

WAITAKERE CITY'S COASTAL VILLAGES

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT : PART 1 - PIHA



For Waitakere City Council

MELEAN ABSOLUM LIMITED
Landscape Architects

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INTRODUCTION

Melean Absolum Limited have been commissioned to undertake a landscape assessment of the Coastal Villages of Waitakere City with a view to determining the existing and potential future character of the landscapes of the City's coastal villages. The villages being assessed are:

- Piha
- Karekare
- Te Henga / Bethells
- Hula
- Little Hula
- Cornwallis and
- Parau

As time constraints prevent all seven villages being assessed at once, this report considers the landscape of Piha only. This is because it has come under the most pressure in recent years from growth and development and, as such, probably exemplifies all of the issues which will arise in the other villages. The other six villages will be assessed and reported on as Stage 2 of this project.

The brief for the assessment work required:

- ❖ Identification of:
 - the extent of the village
 - the various landscape units within the village and their characteristics
 - the vulnerability of landscape units to future landscape degradation
- ❖ Discussion about:
 - Past practices which have created the various landscape character units
 - Likely development potential and its impacts on the landscape character
 - Potential landscape restoration

EXTENT OF PIHA

The settlement at Piha has developed in a manner which is a direct response to the landform of the area. Early baches were presumably built close to the shore, both north and south of Lion Rock and on the flat land within the valley, extending eastwards at both Glenesk and Garden Roads. Flatter ridge tops, such as Pendrell and Te Ahuahu Roads would also have proved readily available for residential development, as was the flatter land adjacent to the access road. As a result, the earlier housing was generally strung parallel to the beach, up the main access road and along the floor of the valleys.

Subsequent development has tended both to 'fill in the gaps' in this pattern as well as intensify development within the pattern. Despite this 'filling the gaps', there are still significant areas of steep, vegetated land which continue to demarcate separate housing clusters within Piha. These slopes are a critical component of the character of Piha, as will be discussed in more detail later in this report. The reasons for their continued existence seems to be partly because of the steep contour, but probably more importantly, because landowners have chosen not to develop, yet.

Also of significance to the character of Piha is the steep vegetated land beyond the settlement itself and it is these slopes that demarcate the edge of the Piha to a great extent, providing a dramatic, enclosing landform, as well as a strongly contrasting, totally undeveloped backdrop, against which the developed parts of the village are seen. The vast majority of this steep enclosing landform around the northern and eastern sides of the settlement are part of the Centennial Memorial Park. It should be noted that small areas of the ARC owned land do, from a landscape perspective, lie inside the settlement, such as the flatter land fronting Glenesk Road to the east of the shop.

At the southern end of the village, where the settlement extends to higher slopes, the majority of the steep vegetated land defining the edge of the settlement is in private ownership. Its continued existence as the delineation of the settlement is thus much more vulnerable, being constrained only by the provisions of the District Plan and the longer term plans of the landowners. Indeed, it was learned during the preparation of this report that a large property in one of the steep vegetated areas separating housing clusters within Piha, has recently been subdivided. This will be discussed further, later in this report.

At the southern end of Piha, along Piha Road, the influence of topography on the definition of the settlement is much less apparent. The cluster of houses from 209 Piha Road to the intersection of Te Ahuahu Road are located on the edge of the gently undulating plateau across which Piha Road travels from Scenic Drive. It is not until the corner just after Te Ahuahu Road that Piha Road begins its descent down the coastal escarpment and the influence of topography on the extent of development and thus the extent of the village, really begins. The edges of the settlement are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

LANDSCAPE UNITS

In assessing the landscape character of Piha, it was subdivided into a number of units which display a reasonable coherence and consistency and which can be differentiated from each other. Thirteen units were identified and their locations are illustrated on Figures 1 and 2. It will be noted that not all of the area within the edge of the settlement, identified in Figure 1, has been included in one of the thirteen landscape units. This is because the character of the units identified is largely derived from the interrelationship between built elements and natural elements. The areas within the settlement but outside one of the landscape units are largely devoid of development and are thus excluded. It will also be noted that these are the same steep vegetated slopes which separate the different clusters of housing from each other, referred to above.

