



Boffa Miskell

news

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Boffa Miskell NEWS

spring 2006



Editorial: Strength from Diversity

This edition of *Boffa Miskell NEWS* gives a glimpse into the diversity of projects that our clients bring us.

The company embraces this diversity as both a source of strength and a significant responsibility.

Strength comes from the great variety in geographic location, client requirements and scale of projects; it helps us attract and retain talented people who thrive on interest and challenge. The range of project work has also enabled the company to build an impressive body of collective knowledge and experience.

Responsibility comes with the need to deliver results that are responsive to the unique requirements of every project. This means building sound working relationships with our clients and ensuring that we understand their needs. It also means investing in our own people to ensure that they share and develop their project experience through teamwork.

Ultimately it is also our responsibility to fully explore the possibilities and the limitations of every project. While each project is unique, it is nevertheless part of a bigger picture, be it a statutory framework, an ecological process or a community. It is our role to ensure positive environmental outcomes by fully considering with our clients the bigger picture, in all its complexity.

Carey Pearce, Senior Principal



The Links coastal development

Lots have been selling so fast at the Links residential subdivision in New Plymouth that stage one of the development has been completed 18 months earlier than expected.

Boffa Miskell's planning and landscape architecture team has worked closely with the client, a consortium of local business people, to master plan the development, which provides a range of housing options from large residential lots to villa types.

Project leader, Peter Whiting, says the project represents a new benchmark for residential development in the Taranaki region. "We've worked with the landform and the natural drainage systems. One benefit of that has been the provision of generous open spaces and some stunning water features."

Design and planning work has now started on the remaining three development stages.

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Successful habitat creation

Shore birds are nesting on shellbanks specially constructed for their use by Transit New Zealand in Shoal Bay on Auckland's North Shore.

Brainchild of Boffa Miskell ecologist Dave Slaven, the new shellbanks compensate for loss of roosting and breeding habitat to the Northern Busway. Dave is one of the Shore Bird Technical Working Group that oversaw the formation of the shellbanks in 2003 and has since then been monitoring the results.

"Over the three years, progress has been most encouraging," he reports. "There's been a steadily increasing presence of birdlife and nesting activity on the new shellbanks."



He says the group has been particularly pleased to observe this positive trend amongst three threatened shore bird species; the New Zealand dotterel, the variable oyster catcher and the Caspian tern.

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Buddhist Temple

Designing the central courtyard in Auckland's new Buddhist temple has been a unique opportunity for Boffa Miskell landscape architect Claire Walker.

"It has been a real honour," Claire says, "and a wonderful chance to learn about Buddhist philosophy and design traditions."

The International Buddhist Trust of New Zealand required that the 4,000-square-metre courtyard space embrace the wide range of temple activities. To achieve this Claire divided the space into three distinct zones.

A central ceremonial space on the temple's main axis connects a small shrine at the temple entrance with the main shrine inside. The simple, paved space serves as the main congregation area for hosting the many festivals in the Buddhist calendar.

A contemplation space is adjacent to the function hall and residential accommodation. Here, geometric blocks of clipped planting and gravel surfacing combine to form symbolic patterns.

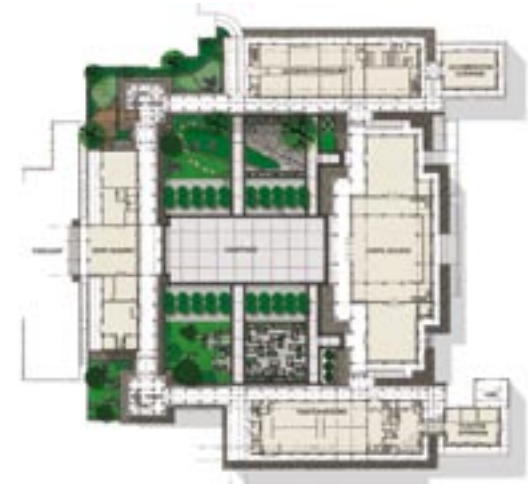
"The ground patterns help define paths that are used for meditation walking, when a single route is repeated many times," explains Claire. "It's a very pared-back space to emphasise inner contemplation which is important to Buddhist teachings."

