



# MIDDLE LEVEL NAVIGATION NOTES

## 2019

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## **Note to Navigators on changes coming into force in 2020**

In November 2018 Royal assent was given to a new Middle Level Act. This new Act allows the Middle Level Commissioners, amongst other things, to require boats using the Middle Level waters to be registered, safe and insured. This is a significant step forward for us and I hope that this move, to more closely align ourselves with neighbouring navigation authorities, will be welcomed. The requirement to register vessels is likely to come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. In the meantime, preparations are underway to be ready for this change. These will include entering into discussions with other navigation bodies about reciprocal arrangements for licencing craft so that seamless travel through UK navigations is possible. I also believe that the change in arrangements will, in the long-term, lead to improvements in the provision of facilities within our system and we will be working with interested bodies including local councils, the Environment Agency and several member-based organisations to explore what would be of most benefit and how best these new facilities and improvements can be facilitated. We will, of course, keep you posted on progress.

David Thomas  
Chief Executive  
Middle Level Commissioners

# **GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBILITY**

- ❖ **When navigating on a river, people must accept they are dealing with flowing water.**
- ❖ **Navigators must be self-reliant and responsible for their own safety.**
- ❖ **The decision to navigate must be taken by the designated boat skipper.**
- ❖ **It is the responsibility of the boat skipper to be properly equipped for the type of boating undertaken.**
- ❖ **When there are strong currents, higher water levels or cold weather conditions, the risk associated with any river activity increases.**
- ❖ **Be courteous and always navigate with care and avoid speeding.**
- ❖ **Do not take risks and never underestimate the power of the water.**

1. The network of fenland waterways, which provide arterial drainage and flood protection to 700 sq km of highly productive fen farmland and a large number of commercial and domestic properties and constitutes a navigable system between the rivers Great Ouse and Nene (see map on page 10), is maintained by the Middle Level Commissioners.

The cost of the continual maintenance of the channels and structures including locks is met primarily out of drainage rates and special levies. No charges are levied on pleasure boats at present. The name of each boat should, nonetheless, be clearly shown and visitors are required to register with the lock-keepers at Stanground or Salter's Lode, when entering the system. The vessel's Boat Safety Certificate will need to be available for inspection upon entering the system. The majority of boat-owners entering the Middle Level do so to gain access between its neighbouring major river systems. To avoid shallows or low bridges, the Commissioners request the co-operation of those persons navigating through the system by adhering to the recommended 'Link-Route' indicated on the map.

2. A maximum speed limit of 5mph is operated throughout the system with the exceptions of King's Dyke (Stanground Lock to Ashline Lock), Whittlesey Dyke (Ashline Lock to Turningtree Bridge), Well Creek (Marmont Priory Lock to Salter's Lode Lock) and Benwick Village (Whittlesey Road Bridge to Half Penny Toll Bridge) where the maximum speed limit is 4mph. See page 17 for further information. **Speed must be further reduced in the interests of safety, to avoid wash, when passing through areas of riverside development, congested areas or by moored boats.**
3. The Middle Level Byelaws require that:
  - a) no refuse shall be thrown overboard into the river or deposited on the adjacent banks.
  - b) boats shall be properly moored and secured so as not to impede or endanger the passage of other craft (mooring two or more abreast is forbidden).
  - c) sunken boats must be removed by the owner failing which the Commissioners may do so at the owner's expense.
  - d) moorings are not constructed on any Middle Level watercourse without the Commissioners' prior approval and written consent.
  - e) digging into the banks of a Middle Level watercourse is prohibited.
  - f) craft shall meet the requirements of the Boat Safety Scheme.
  - g) boat movements during the hours of darkness are prohibited.
4. Excepting for public highways and any public open spaces, **ALL** lands adjoining Middle Level river banks are private property, and the normal laws of trespass apply to such property. There are public rights of way along some banks. **In particular, it must be noted that apart from designated public moorings, mooring is not allowed without the permission of the owner of the mooring rights. In most cases, this will be the Commissioners. It is the responsibility of navigators to ensure that they have the right to moor at any location.** A copy of the map showing the lengths of waterway owned by the Commissioners is available at <https://middlelevel.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Fisheries.pdf>.

