

6. SOUTHSHORE BEACH PARK - DUNE MANAGEMENT POLICIES

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The purpose of this report is to present the results of a survey of residents, recently carried out in the Southshore and South Brighton areas and to recommend two changes to the Christchurch Beaches and Coastal Parks Management Plan.

INTRODUCTION

The Christchurch City Council's Coast Care programme recently conducted a postal survey of 1,750 Southshore and South New Brighton households, seeking community views regarding the management and extension of public walkways, and the management of vegetation for firebreaks, along the beachfront sand dune reserve area at Southshore. The survey arose out of a report presented to the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board on 31 July 2000. The report sought to address issues of significant concern to the community and Coast Care staff including fire risk, private encroachment, public access, dune erosion and the illegal dumping of garden and building waste on Recreation Reserve lands.

The area under consideration in the survey is the dune-land recreation reserve (RS 40856), extending for 1.6km along the beach dunes from Caspian Street to Tern Street and adjoining directly with private properties accessed off Rocking Horse Road. Approximately 50% of the length of the boundary is unformed road reserve in three separate sections.

The reserve is managed by the City Council under policies set out in the Christchurch Beaches and Coastal Parks Management Plan 1995. The policies focus on the environmental protection and ecological restoration of the coastal sand dunes, as well as allowing for, and managing, the competing residential and recreational interests and impacts on this dynamic but vulnerable ecosystem.

BACKGROUND

The 1993 draft Beaches and Coastal Parks Plan proposed a continuous (where possible) public walking track, now known as the Southern Pegasus Bay Track, through the coastal dunes from the Waimakariri River to the Southshore Spit. At that time the Southshore Ratepayers' Association objected to these preliminary plans for the track through 'their' area, on the grounds that it would reduce privacy and security and increase the hazard of fire and vandalism. The section of track which was to wind its way through the dunes, from Caspian Street to Tern Street, was removed from the 1995 plan and the track stopped from proceeding any further south than Caspian Street. However, provisions were made to allow for the reassessment of this situation in the future, and this is being undertaken now.

Over the last five years most of the Southern Pegasus Bay Track has been formed, as far south as Caspian Street. Its growing popularity as a recreational pathway, along with various Parks and Waterways Unit management concerns, has now prompted a formal review of the possibility of reinstating the track to Tern Street, as suggested in the original plans.

At the April meeting of the Parks and Recreation Committee, the Southshore Ratepayers' Association made representations regarding the proposed extension to the Southern Pegasus Bay Track between Caspian Street and Tern Street. The Committee recommended that further consultation be undertaken by the Board with local residents on this matter. The survey was the major consultation exercise undertaken with local residents.

THE SURVEY

The survey was mailed to all 1,750 households in the South Brighton and Southshore areas, from Bridge Street to the Southshore Spit. The survey area was chosen to reflect both those residents most directly affected by the policy proposals and those already using or most likely to make use of the area if access was available. The questionnaire, with a freepost return, prompted a response from 12% (209) of the households in the local community - 77 residents from the Southshore area (Rocking Horse Road and adjacent streets), 69 residents living in the South New Brighton area, and 63 residents who did not give an address. A number of personal letters were also received offering comments on the questions posed. There were three respondents who did not answer any questions as they believed the issues did not affect them. Some others did not give an answer all the questions, only answering one or two questions.

The four questions in the survey targeted two main issues of concern for the management of the Southshore dune area. Firstly, the lack of formal guidelines for firebreak management between the reserve and adjacent private properties. Secondly, the debate about pedestrian and (consequently) management access through the length of the reserve. The results of the survey are tabled. The table below provides a summary of the results:

Question	Support	%	Object	%	Answers	%
Q1: Firebreak Management	A-71	34%	B-128	61%	199	95%
Q2: 5 metres width of fire break	154	74%	36	17%	190	91%
Q3: Extend track	140	67%	65	31%	205	98%
Q4: 50 metres distance	143	68%	51	24%	194	92%

ADDRESSING CONCERNS

The draft results of this survey were presented to representatives of the Southshore Ratepayers' Association (SSRA) on 10 May 2001. Our discussions revealed a general consensus regarding the development of a clear policy for firebreak management along the boundary with private properties. There was a desire for any policy to offer a variety of options for implementation to suit individual needs. There was also support for enforcing policy in regard to private occupation of public reserve land, especially where illegal dumping and storage of waste and materials was involved.

