

MINUTES OF MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 6th APRIL 2022 at 09.30 AM

Present

D C Thomas	-	Middle Level Commissioners
L McShane	-	“ “
K Russell	-	“ “
J Brown	-	“ “
M Daines	-	Middle Level Watermen’s Club
C Howes	-	Inland Waterways Association
R Sexton	-	East Anglian Waterways Association
P Syred	-	Fox Narrowboats Ltd
A Wildman	-	Residential Boat Owners Association

1. Apologies for absence

Nathan Arnold (Environment Agency), Cllr Steve Corney (Huntingdonshire District Council), Phil Hughes (Fenland District Council, Cllr Dee Laws (Fenland District Council) Chris Middleton (EA Fisheries) and Stephen Whittome (Middle Level Commissioners)

2. Declarations of Interests

David Thomas reported that since the last meeting he has been appointed as the Vice Chairman of AINA (Association of Inland Navigation Authorities).

3. Confirmation of Minutes of Meeting held on 8th December 2021

The minutes of the Navigation Advisory Committee held on the 8th December 2021 were approved with the exception of a clarification requested by Chris Howes who explained that in relation to the reference to the facilities at Ely Marina he was referring to the jointly owned East Cambridgeshire District Council and Environment Agency facilities in Willow Walk, Ely.

4. Matters Arising from Minutes

There were no further matters arising from the Minutes.

5. Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman

It was moved and seconded that Chris Howes, representing the IWA, be appointed as Chairman and Alan Wildman, representing the Residential Boat Owners Association, be appointed as Vice-Chairman.

6. Membership

David Thomas reported that Mike Daines had been appointed to the Committee to represent the Middle Level Watermen’s Club.

It was confirmed that Chris Middleton of the Environment Agency was now a member of the Committee.

5. Tourism Update including March Town and Ramsey Schemes

March Town Scheme

Phil Hughes apologised by email for not being able to be in attendance at the meeting and for not being able to forward an update on Fenland District Council matters for the meeting, but he would send an update for circulation post meeting.

David Thomas expressed concern that the toilet and pump out facilities and the attractive terracing along the Old River Nene had been removed from the Town Centre Redevelopment Plans and said that his concerns had been conveyed to Fenland District Council, and he had contacted Cllr Dee Laws and Cllr Will Sutton about the need to retain the pump out facilities. David Thomas was of the view that if the terrace along the river was not to be included in the proposals, then at the very least the trees along the river should be removed to open up the river to the Town Centre. David Thomas had discussed tree removal in the park area along the river and the possibility of the Commissioners assisting with this work. He was aware that this proposal would be unpopular with some of the property owners along the river, but it was important that the redevelopment proposals were a springboard for developing the waterfront in March.

With regard to the collapsed mooring in the ownership of Fenland District Council, the Council proposed to repair the mooring if there was sufficient funding available.

Chris Howes said that it was very important for the NAC to get involved in the discussions about the facilities for boaters in March Town Centre. The facilities needed to be retained and he would involve the Inland Waterways Association if necessary. The position of Fenland District Council Officers was that pump out facilities were available at Foxes Marina; however, the Marina does not have sufficient capacity and the Marina is not on the mains sewer system so it requires tankers to take away the waste. Paula Syred advised that the Marina would be unwilling to take any additional rubbish for disposal because of the cost involved.

The Middle Level Watermen's Club have decided they would not wish to have the facilities on their premises as they would take up limited mooring space and as the members of the Club were just volunteers they could not run/maintain them.

RESOLVED

- (i) The NAC to make representations to Fenland District Council and ask for a joint meeting between MLC and Officers and Members of Fenland District Council and if necessary ask the local MP, Stephen Barclay, to attend.
- (ii) That a letter be sent from NAC stating that the Committee expected the Council to maintain the current level of services for boaters in March.
- (iii) A letter be sent to Stephen Barclay if it is felt that FDC is ignoring the NAC's letter.

Ramsey Basin

The new moorings were complete, subject to some tidying up at the site. It was proposed that there should be an Opening Ceremony involving the Town Council, but this has been delayed because of the Local Government Purdah period until after the Local Government Elections.

Roger Sexton asked if the MLC Engineers could look at the winding hole at Ramsey and do some costings for works to improve and enlarge it. It was difficult for larger narrow boats to

turn around at this location. It was possible to turn using the entrance to the tunnel under the Great Whyte and it was important that no moorings be allowed here, in order to facilitate turning.

8. Facilities Provision (including possible funding of The George Inn moorings)

David Thomas stated that Steve Corner was very keen to get moorings on the river adjacent to The George Inn and had asked if the Town Council would contribute a sum towards the works would the Commissioners add to it to provide the public moorings at this location. He also advised that he would discuss the matter with HDC to see if they could find some money for this.