5. The Middle Level waters contain a valuable coarse fishery, which is intensively used between mid-June and mid-March. Navigators are requested to afford the usual courtesy to anglers.
6.
  - a) Aquatic weeds occur throughout most of the system during the summer period and ropes may be placed (floated) across the rivers to collect cut weeds. If these are encountered, they **must** be removed before passing and **carefully and securely replaced** afterwards.
  - b) The banks of many watercourses are subject to erosion. Piles and other revetment works are installed to provide support and protection. These and shallows elsewhere may make navigation difficult. Care should, therefore, be taken when approaching or travelling close to the river edges to avoid any submerged hazards.
  - c) Navigators should be aware the Commissioners' fleet of weedcutting/lifting boats can be encountered anywhere within the Middle Level System. **Navigators are respectfully requested to sound their horn, make positive contact with the operative, reduce their speed immediately and pass the work boats in a safe manner.**
7. Navigators are advised to avoid the Main Drain beyond the public short stay moorings at Three Holes situated on the north-west bank just beyond Three Holes Bridge, which is navigable only as far as the Well Creek Aqueduct at Mullicourt Priory, and Old Pophams Eau, which is a dead-end spur north of Three Holes Bridge, as conditions there can be hazardous due to sudden pumping operations. **Navigation of Great Raveley Drain and Monks Lode ends at the Control Sluice and Conington Fen Bridge respectively.**
8. **Rainfall (flood events), pumping, water transfer in summer and wind can affect water levels.** They can thus also affect depth of water and headroom and special care/allowance should be taken when making passages with craft requiring maximum headroom, draught or length (for turning).
9. For **normal** minimum headrooms under low bridges see page 11. However these can vary from the quoted figures dependant on system water levels.

**Adequate clearance should be checked before passing under all bridges. It is the navigator's/designated skipper's responsibility to ensure that such clearance is available prior to attempts to navigate the system.**

**A number of both publicly and privately maintained structures affect or cross the Middle Level navigations. It is the responsibility of navigators to take all reasonable steps to ensure that their vessel can safely navigate around or through such structures and to assess any risks involved before doing so. The Commissioners should be informed of any structures which appear to present a hazard to navigation.**

10. Lodes End Lock is unattended. It will accommodate boats up to 20.70m (68'-0") long.

**Boats in the lock must be kept clear of the low-side penstock access walkway to avoid entrapment when the water level is raised.**

It is necessary to open the security fence gate to navigate the lock (see Note 15 - Keys).

Before leaving the lock please ensure that the penning sluices are fully closed, the security fence gate is locked and the chain between the large V-doors is in place. **The chain must be secured by the large end link to the spring loaded catch in the other door and left loose (not wrapped round the door posts) so that the doors can open the full length of the chain to permit gravity drainage when conditions allow.**

11. The turning area at Ramsey will normally accommodate boats up to 18.30m (60'-0") long (see Note 8).
12. During the winter period, and when conditions allow, ice-skating on Well Creek is a traditional local sport which attracts many people to the area. Disturbance of the ice, while it is forming, results in an uneven surface unsuitable for skating. Boat movements at these times are, therefore, frowned upon locally and should be avoided.
13. Dimensions of locks and structures on the 'Link-Route' are described in the following 'Recommended Link Route between Rivers Nene and Great Ouse'.

Stanground Lock is closed on Christmas Day, Tuesdays during November, December, January, February and the first week of March and after 1500hrs on Sundays. Salter's Lode Lock is closed on Christmas Day and Wednesdays during November, December, January, February and the first week of March. Marmont Priory Lock is closed on Christmas Day.

**An appointment is required for locking at Stanground (24 hours' notice) and Salter's Lode (tidal).**

An 'Ouse Key'/Lock Handle/Windlass (see Note 15 - Keys) is required to operate the penstocks/paddles/slackers at Ashline, Marmont Priory, Lodes End and Horseway locks.

