DEBATING PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT IN COASTAL NEW ZEALAND: A CASE STUDY OF OCEAN BEACH, HAWKE’S BAY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents results of research into issues raised by development proposals for Ocean Beach, Hawke’s Bay. It draws on three data sources – key informant interviews, public submissions, and published reports and plans. The report’s is to illustrate a selection of key concerns, rather than to be exhaustive, or representative of all opinions. In draws, in particular, on the views of those institutions and members of the public who have chosen to participate in the planning process for Ocean Beach. Most, although not all, are opposed to substantial development at the site; we report and analyze their views here, but do not seek to judge what option would be most appropriate for Ocean Beach. Key findings include:

- Proposals for development raise questions extending well beyond the ‘technical’; strong emotional responses are also evident.
- Ocean Beach is envisioned by many as a landscape in which a New Zealand childhood can be experienced and enjoyed (and has been for generations).
- The beach is widely characterized as a wild and natural environment. Its proximity to the major urban centres in the Hawke’s Bay adds to its value.
- Views of Ocean Beach are often characterized as spectacular. Many also enjoy being able to use the beach without being viewed from houses.
- Current recognition of Ocean Beach as ‘significant’ but not ‘outstanding’ is contested. The latter designation would offer greater landscape protection.
- The current bach settlement is seen as an appropriate part of the landscape. More intensive development is frequently viewed as detrimental.
- The master plan for Ocean Beach proposes an intensive, mixed-density development in the new urbanist style. It is claimed that this development will achieve a socio-economic mix, and a sense of community.
- Concerns about development are often driven by experiences of other coastal settlements in Hawke’s Bay, e.g., Waimarama. More generally, development pressure on the coast is often attributed to an American influence.
- In contrast to American housing styles, a basic campground is often perceived as a coastal land use consistent with New Zealand’s heritage and identity.
- Property rights at Ocean Beach are seen as important, but not absolute. They exist within a planning and resource management framework.
- The notion of government agencies purchasing some or all of the land at Ocean Beach in order to establish a park appeals strongly to many participants.
1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report presents results of research centred on issues raised by proposals for residential and commercial property development at Ocean Beach, Hawke’s Bay. Drawing on interview data, a sample of public submissions to the Hastings District Council, and published reports and plans, it seeks to identify and explain what is at stake in debates over the future of Ocean Beach. Field costs were funded by the BRCSS Network, as part of its remit to support research into the ‘sustainability of diverse households, communities, and settlements’.

The case study of Ocean Beach is part of a larger, University of Auckland Research Committee-funded research project exploring the meanings of property, and property rights, in coastal communities undergoing change. We are most interested in change associated with residential development. On the basis of media reports and a preliminary site visit, we identified Ocean Beach as one place where significant development was proposed, and was subject to some contestation. Such contestation, we thought, could provide a useful counterpoint to conventional (Western) understandings of property development as a process representing inevitable progress towards ‘highest and best use’ (Blomley, 2004).

Our case study site is located in the Hawke’s Bay region of the central North Island, on the Pacific Coast, close to two mid-sized cities (Hastings and Napier). In this report, we use the term ‘Ocean Beach’ in the manner in which it understood in the local community, and in official documents: it refers to a coastal landscape of some 1000 hectares that encompasses not only a nine-kilometre long golden sand beach, with distinctive headlands, but also an extensive dune system, behind which are coastal flats leading to steep hills and a prominent ridgeline (see Fig. 1). Current land use at the site is primarily pastoral; the built environment is constituted by a community of 32 baches, and a relatively small number of other structures. It is regarded by many commentators as a ‘wilderness beach’, and a valuable public resource, precisely because of this limited development. The beach is divided into a relatively small ‘southern end’, and an expansive ‘northern end’, by a stream and the single road accessing the site. Land ownership is divided among just seven parties: there are three private owners of freehold titles, two communally-owned Maori estates/trusts (Estate Puke Puke Tangiora, and Waipuka Incorporation), a small surf
club reserve owned by the District Council, and a 20-metre wide marginal strip on the beach itself, owned by the Crown, and administered by the Department of Conservation.

![Image of Ocean Beach](image_url)

Figure 1: View of Ocean Beach from the lookout to the northern headland.

Current proposals for Ocean Beach provide a clear example of a new, capital-intensive and highly professional phase of property development on the New Zealand coastline (see Collins & Kearns, 2008). Specifically, following a 10-day public planning meeting (‘charrette’) at the beach in October 2005, a master plan was unveiled for 980 residential units, and associated facilities, clustered around the current road and stream. The plan was prepared by two companies – the Pacific affiliate of prominent new urbanist designers, Duany-Plater Zyberk (DPZ), and Roberts Day – on behalf of the Hastings District Council and Hill Country Corporation Ltd. – who financed the charrette process.

A subsequent consultants’ report to the Hastings District Council (HDC) identified this master plan as the most intensive of four possible options for Ocean
Beach. The remaining three options included subdivision into 20 hectare lots under existing zoning rules, an ‘intermediate’ development encompassing several hundred houses, and ‘protection’ (see section 2.0 for details). Most recently, developers have filed a private plan change proposal for Ocean Beach with the HDC. As of November, 2007, the details of this plan have not been made public.

The large-scale nature of the developers’ proposal, and its dramatic departure from both current land uses at Ocean Beach, and traditionally modest forms of coastal housing in New Zealand (see Kearns & Collins, 2006), elicited comment in the community. This has been evident in the two rounds of consultation carried out by the Hastings District Council, each of which included a call for written submissions, followed by public hearings. Comment has been received from around 200 members of the public, most opposed to substantial development.

Our concern, in exploring debates over Ocean Beach and its future, was multi-faceted. Driven by a general concern to understand what was at stake, we focussed on how those who were involved – either in their professional capacities, or as interested citizens – valued and understood the present landscape, expressed hopes and fears for its future, experienced the planning/resource management system, balanced public and private interests, and perceived property rights. This said, our conversations with interviewees were wide-ranging, and several themes we had not anticipated also emerged. The value of talking with people who were knowledgeable and engaged with the subject at hand was readily apparent during the interview process: without exception, interviewees spoke at length, in articulate and passionate ways.

The remainder of this report is organized as follows. In the next section, we provide a brief overview of the statutory context for decision-making at Ocean Beach, and the range of options currently being considered for the site. In section 3, we outline in more detail the purpose of our research, and the methods used to gain insight into some of the issues at stake at Ocean Beach. In section 4, we present and discuss research findings, organized into seven themes. The final section provides a brief summary of key points.
2.0 CONTEXT & BACKGROUND

Land use decisions in New Zealand are generally governed by the provisions of a single comprehensive statute, the *Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA)*, and the policies and plans issued under it. This legislation subjects development on both public and private land to a degree of bureaucratic and democratic oversight. Section 6 of the *RMA* specifies that those exercising power under the Act in relation to the management of natural and physical resources must recognize and provide for a number of matters of national importance. These include the protection of “outstanding natural features and landscapes” in general, and “the natural character of the coastal environment” in particular. In both instances, the environment is to be protected from “inappropriate subdivision, use and development.”

The *New Zealand Coastal Policy Statement*, a national-level policy document issued by the Department of Conservation (DOC), pursuant to the *RMA*, provides some direction in interpreting and implementing these provisions in coastal areas. Specifically, subdivision, use and development is to be encouraged “in areas where the natural character has already been compromised”, and avoided elsewhere (Policy 1.1.1). In addition, “landscapes, seascapes and landforms” are to be protected, with specific mention given to the need to protect “the collective characteristics which give the coastal environment its natural character including wild and scenic areas” (Policy 1.1.3).

These measures are given practical effect by local councils undertaking landscape assessments, consulting the public, and incorporating the results into District Plans. Landscapes classified as “outstanding” receive a heightened level of regulatory protection from development. This is not to say that subdivision and/or changes in land use are completely prohibited: rather, proposals for these activities are subject to greater scrutiny. By way of example, a heated debate is currently underway in Northland over a proposal for a major housing development on the Ngunguru Sandspit, recognized as an ‘outstanding feature’ in the local district plan.

