

DOUGLAS LINKS GOLF COURSE – OHAU

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

1. BACKGROUND

In August 2020, Frank Boffa was engaged by Grenadier Limited through Land Matters Limited, to assist with the preparation of the Resource Consent documentation in regard to an application for consent to construct and operate a links golf course on the Horowhenua Coast at the southern end of Muhunua West Road, Ohau.

The project brief was to assist with the refinement and further development of the Master Plan which will form the basis of the Consent Application. Specifically, the input was to be in regard to landscape, natural character and visual effects as these matters and in particular, to the relevant planning provisions, namely the District and Regional Plans, the NZ Coastal Policy Statement 2010, and RMA matters relative to visual and landscape matters in general.

In regard to the above, the project brief covered the two work phases outlined below –

Stage 1. Review of relevant background material and planning documents, further and more detailed site and area investigations, followed by a review and report on landscape, natural character and visual considerations, including opportunities and constraints that will inform aspects of the overall master planning phase.

Stage 2. Following refinements to, and agreement on the Master Plan, Landscape, Natural Character and Visual Effects Report to accompany the Resource Consent documentation will be prepared.

This Landscape Assessment Report focuses on the landscape, natural character and visual effects of the proposed Douglas Links Golf Course at Ohau.

2. LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

In the context of the Resource Management Act (RMA), the Horowhenua District Council has aligned its landscape classifications and identification of landscapes and natural character with the relevant provisions of the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 (NZCPS), the Regional Policy Statement and the One Plan. Accordingly, and in the context of the Douglas Links Golf Course site, the coastal edge including the foredunes and adjacent stable dunelands, have been identified in the District Plan as an Outstanding Natural Feature and Landscape (ONFL). The coastal dunes have also been identified as having a high level of Natural Character. In addition, the Coastal Environment has been identified as having a high amenity value. The District Plan also recognises the vulnerability of the coastal dunes, their characteristic topography, their visibility and visual qualities and their susceptibility to change. While the planning provisions seek to identify and protect areas of high value, they also actively seek to promote rehabilitation, restoration enhancement and sensitive management of landscapes, natural character and biodiversity within the Coastal Environment.

3. RELEVANT PLANNING PROVISIONS

While the Regional Policy Statement, the One Plan and the New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement 2010 contain specific provisions in regard to landscapes and natural character (Policies 2, 13 and 15), the following Chapter 3 and 5 District Plan provisions are relevant and more specific to the Douglas Links site.

Objective 3.1.1, which refers to Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes and Domains with High Landscape Amenity seeks –

“to ensure that the District’s Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes are protected from inappropriate subdivision, use and development and that regard is had to other landscapes having high amenity.”

The policies relevant to this objective include –

- Protection of the character and values of these features and landscapes by controlling the level and extent of activities including earthworks and the scale of buildings and network utilities (Policy 3.1.2)

- Controlling and enabling activities in a manner that has particular regard to the maintenance and enhancement of the amenity values of the landscape (Policy 3.1.3)
- Avoiding the development of buildings where they will adversely affect the values of ONFL's (Policy 3.1.4)
- Ensure buildings within areas of high amenity value achieve low impacts (Policy 3.1.5)
- Have regard to the positive effects associated with landscape and biodiversity restoration (Policy 3.1.6)
- Have regard to the landscape's ability to absorb appropriate activities (Policy 3.1.7)
- Have regard to potential adverse effects on adjacent and nearby ONFL's and high amenity landscapes (Policy 3.1.8)
- Ensure that adverse effects on significant dune landforms are avoided, remedied or mitigated (Policy 3.1.9)
- Recognise the need and benefits of essential activities within the Coastal ONFL.

Objective 3.2.1, which refers to Indigenous Biological Diversity seeks –

“to protect the areas of significant indigenous vegetation and significant habitats of indigenous fauna”

In so far as the relevant policies include the management and enhancement of land cover and biodiversity values, and while these are inter-related with and integral to landscape and natural character considerations, they are covered elsewhere in more specific ecological reporting.

Objective 5.1.1, which refers to the Coastal Environment seeks –

“to preserve the natural character of the Coastal Environment and avoid, remedy or mitigate the adverse environment effects from inappropriate subdivision, use and development”

The policies relevant to this objective include –

- Avoiding significant adverse effects, and avoiding, remedying and mitigating other adverse effects on the natural character within the Coastal Environment (Policy 5.1.5)
- Avoid development in areas of high and very high natural character if the level of natural character is likely to be reduced (Policy 5.6.6)
- Ensure development in the Coastal Environment recognises and respects the sensitivities and dynamics of the coastal dune landscape (Policy 5.1.8)
- Promote and encourage opportunities to restore or rehabilitate the natural character of the Coastal Environment particularly at the time of development (Policy 5.1.9)

While visual effects relative to the existing landscape and/or changes and modifications as a result of development generally occur, there are no specific provisions specifically relating to visual effects. In addition there are no particular views or vistas listed or protected in the Plan. Notwithstanding this, visual effects are inherent in the provisions relating to landscape, natural character and the environment in general, particularly in terms of the effects of development and change to landscape character.