14. The facilities at March Town Bridge service block are maintained by and remain the responsibility of Fenland District Council.

The following facilities are available to navigators at the March service block on a 'no charge' basis:

Drinking Water  
Boat Hold Refuse Disposal  
Chemical Toilet Disposal  
Tank Wash Out

Pump out facilities are also available at the service block at a set charge. Tokens for this can be purchased from Fenland District Council at County Road March and March library, located within a short distance in March town centre. Further information can be found on the Council web site, by phoning 01354 654321 or on the purple information board at the service block.

15. Keys:

A key, which will give access to the March service block and Ashline Lock and Lodes End Lock Security Compounds, can be purchased (price £5.00) at:

- a) Stanground Lock Tel: 07824 600470
- b) Salter's Lode Lock Tel: 01366 382292
- c) Middle Level Offices, 85 Whittlesey Road, March, Cambs. PE15 0AH  
Tel: 01354 653232
- d) Fox Narrow Boats Ltd - Boat Builders & Hirers, 10 Marina Drive, March (Marina off Old River Nene) Tel: 01354 652770.
- e) Bill Fen Marina, Mill Drove, Ramsey, Huntingdon (Marina off Ramsey High Lode) Tel: 01487 813621.
- f) Fenland District Council offices, County Road, March Tel: 01354 654321.
- g) March library Tel: 0345 045 5225.

An 'Ouse Key'/Lock Handle/Windlass can usually be purchased at the manned locks, marinas and March Library (price £12.00).

16. It is the Commissioners' policy that any stoppage to navigation, to accommodate routine planned work, to one of their waterways, locks or structures, should generally be no longer than four weeks and restricted to November to mid-March (excluding Christmas/New Year) period. Emergency or other work that needs to be carried out during low flows or cannot be completed in that time span, would be the exception. Information regarding navigation closures, for planned, routine and emergency works can be found on our website at <http://www.middlelevel.gov.uk/suspension-of-navigation-notices.aspx>.
17. Ladders and chains are provided to assist navigators when passing through locks. Their use, together with any other directions that may be signed, is recommended.

## **RECOMMENDED LINK ROUTE BETWEEN RIVERS NENE AND GREAT OUSE**

## 45.8 km (28.5 miles)

**STANGROUND LOCK** Length 24.40m (80'-0")  
Width 3.50m (11'-6") Keeper Mrs T Rootham-Hayward  
Tel. 07824 600470



See **Special Note 'A'**, page 13.

Maximum draught of boats larger than 11.00m (36'-0") long not to exceed 690mm (2'-3").

**24 hours' notice is required at Stanground Lock for passage both ways. If you have not made an appointment with the lock-keeper you may have to wait.**

Closed on Christmas Day; Tuesdays during November, December, January, February and the first week of March and after 1500hrs on Sundays.

**Do not enter lock without keeper in attendance.**

**King's Dyke** 8 bridges;  
minimum headroom  
approximately  
2.10m (7'-0").



**N.B.** Restricted length and sharp bend through Briggate, Whittlesey. Width between walls 4.27m (14'-0"). **Approach the bend slowly and put ashore a look-out to watch for oncoming boats while negotiating the bend.** Narrow boats up to 21.30m (70'-0") long have nevertheless negotiated King's Dyke to Ashline Lock, where there is a landing stage for visitors to Whittlesey (36hr limit) and a turning bay.

Turning facilities/limits (approximate maximum dimensions).

Stanground Lock ..... 18.30m (60'-0")  
Horsey Toll ..... 21.30m (70'-0") plus  
(approximately 1.6km east of Stanground Lock)  
Whittlesey ..... 21.30m (70'-0") plus  
(approximately 100m west of Ashline Lock)

**Whittlesey** : Shops, Fuel, Leisure Centre, Moorings, pub food etc.

**ASHLINE  
LOCK**

Length 27.40m (90'-0")  
Width 3.50m (11'-6")

UNATTENDED.



