



MINUTES OF THE MIDDLE LEVEL COMMISSIONERS' NAVIGATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE FEES MEETING HELD ON 4th February 2025 at 9.30 AM at Middle Level Offices.

Present

J Brown	Middle Level Commissioners
R Sexton	EAWA
J Revell	Inland Waterways Association
A Wildman	Residential Boat Owners Association
D Laws	Fenland District Council
M Daines	Middle Level Watermen's Club
N Arnold	Environment Agency

Also in attendance: Paul Burrows, Kevin Russell and Ruth Martin

Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Paula Syred (Fox's Marina), Chris Middleton (EA), Mike Daines (Middle Level Waterman's Club), Sally Howell (HDC), Phil Hughes (FDC) and Stephen Whittome (MLC).

1. Welcome

Alan Wildman opened the meeting. It was noted that the Committee has no quorum, but Jonathan Brown pointed out that this is an 'advisory' committee and cannot make decisions, a quorum is not necessary. It was agreed that although there were more apologies for absence than usually received, all were comfortable that the representation around the table would be sufficient.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed, and no amendments were made.

2. Licensing Latest

Middle Level Visitors Fees proposal

Paul Burrows reminded the Committee that in December the proposed Licence Fees for 2025/26 were agreed, and he advised the Committee that all the necessary changes to documentation were being made in readiness.

He then drew the Committee's attention to the proposed Visitor Fees that had previously been circulated to all Committee members. A discussion followed on the use of cash to purchase licences, and it was agreed that cash purchases should still be welcomed alongside cashless payment options.

Paul went on to propose that these updated fees would be locked in for 3 years, with the next review in 2028. He explained that previously a 1-month licence had been offered, but as this had never been purchased this has been removed, and that a week's licence is effectively 7 days for the price of 3. The definition of a visitor has also been added, and the licence classes updated to mirror those in the Anglian Pass.

John Revell added that Paul should already have received his agreement to the proposal in writing, and that Paula Syred and Mike Daines have also expressed their agreement.

Dee Laws asked if there would be possible to review the fees before the end of 3 years, but Paul responded that he would like to lock the figure in to give confidence to boaters. The fee increase is quite big this year, and Visitor Licencing is not a big income generator for MLC.

It was asked if issues would be expected with smaller boats, but this would be unlikely. It was also asked if anything could be done to improve the issues with the SumUp machine at Stanground, which was having connectivity issues. Kevin Russell explained that we have the same machine at Salters Lode, and following on from some works by our IT support team that one works well. They are working on making similar improvements at Stanground and it is expected that this will rectify the issues.

Nathan Arnold was invited to provide an update on the Anglian Pass, and advised that the 2025/26 fees have been agreed, and the increase is in line with the Pass Agreement. The revised fees are all live on the Anglian Pass website.

Paul Burrows advised that the revised MLC Visitor Fee's are also ready to go live on the MLC website. It is also proposed to increase the cost of MLC keys from £5 to £6, and MLC lock handles from £12 to £17. Roger Sexton asked if these could be traded back in by boaters, but Kevin Russell advised that we do not offer this service. Some boaters buy from other boaters which we do not have a problem with. Jonathan Brown added that if there is a trade then MLC could benefit from that trade. Paul Burrows agreed that we could take a view on this, but it is likely that administration costs would outweigh any benefits. Jonathan asked how many keys are sold, and Kevin Russell advised that around 300 lock handles were sold last year, and around 100 keys. He advised that this was probably the most sold in one season and that sales were dependent on conditions. Sales would generally be around 100 handles in an average year. It was agreed that things would be left as is.