Issues of landscape protection and classification are highly pertinent to discussion of Ocean Beach, given current development proposals for the site. As noted above, in 2006 a master plan prepared subsequent to the charrette process proposed an intensive new urbanist-style development including 980 residential units.
(DPZ & Roberts Day, 2006). A later report to Council considered this ‘charrette option’ as one of four possibilities for the site, each with its own costs and benefits (EMS, 2006). The ‘status quo’ option was to retain the existing rural zoning for Ocean Beach. This would allow for subdivision into 20 hectare lots, and construction of associated residential dwellings, with minimal consent hurdles. Smaller (1.5 ha) lifestyle blocks might also be possible in the future. Alternatively, the ‘no development (protection)’ option would prevent subdivision and residential construction in the area. A number of mechanisms by which this might be achieved were considered. The ‘intermediate’ option allowed for residential development, but on a smaller scale (e.g., 158 allotments) than that proposed in the ‘charrette option’.

Subsequent council deliberations over a Draft Structure Plan for Ocean Beach have focused on a larger ‘intermediate’-type development (of 280-370 houses). A critical question, in these discussions, has been whether or not development should occur on the Haupouri Flats. This large area of privately-owned flat land is located behind the dunes, to the north of the current surf club and road. Currently farmed, the Haupouri Flats have been deemed to make an “important contribution … as a foreground to the view of the north” (EMS, 2007: 8). Like much level, accessible beachfront land in New Zealand, the flats have considerable potential, either for residential/commercial development, or for use as a recreational reserve/park.

3.0 METHODS

Our concern in undertaking this research was to gain insight into a range of opinions expressed about Ocean Beach, and the proposed development, by those individuals and interested who were sufficiently interested and involved to become involved in the public planning process. We did not seek to survey or question members of the public who have not, as yet, participated in this planning (with one exception, noted below). While both development and protection interests have a tendency to claim that most of the region’s so-called ‘silent majority’ are on ‘their’ side of the argument, we are aware of no independent polling of local residents on this issue, and we do not seek to investigate these claims. Our focus remained on those who have chosen to become involved, and have clearly given prior consideration to at least some of the issues raised. Thus, we were driven not by a concern to assess
which option is most appropriate for the future of Ocean Beach, but rather to gain understanding of what is at stake in debates about that future.

Specifically, our research drew upon three principal sources of data. First, we canvassed official reports and proposals for Ocean Beach. As there are numerous reports on public record (e.g., consultant reports on myriad aspects of the landscape), we focussed on two substantial documents outlining development futures for Ocean Beach. These were the Ocean Beach Charrette Booklet, prepared by DPZ and Roberts Day (2006), and the Ocean Beach Issues and Options Paper, prepared by consultants Environmental Management Services (EMS, 2006) for the Hastings District Council. The former outlines, in impressive detail, an intensive master plan for Ocean Beach; the latter considers that plan alongside three other possible development options for the study area.

Our second source of data was public submissions, particularly those made to Council in early 2007, in response to its Ocean Beach Draft Structure Plan. The stated purpose of this plan was to “gain stakeholder and community input prior to the [HDC] making a final decision” and to “guide appropriate development within an identified development footprint at Ocean Beach” (EMS, 2007: 16). In essence, it proposed an ‘intermediate’ development option, with 286 residential lots, and a camp ground. This plan elicited 197 written submissions, all of which are on public record. Of these submissions, 32 were selected for detailed analysis. This selection was based on a number of factors: we sought to ensure that a full spectrum of views was represented, including the views of local landowners; we gave some preference to submissions made on behalf of groups and institutions rather than individuals; and we focussed on submissions that were discursively rich, rather than pro-forma. Thus, our sampling framework reflected our objectives in carrying out the research, rather than a desire to produce a statistically representative data set.

Third, a series of visits to Hawke’s Bay was undertaken, during which 22 key informants were interviewed. After an initial scoping exercise in August 2006, which

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1 This document is commonly known by names such as ‘the DPZ master plan’.
2 The standard form for making a submission to the HDC stated “please note all submissions are made available to the councillors and public.” As at the time of writing, submissions on the Draft Structure Plan remain available at: http://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/events/charrette/obspsubs/index.htm
included a visit to the beach, the first author returned for an HDC meeting on the Draft Structure Plan in May, 2007. At this meeting, councillors voted to increase the number of residential lots provided for in the plan from 286 to 376. Over the next three months, key informant interviews were carried out with 16 members of the public, three members of the district council, one regional council representative, and one developer representative. Again, our sampling framework was intended to produce a data set that was illustrative (of points raised in relation to Ocean Beach), rather than representative.

All but one of the members of the public interviewed had earlier made a submission on Ocean Beach to the HDC. A standard interview schedule, consisting of open-ended questions, was employed, although it was frequently modified when speaking with these informants to take into account points they had already made in writing. By way of example, we often sought clarification or explanation of particular claims the interviewee had made in their submission. One member of public had not spoken on the record previously, but was contacted following a recommendation that we include the views of an older resident of the region, as older persons tended not to be involved in the submissions process. Overall, a broad social mix was achieved: our interviewees ranged in age from 18 to 80, included nine women and 13 men, and came from three ethnic/national backgrounds (New Zealand European, Maori, and North American). This said, our interviewees, like public submissions, were strongly weighted towards those opposed to significant development at Ocean Beach.

Subsequent thematic analysis sought to integrate information from all three sources. This qualitative approach is characterized by Braun and Clarke (2006: 79) as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data,” useful for both organizing and (richly) describing a data set. It proceeds by searching for themes across an entire data set, rather than within any particular data item (e.g., a single interview). This ‘search’ is not value-free, however; it necessarily reflects the interests, knowledge and priorities of the analysts. This is because thematic analysis involves making a series of choices: at minimum the researchers need to determine what ‘counts’ as a theme, how to balance breadth against depth, and whether to identify themes through deductive or inductive means (or both) (Braun and Clarke, 2006).
Seven key themes are analyzed in this research; most relate directly to the overall aims of the project (e.g., understandings of property rights), or specific questions (e.g., about the appropriateness of the existing baches) asked of interviewees. They are not exhaustive, but convey a sense of what is at stake at Ocean Beach. They were identified and selected primarily on the basis of the authors’ theoretical knowledge and analytic interests (i.e., via a deductive approach). The names of all respondents have been changed to preserve anonymity.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

4.1 CONNECTIONS TO THE LANDSCAPE

Most interviews began by asking respondents to describe their personal connection to Ocean Beach. This proved a useful approach, in that it prompted reflection on the values interviewees attached to the landscape. These values were, unsurprisingly, diverse: most valued Ocean Beach for multiple reasons, which they described in vivid and detailed ways. While this was particularly the case for those opposed to development – who made up the majority of respondents and submitters – some supporters also commented on how and why they valued the landscape.

The most common response to our question related in some way to childhood – whether that of the respondent, the respondents’ children, or future generations. For example, Lee reflected on having “so many [childhood] memories of playing in the sand dunes,” and camping at Ocean Beach, and noted that these had led to a life-time “connection” with the landscape. He also suggested this was not atypical for local residents: “I suppose growing up in Hawke’s Bay everyone’s got a bit of a connection to it because you go out there so much. I don’t remember the first time I went out there but it was probably when I was four or five, just those family trips to the beach.” Similarly, an older respondent noted: “Well, I’ve lived in Hawke’s Bay for 80 years, and as a child I was taken to Ocean Beach by my parents…” (Jonathan). Such family visits to the beach are, we suggest, a quintessential aspect of an idealized New Zealand childhood, and it was therefore unsurprising that they were also mentioned by other respondents:

It’s a place I love very, very much now, having been going out there for 50 years and my children love it too. They’re probably far more conscious of their appreciation of it than I was. The sort of experience that I can have there at Ocean Beach … [was] far
more common, and people’s experiences of space and places like that were far more common 30, 40, 50 years ago than they are now in what’s a more urbanized, I suppose, a more urbanized society (Terrence).

Ocean Beach enjoys a very special place in the hearts and minds of those of us who reside in Hawke’s Bay and who, as in my case, have raised children and grandchildren here. … Our children all learnt to surf there, and to enjoy the sea and become confident with it. It has been a place for walks, for childhood exploration, for simply learning what it is to be a New Zealander and the values of our birthright (written submission #110).

In the foregoing quotations we see that the value of Ocean Beach as a place of childhood adventure and exploration linked to both its increasing rarity value (in “a more urbanized society”), and a particular conceptualization of New Zealand identity (“the values of our birthright.”). Inter-generational enjoyment of Ocean Beach is also implicit in these statements, which were both deployed in opposition to development. Such long-term connections were elaborated on by others, including one family of landowners (the third quotation below):

My children are seventh generation New Zealanders, seventh generation Hawke’s Bay residents. My family have letters written by my great grandmother who, as a girl rode her horse along the beaches, travelling from one place to another. They read like the present day. It is history alive. What she and her family saw when they rode, walked, picnicked and swam at Ocean Beach in the 1890s is almost as it is today. There is so little even my generation can say that of. My wish is that my children can not only tell their great grandchildren of their childhood, they can take them there, and through that take them back through untold generations (written submission #153).