Section 7 of the RMA also makes specific reference to “the maintenance and enhancement of amenity values” and “maintenance and enhancement of the quality of the environment”. Accordingly visual aspects of the Douglas Links project will also be addressed.

4. COASTAL OUTSTANDING NATURAL FEATURES AND LANDSCAPE

Relative to the Douglas Links site, the Coastal ONFL identified in the District Plan generally incorporates both the coastal foredune and the more detailed stable secondary dunes that extend from the mean high water through and into the exotic tree plantings associated with the stable secondary dunes. As the original mapping of the ONFL was based on 1:50,000 contour mapping, the identified area generally appears to follow a line some 300-350m inland from mean high water.

Following several site visits and a review of more recent and more detailed topographic and aerial photography, a refined ONFL boundary has been prepared. The purpose of reviewing the ONFL boundary was not to dispute the District Plan line, it was simply reviewed in order to update the line based on more detailed and recent data, and an acknowledgment that landscape change within the site has occurred subsequent to what was identified in 2012. Figure 1 shows the revised boundary being a little closer to the coast, generally following the inland toe of the secondary stable dune adjacent to the cultivated pasture. The current District Plan ONFL boundary is also shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Outstanding Natural Features and Landscapes

5. HIGH NATURAL CHARACTER AREA

Figure 2 shows both the inland extent of the high natural character area as shown in the District Plan, and a refined boundary which generally follows the revised Coastal ONFL boundary. The District Plan boundary was identified in 2011 and accordingly does not take into account more recent modifications that have taken place.



Figure 2: High Natural Character

While the NZCPS makes reference to identifying areas of high natural character, which the District Plan has complied with, more recent natural character assessments now rank natural character in the coastal environment over a 7 point scale from very high to very low with the outstanding classification being a level determined following a District or Region's overall evaluation of the areas of high and very high classifications.

The reviewed assessment confirms that in line with the District Plan assessment, there are no areas of outstanding natural character within the Douglas Links site. The District Plan also indicates there are no areas of outstanding natural character along the Horowhenua Coast. The review confirms that while there are areas of very high natural character within the Douglas Links site, there are no areas of outstanding natural character within the site. The areas identified in this assessment as having very high natural character include the active coastal foredune and the salt marsh wetland on the Ohau River.

Recently in an undated report, Ms Daly from the Horizons Regional Council prepared a report on the indigenous vegetation and rare and threatened or at risk habitat under Section F of the One Plan. In this report, the mapped active dunelands identified, match the area identified in this report as being of very high natural character. The definition of the secondary or stable dunelands also matches the areas identified in this report as being within the high natural character area. The high and very high natural character areas in the Horizons report also generally encompass the area identified as the revised Coastal ONFL area.

6. DOUGLAS LINKS PROPOSAL

The Douglas Links Development Plan, Land Management Plan and Cross Sections illustrate the proposed golf course layout and development. As previously noted, aspects of the plan were reviewed following the initial landscape, natural character and visual considerations review. Being a links course, the layout has sought to utilise in part, the coastal dunes and more particularly the more stable inland dunes. Thus, the relationship between the course layout, the active foredune and the stable secondary is best illustrated with reference to the Land Management Plan.

In terms of the revised boundaries for the ONFL and the High Natural Character areas, both of which have been determined relative to the Douglas Links site, the two landscape classification boundaries essentially follow the same line. This is shown on Figure 3.