Landscape Unit A

Creation & Character

This area would have developed as soon as Marine Parade North was extended across the Wekatahi Creek and North Piha Road constructed along the back of the fore-dune at the base of the steep bush clad hills. The road terminates where a

steep headland eliminates this flat land. Long narrow residential sections extend from the road eastwards uphill, with the majority being deep enough to have been subdivided allowing two 'rows' of houses. Residential sections have also been developed on the fore-dune itself on the western side of the road along the southern half of this area with community facilities including public toilets and carpark and childcare centre at the southern end.

There are notable, wind sculpted pohutukawas within the northern part of the landscape unit. These generally allow the residential development to nestle within vegetation and reduce the potential dominance of structures over natural elements. In the southern part, the development of houses on the western side of the road together with fewer large pohutukawa trees means that built structures are somewhat more dominant. However, the proximity of both the sea and dunes to the west and the steep vegetated hills to the east along the whole of the landscape unit give it a wild, predominantly natural character.

This is reinforced by the nature of the roadway and parking facilities provided along North Piha Road. The absence of kerbs and drains, with the use of timber rails and planting to define parking areas keep the character low key and informal.

Vulnerability

The most vulnerable elements within the landscape unit are the important large pohutukawa trees. Although many are still far from mature or senescent, the incremental re-development of individual properties could well result in their gradual reduction or elimination. This, together with the trend, found throughout the coastal villages, towards larger and larger houses, could see the character of this landscape unit change.

New development, such as the carpark and toilets at the southern end, have to some extent, introduced more urban elements, such as flush kerbs, wheel stops and marked parking spaces, to the landscape unit, although these do seem to have been kept as low key as possible. Nevertheless, the ongoing management of the public areas can have a big influence on the character of the unit as a whole.

Development potential

Five properties, all on the eastern side of the road, have been identified on the maps provided¹ as having development potential. They are numbers 17, 37, 45, 91 and 93 North Piha Road. From the aerial base, number 93 appears to have a dwelling on it.

Considerate design which ensures retention of taller existing vegetation could be readily undertaken on these five properties, without impacting on the character of the unit. However, the design and location of any additional buildings will be critical to achieving this balance. Unusual and striking structures, such as that seen in Photograph 1 could unduly dominate, as could those of a striking colour, such as red, as show in Photograph 2.

¹ *Two sets of aeriels overlain with cadastral boundaries and with individual properties highlighted where no record of house development has been found.*



Photograph 1 Striking or unusual structures can dominate.



Photograph 2 Striking colours such as red, can highlight individual buildings.

Restoration potential

The likelihood of new development or redevelopment of properties being completely permitted by the District Plan is rare because the number of natural area provisions in the District Plan trigger the requirement for consent, in most instances. Where consent is required there is the opportunity for staff who are skilled in such matters to undertake careful assessment of proposed building development to ensure that inappropriate development is avoided, rather than being either remedied or mitigated.

In terms of potential restoration, the protection and replacement of mature vegetation, in particular pohutukawa trees, is the most obvious tool to ensure an appropriate balance between structures and natural elements is maintained. Although Council has the ability to ensure the ongoing replacement of those within the public realm, (along with the ARC in the northern part of the landscape unit) landowner cooperation will be required within private properties, unless these landowners are seeking a consent for redevelopment, when there is an opportunity to require some restorative planting as part of the consent conditions.

Not only will existing trees need long term management and replacement, but in a number of instances the repeated pruning of vegetation for sea views needs to be addressed as it is clearly an ongoing problem.

Landscape Unit B

Creation & Character

This landscape unit comprises the campground area on the seaward side of North Piha Road to the north of Marawhara Stream. The buildings within the campground are all small scale and they, together with the caravans and campsites are located in the lee of the fore-dune. The open grassed areas and numerous trees give the area a strongly natural character, although the vegetation is clearly managed.

Vulnerability

The camp ground is within the Open Space Environment and also has an adopted Reserve Management Plan. Pressure for development is unlikely as the Piha Coastal Management Plan identifies that the lease for the campground was to be renewed for a final 5 year term in June 2000.

Development potential

No development potential is identified within the Landscape Unit.

Restoration potential

Most of the caravans on the campground are clustered in the lee of a semi-circle of trees. Further pohutukawas could be planted to the south of the campground, particularly along the Marawhara Stream, in association with additional riparian planting. Continued weed management and vegetation restoration opportunities exist on the fore-dune.