Boats in the lock must be held at least 1.0m (3'-3") clear of the upstream doors to avoid fouling the sill as the water level is lowered and well away from the downstream doors to avoid entrapment beneath the penstock/paddle/slackers access walkway when the water level is raised.

Please ensure that the upstream lock doors (King's Dyke side) and penstocks/paddles/slackers are closed after use. Leakage could rapidly lower the water level in King's Dyke and considerable difficulty could thereafter be experienced in restoring a satisfactory navigation level.

Navigators are also requested to leave Ashline Lock empty and the downstream lock doors (Whittlesey Dyke side) open.

In the event of problems, contact the Stanground lock-keeper or, if unobtainable, the Middle Level Office, Tel: 01354 653232.

**Whittlesey  
Dyke**

7 bridges;  
minimum headroom  
approximately  
2.05m (6'-9")

Main drainage channel.

**Old River  
Nene:  
Floods Ferry  
to  
Marmont  
Priory**

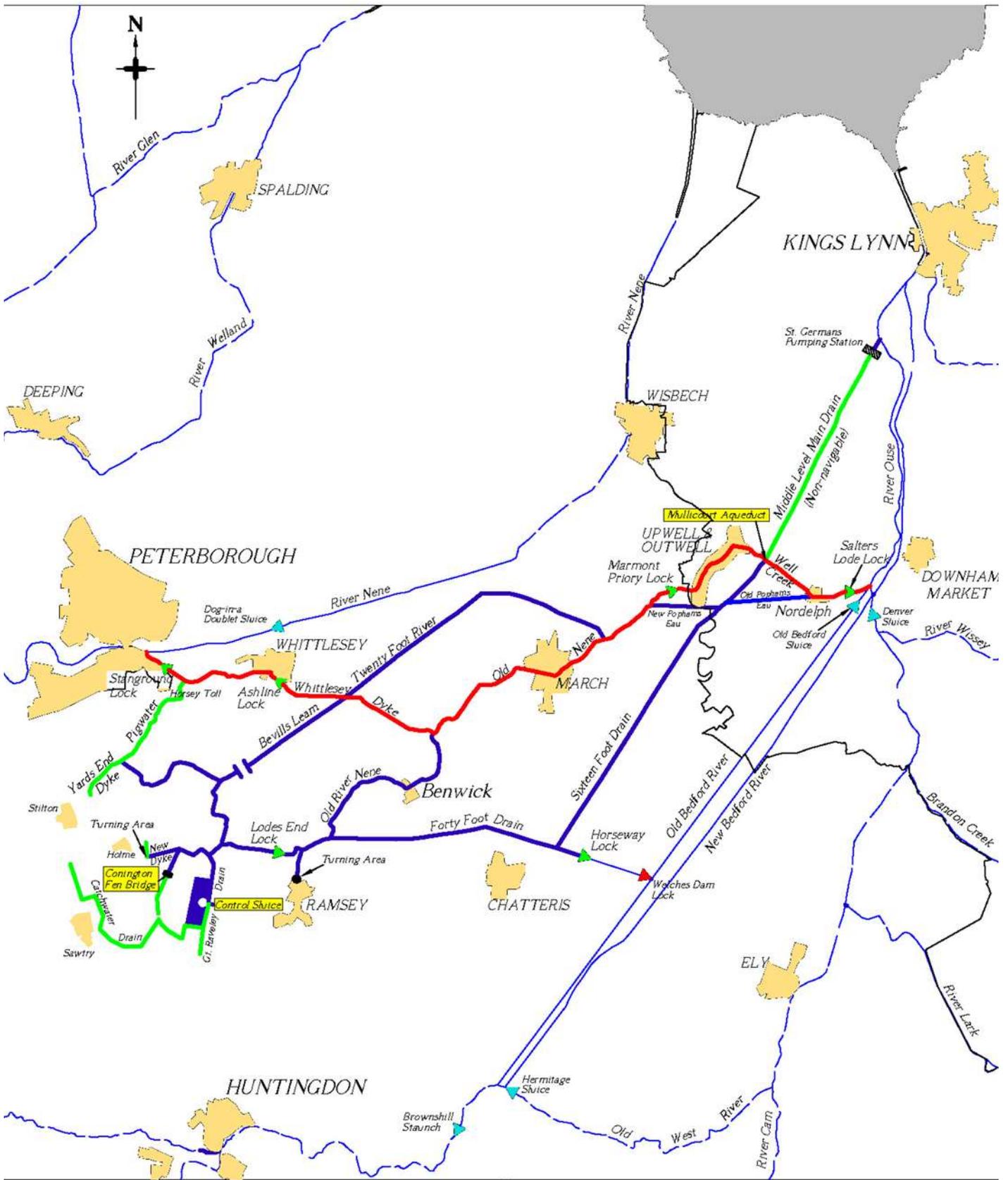
3 bridges;  
minimum headroom  
approximately  
1.91m (6'-4")