At the other end of the courtyard a softer green space is based on the traditional Asian tea garden. Here, the planting and rock features are in more natural forms and embrace seasonal change. The garden connects visitor accommodation, the temple cafe and teaching wings where meditation and life-skills courses are taught.

Traditional Asian garden design principles and maintenance techniques have influenced the design, but New Zealand plants and materials have been introduced alongside those brought from China. "To define the three areas we selected double rows of traditional flowering cherry trees for seasonal interest but used New Zealand native totara as specimen trees within the other zones," Claire says. "The mix of elements from the two regions also symbolises the temple's philosophy of multicultural tolerance for world peace."

The Buddhist attitude to time is another element that underpins the design. The Abbess Reverend Shin, who assisted with the landscape, expects it to take hundreds of years to develop and mature. Construction may have finished in April this year, but for the temple community it is just the beginning of a long journey towards an eventual state of harmony.

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- ▲ The ceremonial space (centre) connects the entrance (left) with the main shrine (right), flanked by a contemplation zone (bottom) and a tea garden (top).
- ◀ The tea garden (foreground) and main shrine (background).

Managing tourism in natural areas – when does a group become a crowd?



▲ The dramatic volcanic landscape of the Tongariro Crossing: fascinating to visitors and of great spiritual and cultural significance to tangata whenua.

Tourism in natural areas of New Zealand is growing, along with concerns about how to manage increasing visitor numbers and related environmental effects.

These issues are being investigated by a consortium comprising CRESA, Taylor Baines and Associates, Boffa Miskell and environmental consultant Paul Blaschke under a research programme, 'Integrated Planning and Management of Natural Areas for Tourism-related Development', funded by the Foundation of Research, Science and Technology.

Under the programme, Boffa Miskell and Paul recently completed a case study of visitor perceptions on the Tongariro Crossing. The aim was to evaluate the effectiveness of the 'Limits of Acceptable Change' (LAC) methodology, which is used to determine visitor carrying capacity.

"The Crossing was an ideal case study for the purpose," says Boffa Miskell planner, Pauline Whitney. "It's regarded as one of New Zealand's top one-day tramping experiences and attracts at least 60,000 walkers per year. With 5 – 10% more walkers every year in the last decade, there's been concern that the social carrying capacity is being reached and even exceeded at times."

Methodology

Just over 800 track walkers were surveyed between March and April 2004, and February and May 2005. They were asked how crowded they had felt on the walk and how it compared with what they had expected. They were also asked whether the number of other people had diminished their enjoyment and whether more or fewer people would have affected their response. Responses were compared with the number of walkers on the given day.

Discussions with six focus groups representing tangata whenua, the National Park community, an environmental group, local businesses, trampers and a high school walker group provided useful supplementary information on perceptions and issues.

Findings

The majority of walkers had been very satisfied with the walk and did not feel that their enjoyment had been adversely affected by the number of people they had encountered.

However, responses were noticeably less positive on days when walker numbers exceeded 350 and noticeably more negative above 550.

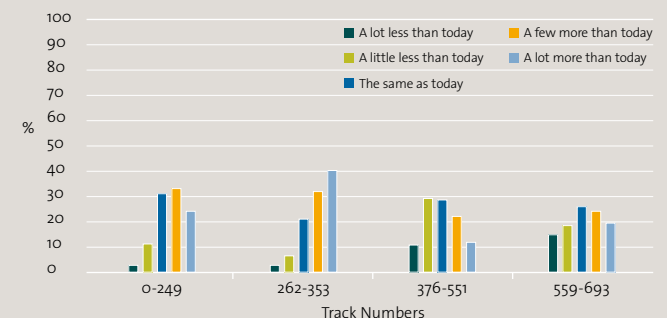
Other factors that contributed to walker enjoyment and perceptions included weather conditions, nationality, and 'bottlenecks' that can occur at peak starting times and at the more difficult parts of the track.

These results indicated that the LAC methodology can measure limits of acceptable change and can inform ongoing visitor management provided that monitoring is ongoing.

"The research clearly indicates that more active management of the Tongariro Crossing experience needs to be considered," say Pauline and Paul. "The Department of Conservation and the Tongariro-Taupo Conservation Board have taken great interest in the study, and their challenge now is to implement options that preserve the quality of the experience while still guaranteeing public access in the National Park setting."