Landscape Unit C

Creation & Character

This landscape unit encompasses residential development along Marine Parade North, extending around the corner above the Piha Lagoon and northwards across Wekatahi Creek. The road here has been constructed on the fore-dune and so, although residential development is on the landward side, it is strongly influenced by its proximity to the sea. Large pohutukawa trees are less numerous than in Landscape Unit A and buildings are more visually dominant. This is particularly true of some of the more recent developments very close to the road just south of Wekatahi Creek, as shown in Photograph 3.

Vulnerability

The redevelopment of the older and smaller properties with large houses of eclectic designs, as has occurred elsewhere within Piha, could easily tip the balance between natural and built elements in this landscape unit. In fact small groups of houses could already be described as dominant over the natural elements in their immediate surroundings. This is particularly so where the remaining vegetation is strongly wind sculpted and lower.

Further loss of vegetation, particularly the pohutukawa trees, could also gradually change the character of this landscape unit. Again, the design and location of new buildings will be critical to achieving a balance between built and natural elements. Again, striking designs and dominant colours could unduly dominate the landscape.

Development potential

Seven properties within this landscape unit appear to have development potential, while many more could also undergo redevelopment at some point in the future. It seems likely that some properties identified as vacant in 2003 have in fact subsequently been developed, see Photograph 3.

Restoration potential

As with landscape unit A, the replacement of large pohutukawa trees on both public and private land could improve landscape qualities. However, the restoration of the fore-dune seems an unattainable aim, with both road and residential properties constructed on it. Because of their location on the fore-dune many properties have enjoyed open sea views for years. The introduction of specimen trees could be an unwelcome change for some, while the environment will also make their establishment tougher to achieve.

Individual landowner liaison and cooperation would appear to be the best way of reintroducing taller vegetation to this landscape unit. Similarly, liaison between suitably skilled Council staff and future applicants seeking to redevelop their properties will be essential if new structures are not to unduly dominate the landscape.



Photograph 1 Striking or unusual structures can dominate.



Photograph 2 Striking colours such as red, can highlight individual buildings.

Landscape Unit D

Creation & Character

Behind the rear dune along Marine Parade North is Garden Terrace. Here residential development has occurred on both sides of the road, mostly in the lea of the rear dune. Some properties on the western, seaward side are located on the crest of the dune to take advantage of sea views. Towards the southern end of the road a sand dammed stream has created an attractive elongated pond, surrounded on its eastern side by native vegetation and used by water fowl.

Large pohutukawas predominate through much of the landscape unit, although towards the northern end some sections are kept clear of taller vegetation, see Photograph 4. The pohutukawas are an important adjunct to some of the houses on the crest of the rear dune, which, despite their size and eclectic design mix, are well integrated into the landscape.

Houses have spread up slope from the road on the eastern side in the middle of the landscape unit where the hills to the east are broken by a stream valley which provides flatter land for residential development.

Vulnerability

Again the loss of the large pohutukawa trees, either during the development of vacant lots or the redevelopment of existing buildings, could create significant impacts on the landscape character of this unit.

In those parts of the landscape unit where rear sections are accessed by steep driveways, the choice of surfacing and edge treatments has the potential to introduce inappropriate hard, urban elements which are currently rare in this part of Piha.

Development potential

Approximately twelve properties within this landscape unit have been identified as having development potential, while they all have the potential to be redeveloped at some point in the future.

Restoration potential

The ongoing retention of the pohutukawa tree canopy and its supplementation in those areas where it has been lost would ensure the restoration and continued enhancement of this landscape unit. Again this will entail careful liaison and cooperation from individual landowners.

Landscape Unit E

Creation & Character

Landscape Unit E is the flat valley floor along Glenesk Road and the development which has occurred here. The entrance to the Regional Park at the end of Glenesk Road describes how this was the location for the local sawmill during the kauri milling era. The availability of flat land close to one of the major streams in Piha was not

only ideal for the logging industry but would have been attractive for residential development once logging ceased.

The narrowness of the valley and the steepness of the surrounding land which is almost all covered in regenerating native forest, give this landscape unit a particular character, not found elsewhere in Piha. Although buildings are often close to each other and the road, the close proximity of the steep valley sides together with their scale mean that natural elements dominate the landscape.

Vulnerability

The steepness of the slopes has meant that at times both access and stormwater have presented problems to those developing land here. However, some of the solutions more recently introduced, (whether at the behest of Council or as a result of the developers initiative, is not clear) are entirely inappropriate in Piha, see Photograph 5. It is noted that if crib walls are to be allowed within Piha, they should be required to be planted with coastal trailing plants. (Crib walls are designed to be planted.) All of Piha is vulnerable to 'urbanisation' through the inappropriate introduction of urban design solutions particularly for infrastructure.