[Ocean Beach] is part of my family’s historical connection to Hawke’s Bay, going back seven generations. Um, but it’s very much part of my mental landscape, and my forbears’ landscape (Katrina).

We wish to see only one development on this land. We have a great affinity with this land, given the history of family ownership and stewardship since 1860, and our overriding desire is to preserve the beach and surrounds as best as can be done so that as a family we can remain on this property for the generations to come (written submission #54).

These comments speak to an emotional attachment to the landscape based on historical connection. They also underscore the extent to which proposals for property development – particularly in sites regarded as sensitive and highly-valued (including much of the New Zealand coast) – may raise questions extending far beyond the technical. While more readily-quantifiable and ‘conventional’ concerns – such as slope stability, coastal hazards, sewerage and waste water management, ecological impacts, and roading – certainly remain relevant to discussions of Ocean Beach’s future, they represent only a portion of what is at stake. Strong emotional
connections to the existing (coastal/pastoral) landscape are also relevant; frequently, these have been built up within multiple generations of the same family, and reinforced by personal experience. The senses of belonging and attachment associated with inter-generational connection to Ocean Beach articulated by New Zealand Europeans above were also underscored by Maori:

Our families have moved up and down here, up and down this valley, ...they would have ducked over the hill down there and gone down to the beach and got their pipis and their mussels. They would have moved out there. We’ve got rocks that they would have used for weights in their boats. You know the history here is living, it’s not something you take out of isolation… (Aroha).

[Historically,] we maintained an outpost at Ocean Beach in order to maintain the safety and security of the main area where we lived at Waimarama. So Akapo Point [between the two beaches] become vital to us by way of, you could light fires there any time that, you know, those pesky raiders [from another tribe] came down (Wiremu).

While these Maori and New Zealand European perspectives on Ocean Beach are not identical – note, for example, the utilitarian, as opposed to recreational, uses of the area emphasized by the Maori respondents – both evoke the notion of the beach as turangawaewae (literally, ‘a place to stand’), in large part because of whakapapa (genealogy). We suggest that the notion of ‘standing’ has several potential meanings here: not only is it the beach as a site to occupy, use and/or enjoy in a literal sense, it is also a place at which many respondents felt they had standing (i.e., the right to be heard), by virtue in large part of historical connections.

In addition to connections built, in various ways, on childhood experiences and familial ties, respondents mentioned a range of other factors linking them to Ocean Beach. Many emphasized its scarcity value as a ‘wilderness beach’ in close proximity of the region’s population centres – Hastings (including Havelock North), and Napier. It was increasingly rare, they suggested, to find such an undeveloped (and unpeopled) site within a relatively short drive from urban areas:

The beach is very accessible and one can always find a place to picnic with friends and family which is not interrupted by a seething crowd (written submission #8)

I have had occasion to enjoy Ocean Beach for over 30 years and have visited the place because of its proximity to my homes and for its wild isolated beauty (written submission #41).

Ocean Beach’s value for me isn’t as a place to live or even as a place to spend a few nights, it’s a place to go out and enjoy the wilderness character of the place, and
that’s what I loved about it, or a lot of people love about it. It’s one of those places where you can go out on your little day trips…. (Lee)

That’s a huge gift, you know [to the] 150,000 people in Hawke’s Bay – to have that sort of space that close. You know, 40 minutes from me in Napier! Amazing! I go to the beach and just walk. I think that’s great. We need that. Humans need that. They need that emptiness, they need to be able to get to places that are remote (Paul).

The argument, then, was that Ocean Beach was doubly valuable – not only was it wild, isolated, beautiful, and needed – it was accessible to a large, predominantly urban population. Understandably, these perceptions prompted not only regular personal visits, but also trips with visitors to Hawke’s Bay. A number of respondents emphasized that these visitors – whether friends and families, or professionals in the area on business – were consistently impressed with what they saw:

Many people from overseas stay with us and usually ask to be taken to the best beach. This is always Ocean. When some of them return to NZ, they always say “When are we going to Ocean Beach?” This is because they find Ocean to be quite unique in the world with its pristine sand, [and] miles of unspoilt dunes with a rural backdrop (written submission #8; original emphasis).

We delight in showing this landscape to our overseas principals, as it never ceases to amaze them and accordingly Hawke’s Bay becomes locked in their memory as a quality location which in turn boosts the brand premium we can realize (written submission #110).

These narratives were often accompanied by the view that residential development would detract from the value of Ocean Beach for visitors. As one respondent put it:

We do have a lot of international people coming in here, and a lot of them are extremely well-moneyed people, but they come and look here and they say ‘how could you think of developing that? …

I think it really comes down to: what do you take people out there for? Why are you taking them there? You’re taking them there because it is, I think, an outstanding natural feature which we can be proud to show them we’re preserving in New Zealand. We’re not taking them out there to show them beautiful houses (Charles; original emphasis).

However, another interviewee with an extensive business background had an opposed perspective. For him, Ocean Beach had little value in its current state; rather, it had development potential:

My main interest really is the fact that I look at Hawke’s Bay as a total package and I saw the [development proposal] in the paper and it was probably a little bit graphic and not quite ideal, but the concept was the thing that got me! … The Auckland population is coming this way, and I didn’t think it was a good idea for Hawke’s Bay to miss out completely. I saw it is an opportunity…. (Kyle)
This view serves as a useful reminder that there was no unanimity among interviewees, or submitters, on the values they attached to Ocean Beach. This said, there almost no suggestion that Ocean Beach was not valuable – that it was a mundane, or unexceptional site. There was broad agreement – admittedly among a sample skewed towards those opposed to development – that Ocean Beach was a place that offered, and should continue to offer, key elements of an ideal New Zealand childhood. In many instances, fond childhood memories were shared within multiple generations of families, both European and Maori (i.e., the Waimarama iwi). Genealogical connections to this area of coastline were referred to repeatedly, in part to underscore the standing of participants in the planning process, and to assert that they were of this place. Connections were often underscored by the perceptions of Ocean Beach as a highly desirable place to visit, by virtue of its wilderness qualities and accessibility. Respondents were also aware that undeveloped coastline in proximity to population centres is an increasingly scarce resource, in New Zealand and internationally.

4.2 Valuing Nature and Open Views

After asking interviewees to outline their personal connections to the study area, we sought to focus in particular on their understanding of the natural landscape (and associated views) at Ocean Beach. Opinion was relatively evenly divided between those who characterized the landscape as an undisturbed wilderness, and those who acknowledged that it was modified by human influence, but nonetheless retained some important natural values (at least in certain areas). Another significant, and related, point of difference in respondents’ accounts was between those who adopted what we term a ‘whole landscape approach’, and those who saw the Ocean Beach environment as being made up of discrete landscape elements of varying value and potential.

Respondents’ divergent views corresponded closely, although not perfectly, with differences of opinion on the appropriateness of development. Specifically, most of those opposed to the developers’ plans viewed the landscape in a holistic manner, encompassing beach, dunes, foothills, and the coastal escarpment to the top of the ridgeline – and argued that housing anywhere in this (very expansive) area was undesirable. Others, particularly pro-development interests, contended that some
parts of the Ocean Beach area merited protection, whereas others were suitable for development.

Informants generally had no hesitation as characterizing Ocean Beach as a natural landscape and a wilderness. While such characterizations of an area dominated by open pastoral hillsides (albeit with some pockets of native trees, as well as exotic pines) may, at first, appear unusual, it is worthwhile to recall that in New Zealand, the pastoral is often perceived as both valuable and natural. This view has received support from planning authorities and the courts. As the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE, 2001: 11) has noted, “‘natural’, in relation to landscape, does not necessarily equate with ‘pristine’”, and may include “such things as pasture, exotic tree species and wildlife both wild and domestic”, but not built structures. Most New Zealand landscapes have been subject to human modification, but this does not disqualify them from being considered natural, provided some natural phenomena remain. From this perspective, naturalness exists on a spectrum “from a pristine landscape to a cityscape” (PCE, 2001: 11).

Characterizations of Ocean Beach consistent with this view included “undisturbed nature” (Lee) and “completely undeveloped and unspoilt” (Paul), and “the only true wilderness beach [in Hawke’s Bay]. … A big wide expansive view devoid of human habitation. You can’t be half pregnant and you can’t have a kind of half wilderness” (written submission #153). The developer representative also characterized Ocean Beach as “a wilderness beach”, while cautioning against viewing it as “undeveloped” (Henry).