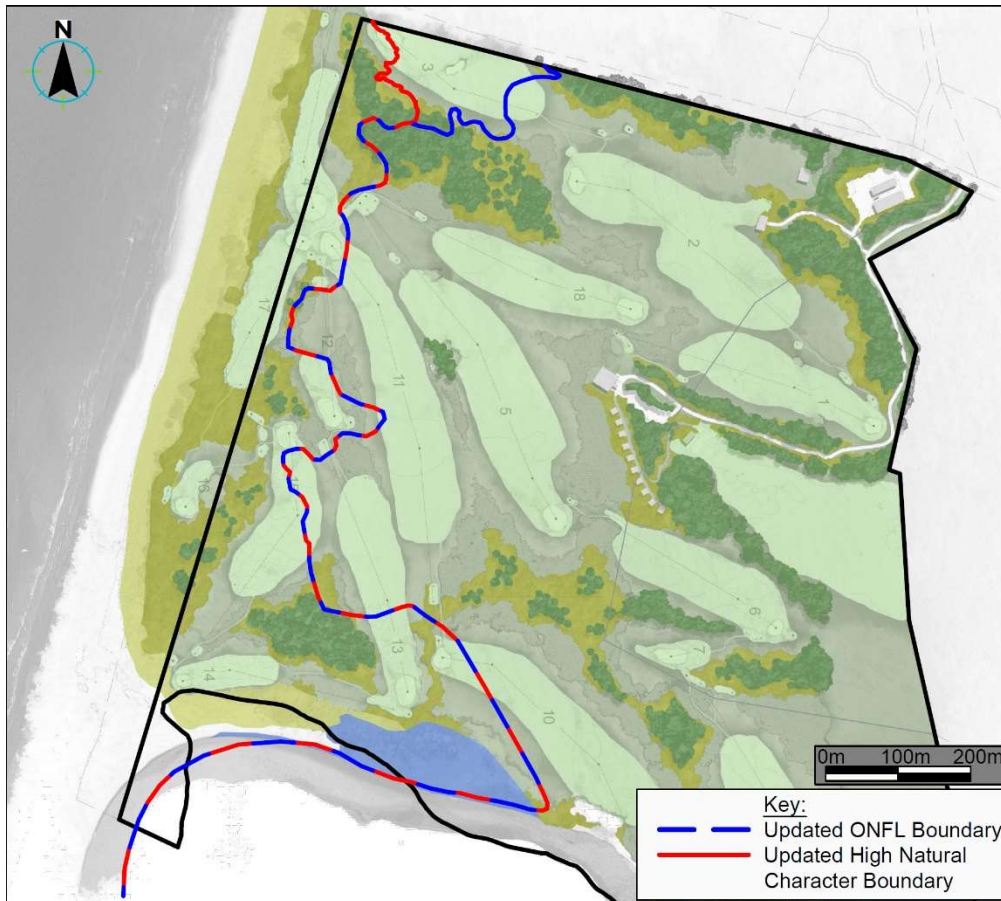


Figure 3: Revised ONFL & High Natural Character Boundaries

In this plan, the active foredune is represented by the light green shade overlay which extends along the coastal length of the site, extending around the north side of the Ohau River to the salt marsh wetland. Immediately inland of the active foredune are the stable dunes represented by a darker green overlay. The seaward property boundary of the Douglas Links site also traverses the stable dunes. As previously noted, the boundary between the active foredune and the stable dunes generally follows the seaward edge of the exotic tree plantings.

While three golf holes are in part sited within the adjacent Esplanade Reserve (holes 4, 16 and 17), this area is largely within the exotic treed area with very little undergrowth and/or biodiversity values. The intention is to replace the exotic trees and, as appropriate, carry out minor reshaping earthworks followed by revegetation as outlined in Mr Dahm's report in conjunction with the golf course grassland management proposed. The refined and combined high natural character area and the Coastal ONFL area which includes the stable dunes and the active foredune, also incorporates additional golf holes, namely holes 4, 12, part of 13, 15,

and in part 3 and 11. The coastal dune restoration and rehabilitation measures proposed by Mr Dahm will extend as appropriate into these areas.

The balance, and most of the golf course area, is located inland within the area identified as not having high natural character, and inland of the Coastal ONFL. While there will be minor earthworks within this area of the golf course, the area will be revegetated and managed as illustrated in the Land Management Plan and, where appropriate, in accordance with the recommendations in Mr Dahm's report.

In the context of the development of built structures and associated infrastructure, these all occur inland of the coastal dunes and the identified high natural character and Coastal ONFL areas. These "built" or unnatural elements which include the clubhouse, chalets, maintenance area and roading, are all discreetly and sensitively sited and will have minimal landscape or visual effects from both within or beyond the site boundaries. The landscape change that will be apparent will be the land cover and vegetation patterns which will be of a restorative nature, given the relatively degraded landscape that currently exists throughout a large portion of the site. The change that will occur to the landscape will essentially be a change in the appearance of "naturalness" rather than a change to a more built or "developed" landscape. While some natural elements will be different, natural patterns and natural processes, while different, will continue to be natural and will be enhanced to the extent that they will be perceived as being at the high end of the natural character scale.

7. LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT

Based on an assessment of the site in the context of its coastal setting, the relevant statutory provisions and the proposed layout of the links golf course, the landscape assessment concludes as follows –

1. That in terms of landscape considerations the proposed development –
 - Has taken into account the Coastal ONFL classification and provisions, and has had regard to other landscapes having high amenity.
 - Has proposed to initiate, implement and maintain landscape restoration and biodiversity values throughout the site.

- Has respected the landscape's ability to absorb and accommodate appropriate activities and development within the site.
 - Has ensured and demonstrated that adverse effects on significant dune landforms have been avoided, remedied or mitigated.
 - Will protect, expand and manage areas of significant indigenous vegetation and habitat.
2. That in terms of Coastal Environment considerations, the proposed development –
- Will preserve the natural character of the Coastal Environment.
 - Will increase and enhance the levels of natural character throughout the site.
 - Recognises and respects the sensitivities and dynamics of the coastal dune landscape.
 - Embraces opportunities to restore and rehabilitate the natural character of the site and its adjacent coastal edge.
3. That in terms of visual effects considerations, the proposed development –
- Will not create adverse visual or amenity effects from locations within or beyond the site.
 - Will enhance the visual amenity of the landscape in the context of its coastal setting.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The proposed Douglas Links Golf Course will –

1. Have no adverse effects on the environment that cannot be readily mitigated, and will in fact enhance the landscape character, biodiversity habitat and the amenity values of the coastal landscape.
2. Will restore and rehabilitate degraded and vulnerable landscapes and vegetation, particularly along the coastal margin.
3. Will protect and enhance natural character values throughout the site.

Frank Boffa

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