3. Link Route Works update

March Town Bridge

Kevin Russell gave an update on the progress. Contractors are now on site, and although they originally blocked navigation with the scaffolding which was in contravention of the works agreement, this has now been resolved. The scaffolding is contained to the areas of the bridge parapets, and navigation is still open. The contractors have two barges on site, but MLC staff are carrying out regular checks and monitoring access. Paul Burrows added that the works are being carried out on behalf of Cambridgeshire County Council Highways Department. There were some concerns amongst the Committee that should the works overrun then the impact on navigation would be significant. Paul and Kevin advised that works should be completed by 31st March 2025, and that there is a penalty clause in place should works overrun. Martin Redding, an MLC Planning Officer, is in regular contact with CCC and will advise of any concerns as soon as they become evident. However, the Committee were advised that the navigation closure agreement is with CCC and the penalty for overrunning will cost CCC £500 a day.

Paul Burrows advised that when the works are complete, he would write to Cambridgeshire County Council with feedback on the scheme on behalf of the Navigation Advisory Committee.

Paul advised that MLC have also been approached by Norfolk County Council in relation to 5 other bridges. Four of these are across the Main Drain and so will not affect navigation. However, the fifth bridge is at Nordelph and will affect navigation through Well Creek. There is currently no other information available, and Martin Redding is trying to progress this. Paul added that the Commissioners would not entertain any closure of Well Creek during the navigation season. Jonathan Brown added that he would expect that any works are still at a planning stage, and Dee Laws added that it is likely that funding is available to the Council for initial reports and consultation only at this stage.

Marmont Priory d/s gates

Keven Russell gave an update. Fencing has been installed, and contractors are now on site. A dam should be installed on 4th/5th February, and it is expected that the gate will be lifted out on 11th February for inspection. Paul Burrows added that this will be a critical point in the works, as we will not know what repairs will be needed until this point. Keven Russell and Jon Fenn will be on site when the gate is being removed.

Paul Burrows also advised the Committee at the point of the sad passing of Maureen Norton, former Lock Keeper at Marmont Priory and a valued member of MLC staff until her retirement. Along with her late husband she was well known to boaters. MLC and the NAC will be represented at her funeral, and our condolences go out to her family.

Salters Lode Tidal Silt

Nathan Arnold advised the Committee that the Environment Agency Asset Team are currently planning works which are due to start at Salters Lode in March. It is anticipated that they will be completed by the end of March in readiness for Easter. No significant works are planned at Denver, as the winter flows have left it in good condition. However bathymetric surveys are currently being carried out and any minor works identified will be carried out on completion of the works at Salters Lode. At present it is not known who has been appointed to carry out the works and so it is not known if the same contractors as last year have been appointed. The EA Project Manager, Rachel Garner, is also investigating other methods that can be employed to keep the silt levels down, and Kevin Russell is in regular contact with Rachel. The Committee then engaged in discussions around various methodologies that could be used to deal with the silt.

Paul Burrows asked if there were any other EA works planned that would affect connectivity and Nathan advised that he was not aware of any.

4. AOB

Dee Laws advised the Committee of some issues being experienced at Stanground Sluice, although this does not affect navigation at Stanground Lock. Nathan Arnold agreed to feed back the concerns Dee raised to the EA Operations Manager for the Nene and Dee would also contact him directly. Dee asked if the Lock Keeper at Stanground could assist with monitoring of the sluice, but Paul Burrows said that any monitoring proposals would need to be discussed with the EA.

Paul asked if Dee could provide any update on the repairs to the Fenland District Council moorings in March. Although she could not provide a definitive update, she understood that proposals are progressing, including works to the moorings at Manor Leisure Centre in Whittlesey. However, she offered to contact Council colleagues and provide an update via email after the meeting. Paul advised that a local boater had reported that there is some metal sticking out of the damaged moorings at March.

Paul thanked FDC for their input into the water point at Whittlesey, and reported that he is still waiting for the easement to be agreed with Peterborough City Council before the water point at Stanground can be installed. Dee Laws offered to assist with bringing this to a conclusion.