This last comment reflected the view that Ocean Beach was modified, but still natural and wild in important respects. For Henry, there was a “wilderness component”, related to the wide views, and a nationally significant dune system, but “no [other] ecology of value because it’s been destroyed by humans.” Another respondent related the experience of being questioned by a councillor during a public hearing as to whether the existing 32 houses at the southern end of the beach detracted from the “wilderness aspect”, and in response making a distinction between truly “remote” areas devoid of human influence, and places like Ocean Beach, which have a “wilderness character but … also that security of knowing there’s a surf club with a telephone, and people living there.” These wild but not remote sites, he suggested, remained important for those who “want to be able to get
away from it all but … don’t want to have to pack a week’s worth of food and … a satellite phone” (Gavin).

For most respondents, the current landscape was valued in particular for the views it afforded. Important views encompassed not only the beach and Pacific Ocean, but also the dunes, the flats, the steeply-rising escarpment and headlands, and the ridgeline. These could be enjoyed from any number of locations, but the most frequently mentioned was a small lookout on the side of the road immediately above the beach. It offers wide views, especially to the north end of the beach and Cape Kidnappers (see Fig. 1), but also to the somewhat developed area directly below (see Fig. 2).

![Figure 2: View of Ocean Beach from the lookout to the southeast. Features (from left to right) include: a private beach house (green building), the surf club and associated sheds (cream building); coastal flats owned by Estate Puke Puke Tangiora; the public car park; the road and stream, which divide the beach into its northern and southern ends; the bach settlement on Waipuka Incorporated land, including a private road. On the far right, just below the horizon, is Bare Island.](image-url)
For visitors to the beach, this lookout provides the first expansive view of the landscape, and it was often described with adjectives such as “breathtaking,” “amazing,” and “spectacular.” As one interviewee put it: “I’ve never heard anybody not do that sort of sharp intake of breath as they come over the hill [towards the lookout]” (Paul). Unsurprisingly, therefore, one of the more heated points of contention associated with the development proposals concerns the extent to which houses, roads and commercial buildings would be visible to beach-goers, particularly from the lookout.

Concern for protecting existing views was not one-dimensional, however. Many respondents spoke not only about enjoying particular views of the coastal environs, but also of being able to walk along the beach (particularly in a northerly direction), and being out of view of others: “I set out walking and I go a couple of kilometres, probably two or three kilometres until I’m clear of signs of human habitation, and there you go! There’s that bluff at the end” (Terrence). This sense of being free from surveillance distinguished Ocean Beach from other beaches in Hawke’s Bay: “at Ocean Beach you sort of get, when you’re walking along the beach and you’re enjoying it, you sort of get that feeling of it being an untouched beach. Whereas at Waimarama all you have to do is glance over your shoulder or back at the shoreline and there are all the houses” (Lee). Such accounts suggests that coastal landscapes are degraded when those at beach level can see houses above them, and be seen from them (see Collins & Kearns, 2008).

These observations about views of the natural landscape, and the ways in which they would, perhaps inevitably, by undermined by built structures, led many respondents to articulate a whole landscape approach. This perspective was diametrically opposed to suggestions from both developers and HDC planners and consultants that, as DPZ and Roberts Day (2006: 2.4) put it: “existing conditions and accompanying recommendations for Ocean Beach reveal areas that should be protected from development and areas that are ideally suited for development.” As one submitter to council noted, “the developer … [makes] the point that he is keen to protect areas of exceptional character – but those places of special character cannot be seen in isolation to the whole beach” (written submission #41). For Bonnie, metaphorically subdividing the beach into areas of greater and lesser value (as a prelude to literal subdivision), made no sense: “I don’t think you can chop up Ocean
Beach and say, this is special, that’s not – this is special, that’s not. The whole thing is a whole.”

Commentaries on current trends in coastal housing in New Zealand often evoke the notion of larger, more capital-intensive houses being ‘in the face’ of beach-goers. They serve as a reminder that while residential development may occur on privately-owned land, it can still be perceived as detrimental to public rights to enjoy the coastal environment (Peart, 2005). At stake, in particular, are the values attached to an ‘open’ landscape, to uninterrupted views of the coast and its hinterland, and freedom from the surveillance of owners (Collins & Kearns, 2008).

4.3 Landscape Classification in the Resource Management Process

One question that flows from public appreciation of the Ocean Beach landscape, and the development proposals, concerns the level of statutory protection to which the area is, or should be, entitled. A prima facie reading of principles guiding resource management in New Zealand suggests the level of protection may be high (see section 2.0). The current Hastings District Plan recognizes, and provides significant protection for, nine outstanding natural landscapes “identified as representing the most significant features in Hastings District” (HDC, 2003: 12.2-13; emphasis added). These include Cape Kidnappers (due to its “visual integrity” and “natural character”), but not Ocean Beach. The latter is, however, recognized among 10 “significant landscape character areas” entitled to some protection by virtue of being representative types. The Ocean Beach area, in general, is recognized as significant for the following reasons:

- Largely natural character because of the undeveloped rural character of the defining hills, and the natural dunes;
- Most extensive area of wilderness coast in the southern part of Hastings District;
- Picturesque qualities deriving from the bold hills defining the beach, the grand scale, the open coast;
- Dunes have significant habitat value. (HDC, 2003: 12.2-15)

The existing bach settlement is also classified as significant, by virtue of, inter alia, its “small scale, vernacular beach style” and “picturesque qualities as a small, intimate settlement within an open wilderness coast” (HDC, 2003: 12.2-15). Such descriptions of Ocean Beach’s “significance” resonate with, and lend official recognition to, much of the language that key informants used to characterize the area: including “natural”, “wilderness,” “picturesque”, and “grand.” However, at the
same time, the “significant” classification does not offer the level of protection to the existing landscape that most participants in the planning process desire (i.e., in many cases, complete protection). An “outstanding” designation would, in all likelihood, provide more support for such aspirations.

Many involved in the process are aware of this, including one land owner who believed that a Draft Structure Plan (EMS, 2007) prepared for Council was overly restrictive of development: “Ocean Beach is not an Outstanding Natural Feature as described in the Hastings District Plan. The draft structure plan treats the area as if it were an ‘Outstanding Natural Feature’ in many respects. We do not accept that such treatment is justifiable or warranted” (written submission #43). Conversely, a submitter in favour of greater protection of the beach from subdivision and development argued: “It is our submission that the Special Character Zone be given serious consideration to the elevated status of Outstanding Natural Feature. If we think on it, how many of us would describe to our visitors that we have special character views at Ocean Beach – or do we proudly suggest the outstanding must-see views….” On this grounds, the submitter suggested, there was a strong case for arguing that the “outstanding” designation given to Cape Kidnappers “could turn the corner and continue south” (written submission #127).

Ocean Beach’s current designation as ‘merely’ significant, was also a frequent topic of discussion in interviews. Our question about whether or not Ocean Beach merited official recognition as “outstanding” was often met with responses such as “absolutely,” “certainly”, and “yes, I do!”, followed by lengthy tributes to the qualities of the landscape. One important dissenting voice was that of the developer, who recognized the “special character” of the landscape, and the “national significance” of the dunes, but refuted the notion that it was iconic. The appropriate question, from this perspective, did not concern landscape classification, but rather: “How should development be controlled? What’s the alternative to the 20 hectare blocks as of right?” (Harry) (see section 2.0 for an outline of existing subdivision rights).

Among members of the public interviewed, several were unfamiliar with the relevant provisions of the RMA, and accordingly were ambivalent or uncertain about whether Ocean Beach should be classified as outstanding. Most, however, were
cognizant of the issue, and the associated debates which had been occurring for some time:

What everyone kept saying, all the way through the charrette, was: outstanding, outstanding, outstanding. But, ah, nobody’s yet to give it that status (Gavin)

I think that the people who’ve been there and the people who enjoy it would unanimously agree with me that it is an outstanding natural feature. … Again, I’m not a lawyer, so I’m not in a position to interpret the ins and outs of the Resource Management Act, but from my reading of it I think that Ocean Beach would definitely have that potential (Lee).