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Carrying Capacity and walker numbers (.000*)



▲ Walkers were asked to indicate how many people they would be prepared to see on the track compared to their experience, before their enjoyment was diminished. Above 350 walkers/day, fewer people would tolerate increased numbers and above 550 walkers/day, more wanted the numbers reduced.



◀ ▲ The Ohope Wharf; a popular recreational focus within Ohiwa Harbour.

▲ Public green space links the surf beach (top) with the harbour edge and wharf area (centre bottom) where limited commercial and harbour facilities are proposed.

Recipe for sustainability at Port Ohope

Take an outstanding natural feature and harbour landscape, add demand for development, and mix to a sustainable balance...

Boffa Miskell is assisting the Whakatane District Council and the Ohope community to achieve the right mix at Port Ohope.

The port is located on the Ohope Spit, a tongue of sand dunes that separates Ohiwa Harbour from the sea. The spit is an outstanding landscape of significant natural character, and an area of importance to tangata whenua as a traditional mahinga mataitai (seafood gathering area) and occupation area. The wharf area, which once serviced coastal shipping, has long been popular for recreational fishing, swimming and boating, and

has also seen growing demand for commercial and community activities in recent years.

To plan for the area and avoid ad hoc development, the Whakatane District Council commissioned Boffa Miskell to prepare, together with the community, a concept plan to guide appropriate future development.

“Our starting point was to understand the existing environment and the pressures that have exerted themselves on it in the past, and are likely to in the future,” says Boffa Miskell project manager Matt Allott.

Boffa Miskell ecologists, landscape architects, urban designers, planners and cultural heritage advisors researched and assessed the site, and Property Economics were commissioned to carry out social and economic forecasting.

Stakeholder representatives attended a design workshop at which development opportunities and constraints were mapped, community values and priorities identified, and a vision based on sustainability objectives defined.

Two alternative scenarios emerged; a low impact option that emphasised environmental enhancement, site responsive design and sustainability objectives, and an option that emphasised more intensive development and growth.

Boffa Miskell produced indicative concept schemes for each alternative and then scored these against the objectives.

“The sustainability model proved to be a very effective tool for evaluating the options,” Matt says. “The quadruple bottom line approach was adopted, with objectives set to achieve a sustainable balance between social, environmental, economic and cultural considerations.”

The low impact scenario, which ultimately scored better, was chosen as the basis for the final concept plan.

The concept emphasises public open space, with continuous green space along the harbour foreshore linking across the spit, past some new mixed density housing, to the surf beach. A central space near the wharf, flanked by a limited amount of commercial development, will continue to be a focus for community gatherings while boating and fishing activities will be better serviced with an upgraded wharf and dedicated harbour facilities area.

The concept plan received positive feedback during initial consultation with the Ohope community and a special consultative procedure will now be conducted throughout the Whakatane District. The Council anticipates being in a position to adopt the plan in November 2006.

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▲ Removing sludge from the bottom of the pond was a first step toward restoring the ponds' amenity values.



▲ The duck ponds and surrounding gardens are a popular visitor destination in Auckland city.



▲ The undersea prospecting will involve sampling seabed material by both core drilling and 'grab' techniques, with the material replaced after analysis on the research vessel.

Bottoms-up for duck ponds

Generations of Aucklanders and tourists have enjoyed feeding the ducks and exploring the formal gardens around the duck ponds in Auckland Domain. Last summer, however, their enjoyment was marred by murky water and dying birds.

Auckland City Council asked Boffa Miskell ecologist Eddie Sides to investigate.

Eddie found that a high volume of sludge in the bottom of the ponds, combined with low summer water flows, had created ideal conditions for the bacteria affecting the birds to multiply. He recommended removal of the sludge, which had been building up over a period of fifteen years, to remedy the problem.

The Council was keen to take action as soon as possible and stakeholders, such as the nearby kiosk operator, were consulted about the timing and the implications for them of closing off the area. Works were scheduled for late summer and were completed in a reduced time of four and a half weeks to minimise disruption.