David Thomas advised that the current income from registration of boats was in the region of £115,000 and it was hoped that this figure would increase to £165,000 for the year 2022-23. In view of the current expenditure on navigation he was unable to commit the Commissioners to match funding every scheme but he would see what he could do. £50,000 had been spend on dredging through Well Creek, works were needed to the lock gates at Marmont Priory Lock, the estimated costs of these works were £150,000. Additionally, there were the costs of employing the Navigation Officer, potential court costs for enforcement action and costs of boats being removed from the waterways.

The Navigation Accounts were currently being prepared and these would be available for inspection.

9. Update on Registration/Charging/Reciprocal arrangements/Anglian Pass

The cost of licensing a boat had increased by 4% for the current year.

The EA had proposed an increase of 4% for year 1, 4% for year 2 and 2% for year 3. Due to the current rate of inflation this may need to be reviewed. There had been no increase to the cost of the Anglian Pass – which was still £25/£50/£75/£100 depending on boat size.

David Thomas advised that it had not been possible to gain entry to Bill Fen Marina to carry out enforcement, but the Marina Office Manager had invited Kevin Russell to attend the Marina on the 7th April to place Notices/Letters on unregistered boats.

The Committee acknowledged the difficulty in enforcement at the Marina. As well as registration for the current year, many of the boats in the Marina had not been licenced for the previous year. David Thomas suggested that when issuing licences for the current year a letter advising about non-registration for the previous year should be included along with an invoice.

David Thomas advised that with regard to the Gold Licence, discussions were still continuing with the Canal & River Trust. There were however no proposals currently for MLC to join the Gold Licence scheme. The Gold Licence was recognised in the Middle Level waters if an Anglian Pass was purchased.

10. Year End Financial Report

The year end accounts were currently being prepared and when completed they would be available to NAC, but David Thomas confirmed that the income from registration in the current year was in the region of £115,000.

11. Licencing of Small Craft

This matter had been raised by Well Creek Trust and a meeting was proposed to have a further discussion about licensing of small craft.

12. Non-Boater Waterway User Interests – fishing/recreation/tourism

As Chris Middleton and Phil Hughes were not in attendance at the meeting there was no further update on this Agenda item.

13. Engagement with Waterways Users

David Thomas advised that he had prepared and circulated a newsletter to update boat users on current issues and facilities being provided.

14. Recommendations to the Board

David Thomas summarised the matters that he would be reporting to the next meeting of the Board from NAC.

- (i) A request for funding for tree clearance in the park area adjacent to the river in March.
- (ii) Funding provision of £5,000-£10,000 to support works/facilities in the Town Centre.
- (iii) Funding to contribute to the provision of moorings near The George Inn on the Forty Foot River.
- (iv) To seek the view of the Board on a letter being sent to Fenland District Council about facilities for boaters in March.

15. Feedback during the Period

David Thomas stated that in general there had been fewer grumbles and the licencing system feels more settled and there appeared to be a general acceptance of the licensing of boats.

16. Any Other Business

- (i) Alan Wildman advised the Committee about disputes that were occurring on the Thames with the Canal and River Trust.
- (ii) With regard to the provision of residential moorings, Fenland District Council would be putting the Local Plan out for consultation in the near future and this should contain some proposals for residential moorings.
- (iii) The Chairman wished to thank the Water Chaplaincy for the time they had spent discussing their work with Lorna McShane and Kevin Russell. The Chaplaincy had offered to come to a future meeting of the NAC and he wished to formally acknowledge and record that discussion with the Chaplaincy had taken place.
- (iv) David Thomas circulated logos for a letterhead for NAC and said he welcomed any feedback/preferences for the logo.

(v) Mike Daines raised some matter on behalf of the Middle Level Watermen's Club

- Some of his members had experienced difficulty in accessing the rural moorings, particularly at Skylark Garden Centre and The George Inn.
- Would it be possible to have an early warning system about water levels on the Middle Level System? David Thomas explained that with the introduction of the new telemetry system it would be possible to create a separate page with water levels for boaters. This would be done for various locations such as Woodwalton, Ramsey and Well Creek and he could look at this information being provided at other key locations.
- In response to a question about the requirement for Boat Safety Certificates, David Thomas explained that the undertaking given to the House of Lords only required Boat Safety Certificates to be provided 12 months from the Navigation Byelaws coming into force, and that this would be a requirement from 1st June 2022.
- Concern was raised about personal safety issues for the Navigation Officer in view of his lone working and possible confrontation with boat owners and it was agreed that the Navigation Officer should acquire a stab vest for his personal protection.

17. Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 21st June 2022 at 09.30 at the Middle Level Offices

.....
Chairman