The issue of Ocean Beach’s designation was a particular topic of discussion with the three district council representatives interviewed, given that classification and regulatory protection of landscapes is a matter for the District Plan. One respondent was happy with the status quo: “we recognize it as significant, but it is not outstanding” (Lesley), while two were of the opinion that a higher level of protection was merited. For Charles, the relatively rapid and intensive coastal development of the last decade and a half justified changing Ocean Beach’s designation:

Interviewer:  Officially it’s not an outstanding natural landscape in the District Plan. Do you think it should be?
Charles: Yes, I do. But the one thing you’ve got to remember is that the District Plan was basically put together in 1991 – that’s when it was drafted – and … one has to look at the attitudes of society in ’91 as against the attitudes of society in 2007.
Interviewer: And there wasn’t the same pressure on the coastal environment in ’91?
Charles: No, there wasn’t. And I don’t think there was the same appreciation because of that lack of pressure. I don’t think there was the same appreciation of what those natural features were. They took them for granted, they didn’t think they’d have to be defended. I mean no one would have thought in ’91 that Ocean Beach would be the subject of a major subdivision. … I don’t think there’s any doubt that Ocean Beach would now be regarded as an outstanding natural feature.

Charles’ comments (which referred in particular to the Haupouri Flats) served as a useful reminder that the ways in which a landscape is perceived, even for statutory purposes, is not necessarily, or appropriately, fixed. The criteria for assessing landscape values may change over time, as may perceptions of particular features, and while some elements “may be able to objectively assessed, there will always be a subjective element to landscape assessment” (PCE, 2001: 11). The heightened level of protection that accompanies classifying a particular landscape as
‘outstanding’ was seen by many (although not all) respondents as an appropriate and helpful step in the debate over Ocean Beach.

4.4 BUILT LANDSCAPES PRESENT AND FUTURE

Although Ocean Beach is frequently characterized as wild and undeveloped, a distinctive cluster of buildings is sited on the south bank on the stream, adjacent to the current road access and car park (see Fig. 2). Consisting of 32 relatively modest baches on a narrow area of flat land (see Fig. 3), this development is known variously as the ‘Ocean Beach settlement’ and ‘Waipuka bach community.’ It is located on land owned by Waipuka Incorporation, a Maori trust.

The settlement is recognized in the Hastings District Plan (HDC, 2003: 12.2-15) as a “compact and discrete” development on “a small coastal terrace”, and as a valuable example of the “single storey, small scale, vernacular beach style.” In other words, the baches at Ocean Beach exemplify the type of built landscape that became valorized in the latter parts of the twentieth century, but is now increasingly rare, as coastal development becomes more intensive, professional and suburban in style (see Collins and Kearns, 2008). The settlement shares a number of other characteristics once found in many bach communities around New Zealand (see Kearns and Collins, 2006): there are questions about the legal status of the dwellings, and their location in a coastal hazard zone prone to erosion, flooding and inundation (EMS, 2006). As such, one respondent was accurate in characterizing the area as “the archetypal little bach community” (Katrina).

Notwithstanding the baches’ prominence in the Ocean Beach environment (i.e., adjacent to the sole point of public access), and debate regarding the suitability and legality of their location, respondents generally valued them as part of the landscape, consistent with the values they attached to the area. Indeed, many spoke about the settlement in glowing terms, as an example of appropriate beachfront development:

I love that settlement. To me that’s like Kiwiana and I think it would be neat to preserve it as it is and have other things in style with it. But apparently they do need to be moved because it is a hazard zone. Bach settlements are a rare thing. I remember one holiday back there when I was a child and it was amazing (Julia).
I like, to use somebody’s term, the vernacular of it all. To me, it’s something that we could promote, y’know, for our coastal environment. … go for the trusty old kiwi bach, y’know (Gavin).

I think they’re beautiful. I think they’re part of [the landscape], and should be allowed to stay. They’re kind of constrained by the waterway that goes out there, that separates them from the rest of the beach (Paul).

Other respondents who viewed the baches in a positive light acknowledged that their attachment was due, in part, to familiarity. This group valued Ocean Beach as they found it; the landscape was not unchanging, but nor was it necessarily worse for historical human intervention. Thus, responses to the question ‘Do the current 32 baches fit into the landscape?’ included the following nuanced reflections:

Yes, yeah. But I can say once again it’s because I’m used to it. I mean I shouldn’t say it because that means that generations down the track they’ll be used to [new] development, but I mean, I don’t know, I like to flatter myself and think I have good taste when it comes to baches. Beach baches should always be small, non-descript, unassuring, subtle, and they [the current buildings] all fall into that category. Yeah, I have no problems with those. They’re cool (Bonnie).

I remember watching *The Truman Show* sometime last year and there was some quote about, “we accept the reality with which we’re presented.” So to some extent, I
mean, you’ve grown up with those [baches], so you don’t really question them. But I think to a larger extent, the sort of low key bach lifestyle is found more acceptable because it’s part of our culture, it’s part of what New Zealanders are (Lee).

They don’t bother me. I’m not really sure why that is. …we tend to accept the world as it is, as we know it, and the way it is and has been and always will be (Terrence).

Baches (especially in low numbers) have come to be seen as consistent with, and even complementary to, New Zealand coastal landscape, although this was not always the case (Morton et al., 1973). In this context, new and intensive development is often seen as detrimental. Accordingly, a number of Ocean beach respondents articulated a sense of unease and impending loss in response to current plans for the landscape: “it will alter the experience of going to the beach totally” (Christine), “1000 houses is a really large number – that is a bustling, busy community, that’s a lot of traffic, it’s a lot more noise … it will change the whole character of the beach” (Amelia); “urban development would just change it – it’s wild uncontrolled [nature] and it doesn’t need to be ‘improved’, it’s time to turn that development narrative around” (Julia).

A contrasting view was presented by the developer representative, Henry, who contended that buildings may be “an enhancement in the landscape”, contrary to much New Zealand thinking (e.g., the NZCPS adopts a negative tone, talking only about “inappropriate development”). For Henry, human and natural habitats were complementary, and moreover well-designed built structures could be valuable in their own right. The point, from Henry’s perspective, was that “buildings, done properly, don’t necessarily have to be mitigated.” In the Ocean Beach context, conservation values and an intensive village could be consistent with each other.

Participants seldom perceived any such consistency in existing coastal settlements in Hawke’s Bay. This was particularly true for Waimarama – located immediately to the south of Ocean Beach – where a bach-style community has evolved in a piece-meal fashion to a prosperous settlement of around 230 relatively substantial homes, some of them built at the top of the dunes. While building styles at Waimarama are varied, and distinct from those proposed at Ocean Beach, development of the former site was still perceived as sending an important warning about what could happen at the latter.
A significant proportion of respondents stated that they now avoided Waimarama, as a result of the increasing development of the beach, and the changes accompanying it. Several held it in very low regard:

Waimarama’s gone for me, it’s totally gone. We used to have a great time [there]. … [My problem is] the houses and the type of people that live there. Peacock displays up and down the beach instead of just trying to be part of the original atmosphere which is why there were attracted to go there in the first place. It seems to happen so frequently: you get these people, rich buggers, and they see this character-full little beach, they buy the bach, they knock it down, they build some monstrosity (Bonnie).

Why would you allow what’s happened at Waimarama to happen to Ocean Beach? If anything Ocean Beach is more spectacular – it’s bigger, it’s wider open, and there’s not development there. … We always go to Ocean Beach, we never go to Waimarama (Paul).

Not all respondents were so scathing: for a minority, the point was not so much that Waimarama was inferior (or that it had been ‘ruined’ by development), but rather that it was different from Ocean Beach: the former offered a suburban-type environment that could be found at many parts of the New Zealand coast; the latter offered an increasingly rare wilderness experience accessible to city dwellers. These differences in characterizations aside, several interviewees were of the view that, if additional coastal housing was required close to Napier and Hastings, they should be provided at Waimarama, rather than Ocean Beach:

With regards to development, if there’s already 300 houses at Waimarama, and it’s already a nice little community, and if [more development at Waimarama] can be inclusive with lots of green space, then go for it. I wouldn’t want to be advocating that they rip it all down and take it away, it’s there now (Gavin).

Waimarama is already heavily developed with houses, some of them multi-million dollar houses, and there’s lots more space there for people that want you know, a subdivision…. Those people that want to have a coastal home, go to Waimarama. It’s only 10 minutes more [driving] than going to Ocean Beach (Jonathon).