Boffa Miskell prepared the contract documentation and supervised the project, which presented the opportunity to carry out various upgrades to the ponds. As well as removing the sludge, an island that was threatening to overtake one pond was reduced in size, and all the fountains were upgraded. The pond base liner was repaired and the retaining structure around the perimeter adapted for easier sludge removal in the future.

"Our contract documentation stressed the need for care to protect the existing gardens and minimise damage," says Eddie. "When visitors complained after the fences came down that there had been no change, we knew a good job had been done."

The contractors, Hiway Stabilizers Environmental Ltd, won a merit environmental award from the New Zealand Contractors' Association for their part in the project.

A management plan is now in place which specifies a regime to maintain the ponds in a healthy state and, in particular, avoid sludge build-up in the future.

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New technology for under-sea gold prospecting

Resource consents have been obtained to enable gold prospecting within a 10,000 square kilometre area on the continental shelf off the West Coast of the South Island.

Boffa Miskell managed the assessment of effects and consent application process on behalf of Seafield Resources Limited, with technical help from specialists in marine ecology, marine mammals, mining and geology.

The project will involve innovative technology not used before in New Zealand to look for the alluvial gold thought to have been deposited on the seabed offshore from the gold-rich West Coast. A prospecting vessel will stay at sea for several months. Samples from the seabed will be analysed on board and then returned to the sea floor. If mining were to eventuate, a similar process is envisaged.

"Building relationships between key parties has been an important aspect of the project," says Boffa Miskell project manager Ken Gimblett. "There was considerable consultation with such agencies as the Ministry of Fisheries and Maritime New Zealand and an important relationship has been established between tangata whenua and the project partners, with cultural impact assessments carried out by local runanga."

A partnership relationship with Otago University could involve the zoology, geology and marine science departments in information gathering, monitoring and reporting regimes, enabling significant research opportunities.

Desktop analysis is already complete as is a preliminary survey. It's hoped that detailed survey and sampling work will begin in the next few months.

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Overseas connections

Angkor World Heritage Park

Frank Boffa and Rachel de Lambert have recently returned from Siem Reap in Cambodia where they have been working on the first phase of the Angkor Park Management Plan and Community Development Project.

The project follows on from the Angkor Forest Rehabilitation and Landscape Enhancement Project which Boffa Miskell and Fraser Thomas Ltd completed in 1998 (see *Boffa Miskell NEWS 01*). The earlier work recommended ways to safeguard the site's landscape setting and remnant forests while also enabling the local people to improve their lifestyle and benefit from tourism and sustainable land management.

The current project aims to put in place an overall, integrated management and implementation strategy that will overcome the issues that have impeded progress to date. The New Zealand project team, led by Fraser Thomas Ltd in association with Boffa Miskell and Tourism Resource Consultants, will be working alongside Cambodian agencies to guide the management plan process. The project is being undertaken for APSARA, the Cambodian Government Agency responsible for the park, with funding from NZAID.

"The key principle is that we are there to advise and assist the Cambodian people to develop and implement the plan themselves," explains Frank. "It's very much a case of education and helping the various stakeholders – especially the local communities – to develop the skills they need."

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▼ Growth in tourism is one of the management issues at Angkor.



Impact Assessment Conference, Norway

Sarah Dawson of our Christchurch office attended the International Association of Impact Assessment Conference in Norway, along with delegates from 90 other countries, during May this year.

The conference, "Power, Poverty and Sustainability: The Role of Impact Assessment", focussed on energy and environmental/social impact assessment (EIA), as well as climate change. Sarah also attended post-conference technical visits to examples of Norway's hydro-power facilities and marine aquaculture.

Sarah also attended a two-day pre-conference training course on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

"SEA is essentially the application of EIA to policy as well as project decision-making," she explains. "Because fundamental decisions about resource management are made during plan and policy development, EIA is often not applied as much as it could be."

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The New Zealand Urban Design Protocol

Boffa Miskell has been actively involved in helping to develop and promote the Ministry for the Environment's ground-breaking Urban Design Protocol.

Boffa Miskell Principal and recognised urban design expert Doug Leighton served on the Advisory Group that helped MfE develop the Protocol. Doug and Boffa Miskell urban designer Lisa Mein edited the "Urban Design Case Studies" and Doug peer-reviewed "The Urban Design Toolkit", available on <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/urban/>

Boffa Miskell was an early signatory to the Protocol, and has been implementing an associated internal action plan including staff training courses in all its offices.