Steep slopes also risk the introduction of large scale excavation. Where this is undertaken in the creation of building platforms, the subsequent occupation of the space by the new building usually masks the excavation. However, where large vehicle turning areas, driveways and gardens are created, the unnatural landform can create scars within the landscape.

Development potential

The large properties on flat land at the head of the valley are within the Waitakere Ranges Environment, although they contain large cleared areas. There could be pressure in the future to re-develop some of these, particularly those which are currently used as a children's camp.

There are 5 properties identified as vacant in the plans provided, including a large property which also fronts Pendrell Road. It is within the Waitakere Ranges Environment and so could not be further subdivided. However, residential development on the vacant lots must be carefully assessed to ensure its location and design avoid adverse landscape effects.

Restoration potential

There is little in the way of native tree cover on the flat land along the northern side of the valley. This land is in private ownership but there may be opportunities for cooperation between landowners and Council to introduce trees and to manage weed species within the regenerating forest areas.

Landscape Unit F

Creation & Character

This is the flat land around Piha Lagoon, including the community facilities, such as shop, post office, library and camp ground, tennis courts and bowling greens. It is the logical heart of Piha and is where one would expect further community facilities to develop. It includes an area of land on the northern side which appears to have been designated for a future school, as well as those residential properties on the south of Piha Stream which form the edge of the flat land.

Vulnerability

With both a trend away from traditional Kiwi campgrounds and the Ministry of Education's designation on part of the land, there is potential for significant change within this landscape unit. As the central focus of the settlement with much of the surrounding residential area looking down onto it, this central valley location is very vulnerable to inappropriate and out of scale development.

The large pohutukawa trees which form the edge of the campground adjacent to Seaview Road are an important vegetative element within the landscape unit. They are vulnerable because of their age, although their location probably reduces the risk of pruning for views.

Development potential

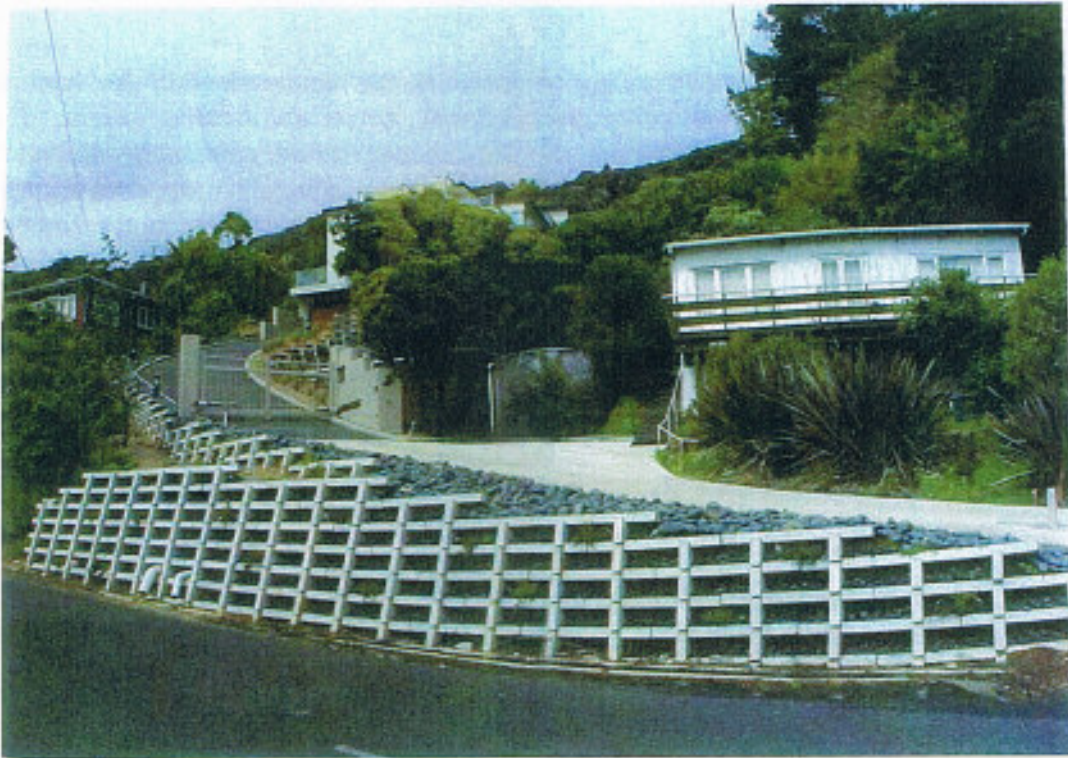
Of the small number of properties within the Coastal Village Environment, none are identified as being vacant. Redevelopment of existing residential properties does, however, remain a real possibility.