Such suggestions appear, in a broad sense, to be consistent with the coastal planning principles articulated in the RMA and NZCPS: namely, protection of natural features from “inappropriate subdivision, use and development”, with these activities encouraged only in areas where the natural character is already compromised (i.e., a policy of containment). Demand for coastal residential and commercial development could, in theory, be met at Waimarama (where extensive subdivision and development has already occurred), while Ocean Beach (where there are currently only five private landowners, and a cluster of 32 baches) is protected. Achieving such
a goal would be difficult, however, given fragmented private property ownership across the area. Denying one landowner (or group of landowners) approval to subdivide, use and develop their land, while granting those same rights to landowners at another beach, in order to achieve the planning goal of containment, would likely be politically and legally difficult. Even within the Ocean Beach study area itself, suggestions that development might be permitted at a particular site, but only if land elsewhere along the beach is covenanted, have met with protest:

The study area comprises some 1030 hectares of land, which is owned by different parties. The draft structure plan disregards ownership differences and does not address the rights of existing owners and the provision of development rights to each of these owners separately. …

[It] seeks to achieve the long-term protection of certain areas by requiring “no subdivision” covenants over lands owned by one party in exchange for development rights being granted over lands owned by another party….. We do not accept such treatment is justifiable or warranted. No party should be beholden to another party by virtue of a local authority structure plan (written submission #43).

In the coastal environment, then, arguments for confinement grounded in resource management law and planning objectives may run up against those based on private property rights and equity for multiple owners. The relatively small number of private landowners at Ocean Beach makes a large, integrated development proposal – such as the DPZ master plan – viable, in a way it would not be at a site where titles are already more fragmented (e.g., Waimarama). Nevertheless, because there is still more than one owner, it would likely be problematic for a public authority to insist on a confined, discrete development. In addition to this difficulty, suggestions that future development occur at Waimarama rather than Ocean Beach does not necessarily sit well with those living at the former site.

The DPZ master plan for Ocean Beach was new urbanist in orientation, and thus featured a range of housing styles, built in a coordinated manner in areas of varying density, rather than the stand-alone ‘trophy houses’ seen at some other beaches, such as Waimarama. The developer representative explained that the focus of the proposed development would be a village centre zone – an intensive core development with apartments and houses, as well as a cafés and restaurants, and facilities such as a swimming pool and village green (Harry). This informant placed considerable emphasis on the need for “density to form community” – specifically a community of varied socio-economic status. The essence of this claim is that a dense development can include a variety of housing options (including
apartments) across a wider range of prices than is traditionally found in lower-density coastal subdivisions made up largely or solely of stand-alone houses. Accordingly, households who might not otherwise be able to live in a coastal community, could potentially find a dwelling to buy or rent (especially if they do not require a large indoor area).

The developers’ arguments around community and socio-economic mix – which are central to the justification of their vision for Ocean Beach – are subject to contestation. A number of our interviewees were of the view that Ocean Beach, as an area, already had a community: “the community that uses it weekend by weekend” (Amelia), “all the people that enjoy it and have got together to try to oppose [development]” (Lee), and “the Maori people, and the weekenders, and those people that lease the baches” (Terrence). An alternative viewpoint valued the currently rather modest human presence. From this perspective, the term ‘community’ appeared to signal over-development. More generally, the notion that community could be created through a particular style of urban design – one of the central, recurring claims made by proponents of new urbanism – was met with scepticism. Several respondents asked whether the term was being used because it was ‘warm’ and ‘fuzzy’, and made development more politically acceptable. Many were also sceptical about whether a socio-economic mix could be established, given the considerable premium real estate markets place on beachfront property.

At Ocean Beach, the current bach settlement is an accepted part of the landscape, and has received official recognition as ‘significant’ in the District Plan. Proposals for substantial residential and commercial development do not receive the same broad level of support, and are contested on multiple grounds. For many observers of the process, development elsewhere along the coast – especially at Waimarama – serves as a stark warning about potentially adverse effects that could unfold at Ocean Beach. The DPZ master plan promises a socio-economic mix and sense of community made possible by density and a mixture of housing types. Such language is commonly associated with new urbanism, but is questioned by those who have entered the planning process in opposition to this development.
4.5 TOWARDS A FOREIGN LANDSCAPE? FEARS OF AMERICANIZATION.

Many of those opposed to development at Ocean Beach characterized pressure on the coast, both in Hawke’s Bay and New Zealand more generally, as ‘American’ in origin and/or style. This concern for ‘Americanization’ took several forms. In some instances, references to American influence appeared largely metaphorical: ‘America’ and ‘Americans’ were a proxy for private property development in general. This was portrayed as an ultimately negative influence in New Zealand that undermined local distinctiveness, and placed profit ahead of all other values. From this perspective, American influence threatened to undermine both landscapes, and land uses, unique to New Zealand. In other instances, concern for supposed American influences was more literal. Specifically, participants articulated concerns related to the purchase of coastal land by particular United States citizens, to the involvement of the US-based design company DPZ, and to the perceived replication of US building styles.

The topic of housing evoked the most complaints about negative American influence. One respondent spoke at some length about how traditional baches – “small, non-descript, unassuming, subtle” – fitted in to the New Zealand coastal environment, in contrast to newer, capital-intensive building styles, which were “an import from America”, and reflective of supposed American values, such as “flashiness” and materialism (Bonnie). Another interviewee noted, less emotively, that first-hand experience of coastal development in the United States had increased his awareness of the value of undeveloped places in general.

In addition, would-be American purchasers – alongside other potential foreign buyers with strong currencies – appeared to represent a generic threat to New Zealanders’ ability to afford coastal land: “they are returning out here, they’re buying life-style blocks near the beach because their dollar is going to buy three times as much over here” (Aroha). Several participants referred to the purchase of Summerlee Station at nearby Cape Kidnappers by an American billionaire, Julian Robertson, as clear evidence of foreign pressure on the coast.

Evidence of American influence in the proposed development of Ocean Beach extended to the involvement of DPZ Pacific – the Pacific Rim affiliate of the Miami, Florida based Duany Plater-Zyberk – in preparing the master plan for Ocean Beach.
While the master plan refers briefly to several New Zealand examples of pre-automobile suburbs built according to ‘traditional’ principles, it also applies the new urbanist toolkit pioneered in places such as Seaside, Florida, to the Ocean Beach landscape. It suggests that ‘traditional neighbourhood design’ would produce an attractive, mixed-density, pedestrian-friendly and long-term community at Ocean Beach – as well as a desirable alternative to the ‘suburban’-style developments seen elsewhere along the New Zealand coastline (DPZ & Roberts Day, 2006).

The proposal did indeed propose building styles, intensities, and heights that are radical departures from the norm along the New Zealand coastline: these included four-storey buildings, apartments, and mock Tudor architecture. It also employed distinctive new urbanist language that remains largely unfamiliar in New Zealand: e.g., development was not to occur in ‘subdivisions’ or even ‘neighbourhoods’, but rather in “a clustering of villages and a hamlet” (DPZ & Roberts Day, 2006: ii). The scale of the proposed development – 782 lots, encompassing 980 dwellings, as well commercial buildings, and community facilities such as a school and a church – surprised many local people.

One participant had recently watched The Truman Show (1997), a film set in Seaside, Florida (renamed ‘Seahaven’ for the purposes of the movie), where the controlled and contrived nature of the title character’s life was underscored by the sterile and micro-managed nature of the urban environment (which viewers know is actually a set). For Lee, the model of Seaside/Seahaven was highly inappropriate for Ocean Beach:

Interviewer: It’s interesting you mention The Truman Show, you might know of the connection already, but the team that designed Seaside, Florida are also behind one of the designs here.

Lee: Yeah, I mean I think you could get some great [i.e., negative] publicity out if you started showing people some of those houses [from Seaside] and somehow superimposed them on to the beach, because that would draw some interesting comparisons, and they would be an example of something that doesn’t fit in.

Interviewer: Right yeah, did you know that? Is that why you chose to watch the movie, or…?

Lee: No we had to watch it for [a class], and I came home one day and [a family member] said, “have you seen The Truman Show? Apparently they’re the ones that are developing Ocean Beach.” And I just shook my head, I couldn’t believe it! I mean, and I heard later that The Truman Show housing was touted as one of the biggest successes
which I always thought was interesting because it was sort of put into *The Truman Show* as a bit of a mockery really.

Interviewer: It was portrayed as very artificial.
Lee: Very artificial nature.