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Keeping up with the play

Boffa Miskell regularly runs company workshops to nurture young talent and to help ensure clients receive value through well founded and creative solutions.

Landscape planning workshop

Effective landscape assessment is highly topical at the moment, given the current round of nation-wide district plan reviews, many of which involve review of landscape provisions. Consequently, twenty Boffa Miskell landscape planners recently convened to review approaches to landscape assessment.

The workshop was both a learning experience for junior staff and an opportunity for senior staff to discuss issues and review project work. Drawing on earlier workshops with Professor Carys Swanwick, a leading UK consultant and educator in the field, assessment methodologies were refined and landscape management mechanisms considered. The results of the workshop are already being applied in several current projects.

Landscape design workshop

In May, twenty-one of Boffa Miskell's sixty-two landscape architects and urban designers participated in a week-long design workshop in Sydney. The participants, from all four of our offices, focused on design issues and site visits, and also attended the combined conference of the New Zealand and Australian Institutes of Landscape Architecture and the Eastern Region of the International Federation of Landscape Architects.

Boffa Miskell Chairperson Don Miskell, who led the workshop, says it successfully brought together designers with varying levels of experience to stimulate intellectual thinking and creativity within the company's design team. Discussions covered a critical evaluation of the design process, ingredients required to maintain a 'creative culture' in the company and points of difference in Boffa Miskell's approach to design. Several significant recent projects were also critiqued.

Green Light for demonstration subdivision

Hamilton City Council intends to become a leader in urban design. One of its first steps is the approval of the demonstration 'Smart' subdivision on a Council-owned site in the Rotokauri growth area of northwest Hamilton.

A signatory to the NZ Urban Design Protocol, Council initiated the 'SMART' subdivision project as part of its new CityScape Strategy action plan. The project aims to show developers and house buyers the benefits of sustainable development principles and quality urban design.

Boffa Miskell's Doug Leighton and David Eustace contributed expertise in urban design and landscape architecture to the joint venture team, which also included Chow Hill architects and MWH. RDT Pacific provided additional development and property advice to the team and council.

"There is general agreement that we need to create better, 'smarter' subdivisions, but there are few examples on the ground in New Zealand," says Boffa Miskell urban designer David Eustace. "We based the design on sustainable development principles, aiming to create a better quality place to live that will make more efficient use of land, resources, and energy."

The Concept

The 5-hectare site adjoins Lake Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park, a proposed ecological restoration and public recreation area.

▲ The SMART subdivision site (centre right) lies between existing housing (far right) and the Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park site around the lake (left).

▼ Mixed density housing will merge with existing housing (right) and green streets will link with the Waiwhakareke Natural Heritage Park (left).



Integration with the adjoining park on one side and existing housing on the other was an important factor. Other features include a pedestrian-friendly 'green street' with permeable surfacing, rain gardens, a central open space and playground, and a range of housing types. All sixty-three lots and open space areas will have direct street frontage to provide for passive surveillance and social interaction.

Tegan McIntyre, Hamilton City Council project manager, says the seamless working relationship between Boffa Miskell and the other team members was a bonus. "The team brought complementary design skills together in a very collaborative way and this made for smooth running of the project."

Implementation

The project is part of the proposed Rotokauri growth area, for which a district plan change is currently underway. With the planning framework in place, the Council will initiate the subdivision process before entering into a partnership arrangement with one or more innovative developers and builders.

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Master Plan for Ellerslie Race Course

The Ellerslie Race Course is an Auckland landmark and one of New Zealand's premier racing and steeplechase venues.

The Auckland Racing Club recognised the need to develop a long-range master plan that would reinforce and support racing by making more efficient use of the site.

Boffa Miskell developed an urban design-based Master Plan, which proposes a wide range of complementary residential and commercial activities while protecting the site's unique character and landscape.

The Master Plan capitalises on the site's proximity to the Greenlane rail station and bus routes, extends the famous Boulevard of Palms, and creates a new entry plaza.

Consents under a private plan change for the first stage of development are expected to be approved in time for construction to commence in late 2006.

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