The river is wide and deep from Floods Ferry to March, and from March to Pophams Eau, but the sections through March Town and from Pophams Eau to Marmont Priory Lock are relatively shallow and should be navigated with care.



Moorings adjacent to March Town Bridge

March : Middle Level Offices, Fox Narrowboats Ltd, Moorings, Shops, Fuel, Sanitation Station, Leisure Centre, restaurants, fish & chips, pub food and cafes.



**KEY**

- MIDDLE LEVEL LINK ROUTE (Navigable) —
- OTHER NAVIGABLE MIDDLE LEVEL WATERCOURSES (See note 7) —
- M.L. WATERCOURSES (Non-Navigable) —
- RIVERS OUTSIDE M.L. —
- CAMBS/NORFOLK COUNTY BOUNDARY
- M.L. LOCKS ▶
- OTHER LOCKS ▶
- SLUICES ▶

## MIDDLE LEVEL COMMISSIONERS

D. Thomas B.Eng M.C.M.I Chief Engineer



Watercourse	Bridge *	Bridge number *	Headroom m	Headroom ft	Grid Reference
Sixteen Foot River	Bedlam Bridge	17	1.93	6' 4"	TL46799478
Sixteen Foot River	Boot's Bridge	21	1.98	6' 6"	TL44599120
Well Creek	Upwell Church Bridge	35	1.96	6' 5"	TF50520278
Well Creek	Methodist Chapel Footbridge	36	2.00	6' 7"	TF50130267
Old River Nene	White Fen Bridge	48	1.91	6' 4"	TL35729264
Old River Nene	Ramsey St Mary's Bridge	57	1.89	6' 2"	TL25528732
New Dyke	Charter House Farm Bridge	58	2.00	6' 7"	TL22358714
Twentry Foot River	Infield's Bridge	67	1.60	5' 2"	TF36960033
Twentry Foot River	Holloway's Bridge	68	1.91	6' 4"	TL35149892
Bevills Leam	Poplar Tree Bridge	72	2.00	6' 7"	TL31539611
Bevills Leam	Angle Corner Bridge	73	1.95	6' 5"	TL30859557
Bevills Leam	Chapel Bridge	74	1.99	6' 6"	TL28859405
Bevills Leam	Tebbit's Bridge	76	1.99	6' 6"	TL24939145
Old River Nene	Herbert's Bridge	77	1.77	5' 10"	TL24139101
Yaxley Lode	Bradford Bridge (Froghall)	78	1.56	5' 1"	TL22789169
Old River Nene	Exhibition (Stoke's) Bridge	80	1.53	5' 0"	TL24358822
Great Raveley Drain	Speed the Plough Bridge	87	1.87	6' 1"	TL23568699

#### Note

The map shown indicates only those bridges on the Middle Level System with the lowest headrooms. The headrooms on these and all bridges on the Middle Level navigable system may fluctuate, see page 2, notes 8 and 9.

The bridges shown on the map have been assigned a bridge number. This has been introduced to assist navigators in better pinpointing their position should they encounter difficulties.