This notion of artificiality was invoked by another interviewee opposed to development at Ocean Beach, for whom the cultural point of reference was not *The Truman Show*, but rather the rather the television series *Desperate Housewives* – set in a very prosperous and outwardly orderly Californian street, Wisteria Lane:

So anyway, they came – those American folk, DPZ and Associates, came up with that design. What did we call it (pause) … Wisteria Lane. And it was their style and I didn’t like it. I mean one or two houses like that would probably, you know, be quite nice, but to have streets and streets of them, and have two storey houses all though the Haupouri Flats…. And I could hear what they were saying, you know they have this Seaside place over in the States, and its this precinct where people walk instead of [use] cars and I’m sure that might fit in somewhere that was desperate for a city at the beach. But to me, *I didn’t think we were desperate for a city at the beach!* We’ve got a huge town [Hastings] just here, just 15-20 minutes away. I just couldn’t see the sense of it. [They’d tried to convince us,] but I didn’t think they were very reality based (dramatic pause) … affordable housing and what do they call it, a “cradle to the grave community” (ironic tone)…. For me they were just looking at maximizing the potential profit to be made from a development project rather than a real, a genuine need for people to live out there (Gavin; original emphasis).

This comment merits quoting at length by virtue of the way in which it encapsulates many of the objections to the master plan: that it was contrived (like “Wisteria Lane”); overly large in both scale and intensity (“two storey houses all through the Haupouri Flats”; “a city at the beach”); primarily about “maximizing the potential profit” rather than community-mindedness; unnecessary, given the proximity of other settlements, such as Hastings (“just 15-20 minutes away”); and ultimately foreign (see numerous references to the United States).

The point, for many other members of the public moved to comment on the issue, was not so much that the master plan was an intrinsically poor design, but that it was inappropriate for Ocean Beach – one of the last relatively undeveloped sections of the Hawke’s Bay coast proximate to the region’s major population centres. As Christine put it: “when you saw those sketches of three-storey apartments and god knows what else, you think, I mean, how wrong can you pick something for a Hawke’s Bay settlement?!” Thus, the new urbanist design was not only foreign to New Zealand, givens its American origins, it was also (and perhaps more importantly), alien to coastal Hawke’s Bay, and out of keeping with current and
historical uses of local beaches. This thinking was encapsulated in the following strongly-worded submission:

The traditional design project DPZ, Roberts Day and Hill Country Corporation have conjured up is an interesting and commendable idea but totally inappropriate for Ocean Beach. It seeks to emulate overseas models, has employed foreigners to impose a plan for a New Zealand beach, and because of this shows no real understanding of the values of the current and past Hawke’s Bay community and how best to enhance these (written submission #157; emphasis added).

A number of other respondents were less emotive in their responses, suggesting that the high densities in the master plan were proposed primarily to offset the high cost of supplying infrastructure (especially sewerage, water and new roads) to the beach. From this view, the design was less an attempt to impose American values on a New Zealand beach, than a pragmatic effort to improve the economic viability of the development. From the developer’s perspective, the proposed density was necessary to avoid sprawl and 20 hectare subdivisions, enhance the landscape, and foster a sense of community (see section 4.4).

4.6 “SOMETHING FOR THE HAWKE’S BAY PEOPLE”: CAMPING AT OCEAN BEACH

In discussing the future of Ocean Beach with participants, we were struck by the degree of passion with which the possibility of a campground was discussed. The DPZ master plan made provision for a caravan park alongside other facilities such as a conference centre and equestrian area (see DPZ & Roberts Day, 2006: 4.2). Camping opportunities have also been discussed by the Hastings District Council in terms of uses for a potential public reserve on the Haupouri Flats. Thus there are few, if any, stakeholders involved in the planning process opposed to the provision of a campground per se – reflecting, perhaps, the prominent and valorized place of camping (and the coastal campground in particular) in New Zealand popular culture (DOC, 2006).

For many respondents, a campground was the only form of development they could actively support at Ocean Beach. As one put it, “even though I’m keen on no development, that doesn’t exclude the idea of campground” (Amelia). However, not any campground would do: most envisioned a basic facility in stark contrast to the more upmarket holiday park. Contemporary holiday parks in New Zealand offer a variety of accommodation types from basic tent sites, to utility sites for caravans, motor-homes and busses, through to cabins, and in some cases self-contained
motel-style rooms. These exist alongside communal facilities for cooking, washing and laundry, and in many cases games rooms, television lounges, and even swimming pools.

The theme of ‘back to basics’ was articulated strongly and repeatedly, even though our question on camping went no further than: “Would you like to see a campground at Ocean Beach?” One response captured the difference between a ‘holiday park’ style campground, and a ‘simple’ campground, with particular clarity:

Well, what bothers me about campgrounds is that one, you’ve got to have large ablution blocks, water, sewerage again. Those ablution blocks are large and then they seem to have cooking facilities inside them and they have drying rooms and washing machines and all those things. And then every site has a post where you put out your power things [i.e., electrical cables] or whatever. I don’t think that’s what people have in mind, I don’t think that’s what my family has in mind when they say campsite: they’ve got a little tent, somebody that swims in the sea and walks down to the surf club and uses that [as a facility] (Aroha).

Whereas a holiday park, and its attendant buildings, would make a significant impact on the coastal/rural landscape at Ocean Beach, a simple campground would offer a more low-impact beach experience, seen as more appropriate for the site, and more consistent with national heritage. To identify a counterpoint to ‘back to basics’ camping, respondents did not need to look to the United States. Rather, they looked to local examples – in particular, to the Clifton Motor Camp, located on the coast north of Ocean Beach, near Hastings. This campground was characterized by one respondent, Gavin, as having “a handkerchief of land to put your tent,” with the remainder in “permanent dwellings” – namely, caravans and motor-homes left at the site year-round, most of which have awnings attached to increase living space. There was strong opposition to any replication of this arrangement at Ocean Beach.

Such concerns led several interviewees to suggest that only tents would be appropriate at Ocean Beach, as part of a “basic camping” environment offering few luxuries: “a cold water shower and long drop loo, and that’s all” (Katrina). Thus, many of those involved in the planning process for Ocean Beach advocated a particular form of camping, and an associated ordering of the landscape consistent with the values they attached to Ocean Beach. In this respect the structure of their arguments mirrored, in some ways, that deployed by advocates of private residential and commercial development: Ocean Beach could be enhanced through human
intervention, but this was contingent on a particular order being imposed on the landscape.

A recent review of camping opportunities in New Zealand by the Department of Conservation (DOC, 2006) noted that demand for campsites is highest along the coasts and lakes of the upper North Island. However, demand for residential property and second homes is also particularly high in this region, fuelling rapid increases in the value of the coastal land, and pressure to convert campgrounds to other, more 'productive' uses. DOC (2006) identified East Coast/Hawke’s Bay as having witnessed a net loss of 23 campgrounds between 1996 and 2006 – the equal-highest loss for any region in New Zealand (together with Auckland/Coromandel). Each of these regions accounts for about one-third of the national loss of 70 campgrounds over the study period. For several respondents, local camp closures – such as those at Mahia to the north (focus of the 2006 documentary The Last Resort), and Aramoana/Shoal Bay to the south – informed their support for a new facility at Ocean Beach.

4.7 Property Rights in a Dynamic Landscape

Many of the questions raised by proposals for Ocean Beach relate, more or less directly, to the issue of property rights. These include questions of access and zoning, and the possibility of public acquisition of some or all of the privately-owned at the beach. Each of these questions has technical and legalistic aspects. By way of example, a portion of the publicly-used road accessing the beach is on private land, and use of this section of road has therefore been dependent on the good will of the property owners. There has been some tension between the owners, Estate Puke Puke Tangiora, and the HDC, over the land in question. A short-term resolution may be achieved by the Council purchasing a three-year lease (Gullery, 2007). Our concern was not to explore the (often very dense) details of such questions, but rather to focus on the larger picture of how a sample of participants in the planning process conceived of property rights at the field site. Following Blomley (2005), our questions on this theme were not framed in abstract or legal terms, but rather were grounded in the everyday: specifically, the oft-discussed options for Ocean Beach, and the extent to which each option was perceived to recognize, or abrogate, the rights of land-owners.
One common theme in respondents’ replies to these questions was that property rights were not conceived in absolute terms. In other words, there was no suggestion that ownership brought with it the right to do as one pleased with the land, and no strong hostility to the notion that property rights are properly defined and limited by public authority. While absolutist conceptions of property are heard with some frequency in New Zealand, they were not apparent at Ocean Beach. Rather, there was broad agreement that property rights existed within a prevailing planning framework (established by the RMA and the plans issued under it), and that this framework was generally appropriate – although also subject to change as allowed for by law. Thus, the developer representative acknowledged that the existing development rights were limited to 20 hectare subdivisions, but argued that an alternative should be pursued (pursuant to officially-approved plan changes), because “we need to do something better at Ocean Beach” (Henry).