The Ministry of Education designation on land in the north-east of the landscape unit could see dramatic built development occurring at some point in the future. It is probable that should permanent population numbers be high enough to warrant the construction of a school, then pressure for additional commercial premises may also arise. This could include petrol station, small supermarket or retail premises targeting the tourist market.

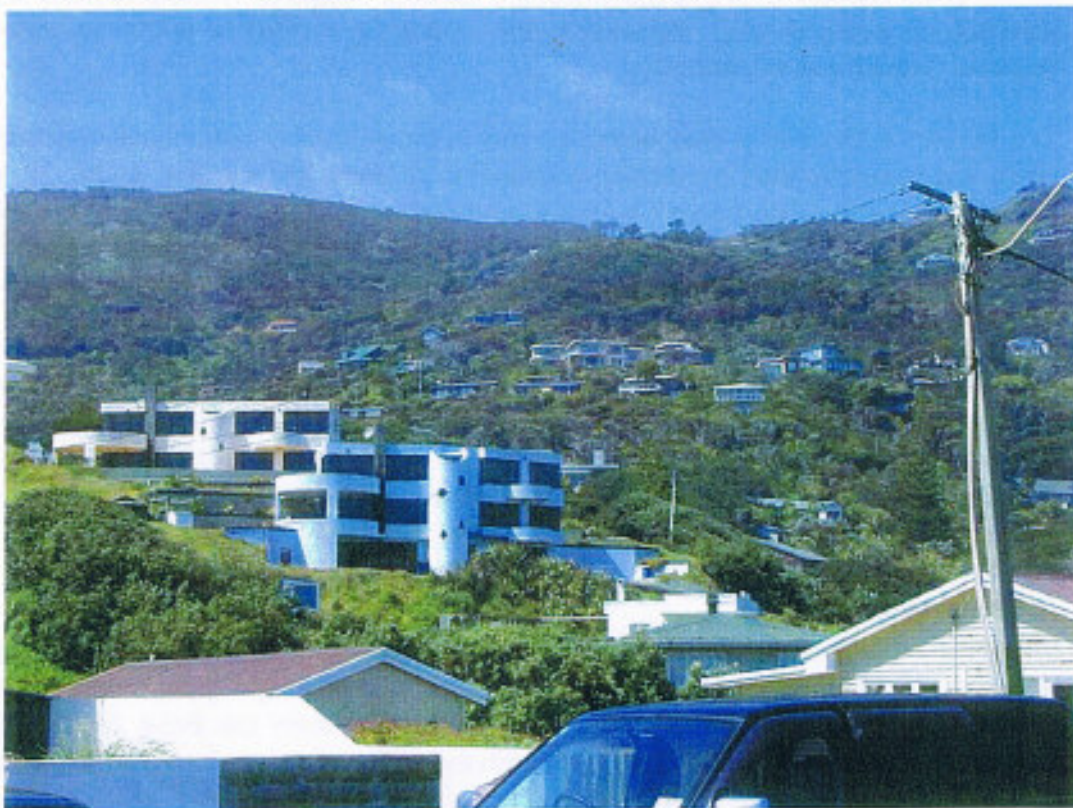
Although it may be some years, if ever, before such development occurs, it would seem wise for Council to consider the preparation of a long term future development plan for the heart of Piha, in consultation with the local community. In this way, when development pressure does arise, both the community and the Council will have a common vision against which to assess individual proposals.

Restoration potential

The riparian margins of Piha Stream are heavily weed infested and offer a substantial restoration opportunity. They have the advantage of providing a gradual change in habitat from fresh water to brackish water and could form the basis for further community restoration work (following on from the successful dune revegetation work already undertaken).



Photograph 5 Inappropriate interface between public and private realms



Photograph 6 Visually prominent homes in landscape unit G