Paul has also asked the Well Creek Trust if they can assist with identifying any businesses along the Well Creek that may be able to host waste disposal and Elsan facilities, with some financial provision being made by MLC to assist. He has also written to the Crown Lodge at Outwell to see if they would consider the same, alongside offering them assistance with the refurbishment of their redundant mooring but has not yet received a response. He would like to engage the local community in providing facilities that

would attract boaters to the area. John Revell advised that the Well Creek Trust AGM was being held the following day.

Nathan Arnold asked if MLC had a standard design for Elsan facilities, to which Paul replied they had not. Nathan wished to share the lessons learned from the installation at Denver, and that a more robust system was needed than that the EA had installed. Paul advised he would be happy to receive any feedback and guidance.

Paul advised the Committee that he had received an invitation from Mary Prior of the Great Ouse Boating Association (GOBA) to attend their AGM on Sunday 11th May. There is also an Anglian Pass Partners meeting next week.

Nathan Arnold advised the Committee that the Cam Conservators are working hard to get Baits Bite lock open for the start of or early in the navigation season it at all possible. He has asked that any questions are directed to Helen Cleary of the Cam Conservators, as he and the EA are unable to answer them. Cam Conservators will be updating their website this week with the current situation and any proposed schedules.

John Revell advised that he has had feedback from people who are reluctant to purchase an Anglian Pass as there is no access to Cambridge. Nathan responded that over 500 Anglian Passes were sold last year, which is down from the previous year but historically there have been fluctuations.

John Revell asked if the MLC Navigation Notes will be updated to include Monks Lode beyond the Conington Fen Bridge. Kevin Russell advised that as works are still needed beyond the bridge it would not be appropriate to update the notes. John asked if the notes could show an understanding that boats could progress further than the bridge, as currently they show that navigation of Monks Lode is prohibited. Paul Burrows agreed to amend the notes accordingly. John Revell added that at the Fund Britain's Waterways meeting and associated press release, Monks Lode was mentioned. He also advised that they are still waiting for permission to carry out further clearance works to Monks Lode and was disappointed in the time this is taking. However, Kevin Russell advised that the necessary environmental survey cannot commence until the spring, and so this cannot be progressed until then. Jonathan Brown asked if the survey could prevent the works from happening, to which Kevin replied that this would be dependent on what is found. John Revell added that a working party is planned for later in the year once approval is given, and Jonathan Brown highlighted the importance of following due process and the associated Environmental laws. He reminded all present of the impact of breaking these laws, which can include large fines and a criminal record.

Jonathan Brown asked for an update on prosecutions. Ruth Martin advised the Committee that of 5 cases that were referred to a Debt Management agency, there had been 4 successful outcomes. The remaining case is a little more problematic and consideration is currently being given to the most appropriate next steps. Kevin Russell reported that some time spent door knocking along a short stretch through March had some positive results with 6 or so unlicensed boats being licensed as a result. Other boaters soon become aware that action is being taken, and this is having a positive effect. Kevin has also been working closely with the new manager at Bill Fen Marina and this has also had some positive outcomes. Paul Burrows added that incremental changes are being made, although we still wish to avoid taking a legal route to recover fees as this has a big financial cost to the Commissioners and boaters. Ruth Martin advised that actions taken so far had been cost neutral.

Roger Sexton reported that two boats on the Fenland District Council moorings in March had been there around 6 weeks. Roger was advised that there is a reporting form on the Fenland District Council website, but Dee Laws offered to report these. Kevin Russell advised that one of the boats is licensed, but one is not and had suffered some damage. He has been monitoring the situation and will remove the boat if this becomes necessary.

5. Dates of Next Meetings

It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for Tuesday 6th March 2025 be cancelled, and that a meeting be arranged for early September. Paul Burrows will arrange for this to be communicated once arranged.

Paul also agreed to send the Committee an update by email around the end of March or beginning of April, with a progress report on the March Town Bridge, Marmont Priory gate and Salters Lode siltation. Alan Wildman suggested that if it became necessary to meet before September, a virtual meeting could be called, and this was agreed by the Committee.

The meeting closed at 10.35am

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Chairman

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Date