Many interviewees contended that if development rights over and above those already existing at the site were not granted (through the democratic and legal processes for achieving a plan change), then this did not represent a denial of rights, or a public ‘taking’ of private property. As Amelia explained: “[The developers] knew what the potential was, but they also knew the status quo, and the process they had to go through. You know, that they couldn’t go in there and by right build a township.” Under this resource management regime, developers might not achieve their goals for the site, but this was a normal commercial risk, rather than an insult to any sanctified notion of private property:

Private landowners have a legitimate entitlement to do with their land as they please, more or less, but the moment they embark on using it for property development as a profit-making exercise, then they have some responsibility to respect the wider interests of the community they could possibly affect. Persons who buy land with the intention of developing it do so in the principle of taking legitimate risk; they should apply all the necessary diligence first and if they do not that is their problem. A perceived right to a change in zoning or policy to provide a guarantee for their development is not an appropriate solution (written submission #110).

Another participant, Gavin, acknowledged that if there was a significant shift in the planning rules governing Ocean Beach – such as classification as an outstanding natural landscape (see discussion in section 4.3) – then the developers might have a legitimate case for public compensation. Even then, he implied, it was still legitimate for public authorities to set rules for the use of privately-owned land, and property
rights only existed within this framework: “maybe [the owner] would have to get used to having … an outstanding landscape that won’t have houses along the skyline perhaps.”

Respondents’ understanding of property rights as highly conditional was also apparent in another prominent theme in the data: namely, that use and development rights were appropriately limited to ends deemed ‘acceptable’ by the community. In broad terms, acceptable property development at Ocean Beach was held to be small-scale and familial in nature. Many opponents of large-scale development were anxious to state that limited development on Maori land was acceptable (“I don’t think anyone has got any objection to the Maori people on their Maori land bringing their whanau back to live there and the existing bach settlement being kind of revamped” - Julia), as was the addition of houses for family members more generally (“the people owning the land, if they wanted to build a house for their son or daughter or something like that … and if it was done in a really careful fashion … and they weren’t defiling the land, then I don’t have a problem with that” – Bonnie). What was less acceptable, however, was the use of rights “to fill the landscape up with humanity” (Gavin). Such criticisms, which have been expressed frequently in the planning process, led the developer representative to observe that “we won’t have communities and places to live if someone doesn’t take the risk and develop” (Harry).

Several Maori respondents at Ocean Beach emphasized that their land was not for sale, and that unlike others in the area, they could not simply sell up and move on if the impacts of development were adverse. This was presented as in part a philosophical stance; as Aroha had explained to a neighbour who was planning to sell: “that’s the difference between you and us: for you it’s a commodity, for us it’s who we are.” Moreover, in the case of at least one of the Maori estates at Ocean Beach, sale was prohibited by the will of a far-sighted ancestor. While this land ownership was a matter of pride, and helped to underpin the right to be heard on matters affecting Ocean Beach, it also posed challenges: the land was never going to be sold, and so possessed no market value in a conventional sense, yet was still subject to rates, which might rise if development proceeded.

In discussions of options for Ocean Beach’s future, a Regional or National Park was enthusiastically supported by many members of the public, although not by
developers or council representatives. From the developers’ perspective, selling the land as is was not an option – they had a long-term commitment to developing the site themselves. From the perspective of council representatives, the cost of purchasing the land was prohibitive: “For a region [like Hawke’s Bay] and for a council like Hastings, there’s some hard realities there: I mean you’ve got this huge pressures to keep rates down yet people advocate spending $10, $15 million on land acquisition…” (Matthew). Moreover, in the absence of a willing seller, government agencies (whether local, regional or national) would need to invoke their powers of designation and compulsory acquisition to establish a park – a process described as very difficult, lengthy and expensive. For many members of the public, however, the case for a park was compelling. Not only would it safeguard public interests (e.g., to enjoyment of an open and wild landscape), it would do so by transferring the title to a public authority, in a manner consistent with the dominant logic of property. The current owners would receive a ‘fair’ price (it was widely assumed such a price would be accepted), and property rights would be transferred, not abrogated:

If the developers were told they weren’t able to do a significant amount of developing, the option of buying the land would be proposed to them. … I don’t know what [the principal developer] paid for the land, but I’d say he would be paid more by Council than he bought it for in the first place, so that would cover financial compensation. But I suppose rather than seeing it as compensation, I would like to see it as an investment by the public (Lee).

It’s a pittance. To me $30 or $40 million is nothing when I think of it. Pay them. Work out a formula that says ‘sorry guys, it’s not going to be developed, we’re going to give you this instead.’ You know, they come into it with nothing, they came into it when it was farmland, but, irrespective, they should be compensated for whatever it’s worth. … There are 140,000 people in Hawke’s Bay, ok? … Per capita … it’s a few hundred dollars, it’s nothing (Paul).

As a general rule, then, respondents thought competing interests at Ocean Beach could be resolved within the existing property system. Importantly, this system was one that recognized owner rights only within an existing planning/resource management framework, and which also allowed for the possibility of the public interest being realized through public purchase of the land in question. Maori participants did not reject or challenge this system, but noted that it could pose unique challenges for Maori landowners, whose land is rated, but is not necessarily a commodity that will ever be traded on the land market.
5.0 SUMMARY

In undertaking research into property development in coastal New Zealand, and associated debates and questions, one cannot help but be struck by the widespread nature of the process. While the trend towards more intensive coastal settlement is most evident in the northern half of the North Island, particularly on the Pacific coast, it is a national phenomenon. In this context, a detailed case study approach can provide much needed focus. It allows for engagement with a place and a sample of its people, and for assembling a nuanced understanding of why proposed or actual development attracts attention, raises questions, and often excites passions.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the focus of this study was very much on one landscape. A critical question for future research concerns whether our findings reflect the relative uniqueness of the Ocean Beach situation (e.g., the intensive new urbanist master plan; the extremely limited residential development in the current ‘wilderness’ landscape), or might be commonly found in debates elsewhere in coastal New Zealand. We intend to pursue this question with reference to sites in Northland, as part of our ongoing research.

This report has focussed on seven themes that, in combination, go some way to explaining how and why coastal property development is contested. Discussion about the future of Ocean Beach is wide-ranging, and not restricted to narrow statutory terms. This is to say that while the RMA is clearly highly relevant to the debate (as is the much less-frequently invoked NZCPS), not all concerns and interests are captured by its provisions. By way of example, the RMA is especially pertinent in discussions about the protection and classification of coastal landscapes, but has little specific to say about the value of emotional and familial attachment to place, and fears about potential foreign control. While the latter types of concern might be dismissed as ‘nostalgia’ and ‘nationalism’, respectively, this does not alter the fact they are important to many participants, and help to explain why many chose to become involved in the planning process.

Significant development proposals, such as those at our case study site, necessarily raise important technical questions. Yet Ocean Beach is not only a physical landscape, but also a social one, and in this study we have emphasized
human values. These include understandings of the beach as a place of childhood adventure and learning, as a wild-yet-accessible coastal landscape (an increasingly rare combination), and an environment that speaks to what New Zealand, and Hawke’s Bay, are – or should be – about. Many participants perceive that these values are threatened by proposals for significant residential and commercial development. One potential change not viewed in this way was a campground, provided it was ‘basic’, and thus genuinely ‘Kiwi’ in character. The contrast between such a campground, and the perceived ‘American’ dystopia of intensive development, was frequently expressed in stark terms.

The existing bach settlement at Ocean Beach was also perceived to be consistent with national heritage, and the values New Zealanders attach to coastal landscapes. Moreover, it was acknowledged that the archetypal ‘Kiwi’ bach – a very basic structure – was threatened by the trend, exhibited in Waimarama and elsewhere, towards more impressive, and substantial holiday homes. In Bonnie’s words: “they buy the bach, they knock it down, they build some monstrosity.” Such ‘upgrading’ is, of course, generally consistent with how private property works.

At Ocean Beach, however, private property rights are generally understood as limited, and inseparable from an overarching regulatory context. Accordingly, plans for “imposing … another change on the landscape”, as Terrence put it, in a way not permitted by existing local rules, are generally deemed to be appropriately subject to governmental control and public oversight. Many of those involved in the planning process appeared to conceptualize the landscape as a common gift to the people of Hawke’s Bay, and hoped that the notion of a ‘coastal commons’ could be literally secured through public purchase and conversion to a park or reserve. Ultimately, it was the landscape, rather than property rights, that were at stake.

6.0 REFERENCES


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