On the issue of pedestrian access through the reserve and the continuation of the Southern Pegasus Bay Track, a strong divergence of opinions is still very evident. The recent SSRA survey, undertaken prior to the Council survey, showed that 66 out of 88 Southshore respondents (75%) were opposed to any track extension. This is apparently at odds with the results of the Council survey, which showed a 42 to 35 split of Southshore respondents, marginally in favour of the track extension. To meet SSRA concerns about the accuracy of the analysis of results from this survey, it has been individually checked, recounted and verified by the Community Board Secretary, Adrian Carpinter.

The difference in results from the two surveys by Southshore respondents initially appears difficult to explain. It is surprising to the SSRA that the strong negative response to the track proposal in its survey is not repeated in both surveys. The fact that the SSRA survey included their questions on the track and fire break proposals as part of a much wider ranging multiple question survey, and that it provided no discussion, background or illumination of the issues surrounding the proposals is a difference. Respondents were expected to have read previous articles in the local newsletter to have an understanding of the issues involved. The Council survey however was able to provide accurate background and details on the questionnaire form, which may have illuminated the reality of the proposals and alleviated some concerns.

One of the main concerns expressed regarding the proposed track extension was the loss of privacy, increased vulnerability to crime and vandalism, and interference with a natural wilderness area. The reasons provided by those in opposition of a track extension are certainly understandable and the concerns of residents should not be ignored. A review of police crime statistics and their locations for the Southshore Area for the period from January 1999 to December 2000 could be said to show few correlations to existing access tracks from the beach. However, in some cases concerns expressed by individuals living next to the reserve raise matters that are partly their own responsibility. For example, residents at those properties without rear boundary fences while expressing security concerns may have to consider their own security responsibilities.

A number of submissions address the wilderness values of the area that would be threatened by any track development. It is true that the area does offer a perceived 'wilderness' experience in a dune-land setting. However, presently there are already a considerable number of private tracks through the reserve, many privately mown, which run from residential properties to the beach. Some of these private tracks also access illegal dumping sites in the dunes. These tracks are not mentioned by objectors when they are extolling the untouched wilderness values of the area as a reason to exclude the 'public'. There are few native or 'threatened' plants or animals regularly using the area in question that would be disturbed by increased pedestrian traffic.

CONCLUSION

In terms of firebreak management issues, 61% of all survey returns give the opinion that the primary responsibility for fire management lies with the Council and should therefore be carried out by Council staff, with community input. A width of 5 metres is deemed acceptable by 74% of survey respondents.

Although respondents in the Southshore area are closely divided 55% to 45% in favour of the track extension, the resounding response from the general community is that it should go ahead. A total of 140 out of the 209 survey returns, or 67%, support the track extension south of Caspian Street. For those living outside of the Southshore the desire for access is even greater with 74% in favour of a continuation of the track to the south.

The community and Parks staff foresee many benefits of a track extension. Increased use will lead to an increased awareness and appreciation of the local environment as a wider section of the public are introduced to and have access to the beauty of Southshore. The track will be 'complete', and in its finished form will become known as an excellent recreation area, sheltered from winds, and linking the entire Christchurch coastline, and all its attributes, together. A formed access route will allow management access to carry out tasks such as planting, weed control and resource protection and monitoring.

In conclusion, it must be acknowledged that the reserve is public recreation land, and all residents of Southshore, South New Brighton and the whole of Christchurch have a legitimate right to enjoy and access it. Recreational opportunities and environmental awareness can only be enhanced by the addition of a further stage of the Southern Pegasus Bay Track.

The above report was before the Burwood/Pegasus Community Board at its meeting on 2 July. The Board supported the proposed changes to the Management Plan.

Recommendation: That the following policy additions and changes to the Christchurch Beaches and Coastal Parks Management Plan be approved:

1. Policy for Fire Risk Management on reserve land in the Southshore dunes - Caspian Street to Southshore Spit:
 - That private owners may if they wish, manage a strip, of no more than five metres wide, of reserve land adjacent to their property boundaries for fire protection,
 - That the Council will carry out fire safety management for hazard reduction as requested by individual property owners,
 - That any management by adjacent residents, within the five metre strip, be either mown grass or plantings of iceplant or evergreen native species,
 - That no earthworks occur within the five metre strip,
 - That the unauthorised building of structures and the dumping of waste by residents on reserve land be banned, and that existing structures and waste be removed.
2. Policy for Southern Pegasus Bay Track:
 - That the pedestrian track, known as the Southern Pegasus Bay Track, be reinstated and continue from Caspian Street to Tern Street,
 - That the Southern Pegasus Bay Track be no more than a mown strip of approximately one metre in width and where possible at least 50 metres from any property boundary,
 - That those private tracks crossing the dunes be rationalised, in consultation with users, and users encouraged to use managed crossings.

Deputy Chairman's Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.