Should the emergency services be required then, where possible, the nearest bridge number along with its grid reference should be quoted when calling for assistance.

**MARMONT  
PRIORY  
LOCK**

Length 28.00m (92'-0")  
Width 3.65m (12'-0")

Caretaker Mrs M Norton

See **Special Note 'B'**, page 13



Ensure that the lock doors and penstocks/paddles/slackers are properly closed after use. Leakage can rapidly lower the water level in Well Creek, which can sometimes require several days to restore a satisfactory navigation level. To assist in maintaining adequate water in the Creek, 'double-up' where possible when negotiating the lock.

**Well Creek**

15 bridges;  
minimum headroom  
approximately  
1.96m (6'-5")

Some sections of Well Creek in Upwell and Outwell are narrow and relatively shallow and should be navigated with care.



Turning facilities/limits (approximate maximum dimensions).

- Marmont Priory Lock (low-side) 15.30m (50'-0")
- Outwell Boat Basin ..... 21.30m (70'-0")
- Nordelph.....21.30m (70'-0") plus  
(approximately 100m west of highway bridge)
- Salter's Lode.....18.30m (60'-0")  
(approximately 120m west of Salter's Lode Lock)

***Villages of Upwell, Outwell and Nordelph:  
Moorings, Shops, Fuel, fish & chips and pub food.***

**SALTER'S  
LODE  
LOCK**

Length 18.90m (62'-0")  
Width 3.80m (12'-6")

Keeper Mr P Grodkiewicz  
Tel. Downham Market (01366) 382292.



Locking through to tidal river for limited periods each side of high tide. Possible passage for craft up to a length of 24.30m (80'-0") on level water (falling tide) or below, when tidal conditions allow.

Closed on Christmas Day and Wednesdays during November, December, January, February and the first week of March.

**Telephone lock-keeper beforehand and do not enter lock without keeper in attendance.**

## SALTERS LODGE LOCK Advice To Navigators

- Tidal waters can be dangerous. Never take risks. Never underestimate the power of tidal water.
- The decision to navigate through the Middle Level Commissioners Salters Lode Lock into and along the Environment Agency's tidal River Great Ouse is the sole responsibility of the boat skipper who should assess the risks and the crew competencies before proceeding.
- The Middle Level lock keeper's instructions must always be followed during the locking operation.
- The use of lifejackets/buoyancy aids and the provision for sea anchors on board is highly recommended.
- The Middle Level Commissioners provide no rescue service for the River Great Ouse.

MLC

Tel: 01354 653232 Email: [www.middlelevel.gov.uk](http://www.middlelevel.gov.uk)

Navigators may find it beneficial to check our website where Safety Updates are added periodically <http://www.middlelevel.gov.uk/safety-information.aspx>.

### Special Notes :-

- 'A' - Stanground Lock serves a dual role as a sluice as well as a navigation lock. When the sluice is open dangerous undertows may be encountered in the pens. **For this reason in particular, navigators must not enter this lock without the attendance of the lock-keeper.**
- 'B' - Marmont Priory Lock - Special care must be exercised to ensure that the doors and penstocks/paddles/slackers are **completely** closed after use. **This lock is similar to Ashline Lock and care must be taken to keep clear of the upstream sill and the downstream penstock access walkway.**

## Public Moorings

Limited public mooring space is available throughout the Middle Level System. The public moorings (see map on page 11 for locations) are located at:

1. March Town Centre – Old River Nene
  - a) Library
  - b) Town Centre Bridge
  - c) Park side moorings, Marylebone Bridge
2. Benwick Village – Old River Nene
3. Adjacent to Manor Leisure Centre, Whittlesey – Kings Dyke
4. Three Holes Bridge – Main Drain/Sixteen Foot River
5. Church Bridge, Upwell – Well Creek (not marked on map – see bridge no 36)
6. Boat Basin, Outwell – Well Creek
7. Gladys Dack's, adjacent to Barroway Drove, Nordelph – Well Creek

**NB: The public moorings have a 48 hour maximum stay time. Please note these moorings are not maintained by the Middle Level Commissioners.**

The moorings are particularly busy during the peak navigational periods and during the summer months.



