full board meeting since the 5th November therefore there was nothing further to report under this item.

6. Membership

There were no changes to report and no new notifications had been received for membership of the Committee.

One outstanding item from the last agenda of the Committee was to approach Huntingdonshire District Council for them to nominate a member to represent the Council on the Navigation Advisory Committee or alternatively an approach could be made to Ramsey Town Council to seek a representative from the Town Council. Councillor Laws apologised that she was unsuccessful in her approach to Huntingdonshire District Council to seek a Council member for the Committee. David Thomas stated that the needs of the Committee would change over the years as the Middle Level Commissioners matured as a navigation authority. It is currently believed that it is very important to engage with local authorities in the area so that they know the value of navigation to their areas. David Thomas agreed to write to the Leader of Huntingdonshire District Council to seek a Council member to represent Huntingdonshire District Council on the Committee. Stephen Whittome said he could make contact with Ramsey Town Council as an alternative to seek who could represent on the Town Council on the Committee if needed.

7. Tourism Update including March Town and Ramsey Market Town District Council Bids

David Thomas advised the Committee that the Market Town bids for both Ramsey and March had been successful and that the March town bid included development and refurbishment along the waterfront which would enhance the character of the water frontage. David Thomas stated he had been to provide a quotation for the cost of the construction of moorings in Ramsey, but that this excluded the cost of the IWA aspiration to increase the size of the turning head. Roger Sexton enquired about the use of trusts for fundraising for development such as the Ramsey moorings and on the use of volunteers. The representatives on the Committee from the Middle Level Commissioners confirmed that they would support and encourage any trust which would benefit the navigation system. David Thomas confirmed that he had always been keen on the use of volunteers which could be progressed once the COVID-19 restrictions were removed. David Thomas referred to the developments proposed by the Watermen's Club. The Fenland District Council Local Plan Review was currently being undertaken and Councillor Laws stated that one of the issues she had raised was a community on the water to provide moorings and facilities for residential boaters. Councillor Laws also advised that she had asked Phil Hughes to investigate whether the moorings in March which were in need of repair were insured under the Council's insurance policy and if funding for their improvement and repair would be obtained from that source.

8. Residential Moorings Strategy

David Thomas advised the Committee that he had been allocated a slot at the next Developers Forum to discuss the value of waterfront development and development in relation to the provision of residential moorings. In developing the Residential Moorings Strategy David Thomas advised the Committee that he had a discussion with RRR who were Fenland District Council's consultants assisting with the development of the Local Plan Review. RRR had

found it difficult to obtain the data they needed because of the COVID-19 restrictions but they needed to establish how many residential boaters there were on the system. This information was essential to the research they were carrying out on behalf of the Council. Alan Wildman said that the RBOA would be happy to link with RRR and give the information they had about the increasing desire of people to live on the water permanently. It was noted by the Committee in the Fenland District Council area a number of residential boaters were socially disadvantaged people who were using boat living as an affordable form of accommodation and therefore when considering provision of residential moorings in an area it was important to consider the need for sanitation and other facilities within easy reach of the moorings. Colin Ovenden stated that a number of live aboards using the waters in the area had learning disabilities and this presented challenges in obtaining help and assistance from the various agencies in the area. Jonathan Brown stated that whilst the Middle Level Commissioners were not in the business of providing social care it was important that these issues were recognised by the Committee. David Thomas advised that the House of Commons wished to receive an update on the House of Lords undertakings this summer.

RESOLVED to continue to pursue the actions on the development of the Residential Moorings Strategy.

9. Facilities Provision

David Thomas reported that rural moorings were to be provided on the Syklark land and signs were being erected. Rural moorings were also to be provided at Yaxley. Also, as previously reported the reconstruction of the moorings at Salters Lode were in hand. At the time of report materials had been delivered so that work would be commenced and completed on these moorings at Salters Lode by Easter. Other suitable locations would also be looked at for the further provision of rural moorings. It was suggested by the Committee that the Golden Lion pub at Stonea might make an excellent mooring with access to the pub just across the road.

Chris Howes stated that the IWA had in the past used this as a mooring place as it gave access to the historic pub and was an attractive place to moor.

It was agreed that development of additional moorings at the Golden Lion pub would be investigated.

10. Update on Licencing/Charging/Reciprocal arrangements/Anglian Pass

The Environment Agency, Cam Conservators and Middle Level Commissioners had now all agreed the arrangements for the issue of an Anglian Pass which was an annual pass allowing access to all Environment Agency, Middle Level Commissioners' and Cam Conservators waters. Information about the new pass was available on the Environment Agency website and the Middle Level Commissioners navigation website. Forms would be available for download on the Environment Agency's website and the Anglian Pass would be issued by the Environment Agency. Councillor Laws asked whether information about the Anglian Pass could be passed on to Phil Hughes for including on the Fenland District Council website. Chris Howes stated that the annual pass had been welcomed by the IWA and would allow seamless transition through the three waterways. David Thomas reported that the application forms for registration for next year, April 2021, onwards were available on the website. However, at the moment, boaters are not allowed access to their boats and any travel on the waterways is severely restricted because of COVID-19. The COVID-19 restrictions were also making any enforcement on the registration of the boats difficult so enforcement would proceed as soon as the current restrictions were removed. Councillor Laws stated that Fenland District

Council were not policing their moorings because of the COVID-19 restrictions on the movement of boats.

11. Non Boater Waterway User Interests – fishing/recreation/tourism

As Chris Middleton was not present at the meeting there was no update on fishing matters although David Thomas did advise that fishing swims with platforms were being provided by the Middle Level Commissioners along the River Nene in March. This provision was being funded by the Environment Agency.

12. Engagement with Waterway Users

Chris Howes stated it was very regrettable that the Middle Level Watermen's Club were not able to have their regatta last May due to the COVID-19 restrictions and it was hoped that a future event could be planned by the Club. David Thomas stated that the offer from the Middle Level Commissioners to host the event remained open.

13. Byelaws

Miss McShane reported that she had had a recent update from Defra regarding confirmation of the Byelaws. The solicitors had almost completed their due diligence test and procedures were being put in place to pass the Byelaws to the Minister for sign off. Defra had though asked for some additional information on the powers that the individual Byelaws were made under and this was currently being prepared ready to be sent to Defra.

14. Boat Removal Protocol

David Thomas said this had been a standing item on the agenda and now that the boat removal protocol had been prepared and approved this item could probably be removed from the agenda. David Thomas confirmed that once the Byelaws were confirmed by Defra it would be necessary to append the boat removal protocol to the Byelaws before publication of them.

15. Recommendations to the Board

The Navigation Advisory Committee requested a resolution be put to the Board at its next meeting in April to offer support and assistance to any trust that was formed which was not in conflict with any objective of the Navigation Advisory Committee and the Middle Level Commissioners and also that they would support the use of volunteers on the waterway.

16. Any Other Business

The Committee asked that the Middle Level Commissioners staff be congratulated on the handling of the flooding event over the Christmas period and Nathan Arnold stated that the Environment Agency had had a problem with water on the Old Bedford at Welches Dam pumping station. The Environment Agency had had to introduce temporary pumps at this location. David Thomas also said that a review of the flooding event was being carried out with the Internal Drainage Boards and other agencies. Councillor Laws commended the work of the Internal Drainage Boards in the area. She stated that she realised how important it was

to prevent people filling in ditches and how important they were to flood risk management. Roger Sexton said that Project Hereward still needed agreement with the Environment Agency and that the group will meet again after the COVID-19 restrictions are removed.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is Tuesday 23rd March 2021 at 10.00 am.

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Chairman