

**Middle Level
Commissioner's
Residential Mooring
Strategy**

V1.0

Background

The Middle Level Commissioners have been a Navigation Authority for over 150 years. Until 2018 they operated under various Acts of parliament dating back to the 1800's. These Acts and the associated byelaws were not deemed sufficient to allow for the operation and management of a modern navigation and were devoid of powers to charge for the use of the waterways by those with access to vessels for living or relaxing on the Middle Level waters.

In November 2018 the Middle Level Act was given royal assent and came into force. During its process through the lead up to being passed this private Act underwent detailed scrutiny in both the Houses and during its time in the Lords the Commissioners were asked to give an undertaking to the Lords to produce (and periodically update) a Residential Mooring Strategy.

The licencing and charging for the use of Middle Level Waterways were introduced in September 2020 and updated Byelaws were approved by the Secretary of State and came into force in May 2021. At the time of production of this report some XXX boats have been registered with the Middle Level Commissioners of which YYY were declared as residential vessels.

Aim

The aim of this strategy is to seek ways in which the Middle Level Commissioners can support the delivery of residential moorings to meet the needs of those vessel owners who either live permanently onboard and within Middle Level Waters or who are classified as **continuous cruisers** who live aboard their vessels but have no fixed home mooring. The needs of these two groups will differ and are covered later in the strategy.

Constraints

The Middle Level Commissioners are not a Planning Authority and cannot therefore grant permission for residential moorings. Neither are they substantial land owners with access to land which can be developed for residential moorings. Where land is owned it tends to be the water course and bank sides only, this would limit what could be delivered without third party land owners' involvement.

Need

It is recognised that there is a need for more residential moorings in the Middle Level district and that this need is only likely to increase as more people instigate life changes that result in them swapping permanent or temporary housing for residing on a boat. The reasons why people choose to live on vessels will be wide ranging and include but are not limited to;

- Desire to simplify life
- Desire to get closer to nature
- Wish to be more flexible
- Wish or need to reduce financial outgoings
- A change in personal circumstances
- Retirement
- Mental health reasons

The actual need is currently unquantified though for a number of reasons. The main being the lack of data. The Commissioners have yet to complete a full year of licencing so have no complete record set of the current numbers of residential boaters permanently located on Middle Level waters. Fenland District Council are currently separately seeking to identify this need and the Commissioners are committed to working with them to get better data.

Perceived Benefits of Residential Moorings

The Commissioners have liaised with the **Residential Boat Owners' Association** who have members who are continuous cruisers and from this the following assessment of benefits has been drawn up. Where a number of residential craft exist in a single location, the manager and/or caretaker of the site often resides aboard a boat him/her-self, so removing the need for a land-based management dwelling.

Of necessity, residential boaters do tend to be environmentally low impact, every element of domestic consumption requiring far more personal input and control than land-based living:

- Electricity frequently has to be generated on-board and stored in long life battery banks; generation often being via small unobtrusive wind turbines and/or boat roof mounted solar panels. Many pieces of standard equipment and/or devices are highly efficient, running on a 12 volt, low amperage, supply
- The live-aboard boater has to closely manage electricity consumption. Even where a land-based supply is available, consumption aboard an average residential craft is minimal
- Living space aboard most residential craft is usually more compact than that in even a small house or flat. This makes space heating easier and more economic (less waste), particularly as craft can easily be heavily (heat) insulated
- Water tanks need to be filled regularly so the residential boater tends to use precious water sparingly
- Storage aboard most boats is at something of a premium, reducing the ability to acquire or keep unnecessary/unneeded clutter - less consumption equals less drain on natural resources, equals less waste creation
- The use of separating/compost toilet systems is becoming more common amongst live-aboard boaters. With a little planning, these systems can be wholly natural, requiring no unpleasant chemical input, creating no unpleasant odours and generating, to a very short time scale, fully usable soil compost. So successful are these systems, an online user forum has arisen giving free advice to interested parties
- Residential boating clearly places occupants at the heart of nature, wildlife and seasonal variations, this often being the driving force behind boat life; experience has shown that responsible residential boaters fully embrace an appreciation of, and respect for, conservation of the natural world around us

Actions Taken to Date

- The NAC have set up a sub-committee to look at the need and ways in which encouraging and supporting residential moorings can be delivered.
- Officers employed by the Commissioners have liaised with the main Planning Authority, Fenland District Council stating the wish to be involved and consulted on the emerging Local Plan. This has received positive response, however COVID19 has slowed down the production of the Local Plan.
- Officers have also met virtually and fed back to the RRR Consultancy who have been employed by the Council to investigate and report back on boat dwellers accommodation needs. This piece of work is specifically designed to assess what the requirement is for residential mooring and is of course the missing piece of information alluded to earlier in the report. It is intended that this will inform the local plan and the data will be used to look for suitable locations for sites to be included within the allocation process.
- Presentation given to the Fenland Developers Forum encouraging developers to consider opportunities for seeking to provide permanent residential moorings, given the advantages clearly identified.

Further Actions

- Continue to work with the Planning Authorities to encourage and support the provision of residential moorings, both permanent and transitory.
- Work with developers and land owners interested in promoting sites for residential moorings.
- Once a full licencing year has been completed use this information and any data gathered from other sources to review the demand for residential moorings and feed this information back to the planning authorities.
- Work with local and national navigation bodies to understand need and requirements and take on board any shared learning that might be available.
- Once Fenland District Council have published their Local Plan review this strategy. Looking particularly at how best to support delivery and identify what constraints may have to be placed on residential mooring developments (on a site-by-site basis) to ensure that the moorings delivered are effective and do not impact negatively on other users of the waterways.
- Publicly support initiatives for residential mooring, for example by engaging with Parish Councils developing Parish Plans.