March Town Centre Bridge – Old River Nene



Three Holes Bridge – Main Drain/Sixteen Foot



Adjacent Manor Leisure Centre, Whittlesey – Kings Dyke



### Old Bedford River

**Old Bedford Sluice** (Environment Agency) To pass into the Old Bedford/Counter Drain system, contact **must** be made with the Salter's Lode lock-keeper Mr P Grodkiewicz Tel: 01366 382292.

**Welches Dam Lock** (Environment Agency) This lock is not operable. Further information can be obtained from the Environment Agency.  
Length 14.30m (47'-0")  
Width 3.35m (11'-0") Tel: 08708 506506.

**Horseway Lock** Length 18.30m (60'-0") This lock is currently not in use. Further information can be obtained from the Middle Level.  
Width 3.65m (12'-0") Tel: 01354 653232.

### River Great Ouse

**Salter's Lode to Denver Sluice** (Environment Agency) This river is tidal and the times that craft can enter or leave the Middle Level are restricted. Denver Sluice is half a mile upstream of Salter's Lode Lock.

The lock-keeper at Denver Sluice must be notified before making a passage between the two systems.  
Tel: 01366 382340

Special care should be taken when entering and leaving Salter's Lode Lock on the tidal side; inexperienced navigators should follow the instructions of the lock-keepers.

### Forty Foot Navigation

Due to structural problems with the Forty Foot Lock (Welches Dam Lock) the Environment Agency has closed the structure and passage into the Old Bedford is not available at this point. For more details please contact the Environment Agency on 03708 506506 or visit the website on <https://www.gov.uk/environment-agency>.

### Strong Stream Advice (SSA)

The Environment Agency issues Strong Stream Advice to inform river users when levels in the Nene and Great Ouse are increasing and conditions are becoming unsuitable for boating. **Notice boards** are displayed prominently on the riverbanks of these rivers to inform navigators of the status of the river and **red flags** are also raised at several boat clubs.

The Environment Agency recommends to find out if SSA has been issued navigators call the **24 hour SSA hotline: 0345 988 1188**. Choose option 1 and listen to the pre-recorded information followed by one of these quick dial codes:

- Nene - 032112
- Great Ouse (Bedford to St Ives) – 033211
- Great Ouse (St Ives to Earith) - 033212
- Ancholme – 031212

Alternatively, they offer a service where you can be added to their free Strong Stream Advice messaging system. You will receive a call on your mobile phone and/or landline, via an automated service that can send messages at any time of day or night. Text and email facilities are now also available. For further information please contact them on 01522 785943.

# NOTES

# SLOW DOWN

## Don't make waves!



Speed limits are in force on the waterways of the Middle Level Commissioners

Look for the signs on the rivers that indicate the maximum speed permitted in that area.



6.45km/h



8 km/h

### Why should I bother?



Because boat wash is a major cause of bank erosion - the faster a boat goes, the greater its wash and the faster the banks will erode. The Middle Level area depends, for its flood protection, on artificial flood banks and any erosion of these banks greatly increases the risk of the land and properties flooding. Also, the silt washed from the banks has to be expensively dredged from the waterways in order to maintain sufficient depths for the boats to continue to navigate the waterways.



### Think of others

By keeping to the speed limits, you help protect birds whose nests can easily be washed away. Even if you are within the limit, you should reduce your speed when passing other vessels. Someone might be trying to make a cup of tea or cooking food, and might get injured by your wash rocking their boat.



### Who must obey the speed limits?

The limits apply to all boats or craft except those used for enforcement or by the emergency services.



Middle Level Commissioners

### What happens if you break the speed limit?

We are sure that most people on the Middle Level will understand the need for speed limits and will observe them. The Middle Level Commissioners undertake routine radar speed checks and average speed observations. Even if you are observing the speed limit, your boat wash should be less than one foot (300mm) in height. Don't forget that anyone who breaks the limit faces a maximum fine of £5000.