

## Submission on the Takapuna-Milford Coastal Route

by Dr Deborah Dunsford and Norma Bott, Co-chairs, Milford Residents Association Inc.

1. This submission is presented in conjunction with the submission of Richard Burton and Christine Handford, residents of Milford. We support all of the points made in their submission and urge Council to resolve the access issue promptly by (1) accepting the Firth family offer to gift an easement for a walking track and (2) instructing officers to instigate a plan change to remove the questionable heritage listing on the dilapidated cottage.
2. Our submission will focus on the social and practical significance of the Takapuna-Milford Coastal Route to residents of Milford now and in the past. The pleasure of walking alongside the sea, with long views out to the Hauraki Gulf and Rangitoto, means that Milford Beach and the rocky coast to Takapuna are the obvious and most beautiful places in our area for large numbers of residents to take their daily exercise or simply to enjoy the scene and the outdoors. People can be seen doing just this along the length of the route every day throughout the year. Residents use the route to walk to Takapuna not just for exercise but as a more beautiful and healthier alternative to walking along the main roads.
3. The coastal route is a challenge not a flat stroll but this is no reason to close it off or have Council withdraw its support for some spurious 'health and safety' reasons. In fact, the rough and tumble surfaces are negotiated without much difficulty by the young and the fit, as well as being relished by those who are getting older and view the uneven rocky surfaces as a way of maintaining and measuring their ongoing fitness, balance and agility.
4. We regard the term 'walkway' to be erroneous in the context of the Takapuna-Milford coast. As described above, it is a coastal route requiring elements of mobility and agility to cover. It will never be tamed into a boardwalk or walkway, nor should it, for

this would destroy the natural features that are its essence. Residents know the route is used at their own risk and understand the need for care.

5. Milford's residents are a diverse mix of long and medium term residents and newer arrivals. The majority regard the walk along Milford beach and the coastal route to Takapuna as the 'icing on the cake' of living in Milford. To be able to take that extended walk along the margin of sea, sand and rocks, is a source of satisfaction to all, whether local residents, visitors, tourists or walkers on the Te Araroa Trail.
6. For the most part, we are a courteous and co-operative community, used to engaging with Council and the Local Board to find solutions to local issues. However, the general response from locals to the blocked off access at 9 Kitchener Road is: 'How did it ever get to this impasse? Surely common sense should have found a solution by now?' Up to this point, Milford Residents Assn has given Council the benefit of the doubt and assumed a resolution would be achieved. However, we are increasingly alarmed at Council's current direction which indicates they will divide the route into two separate halves on a permanent basis. **We state that this will never be acceptable to us. Such a closure is not just an inconvenience, but represents a catastrophic loss of an extended walk that is symbolic of our suburb. We will never agree to the loss of this amenity.** The Takapuna Residents Association petition of over 7,000 signatures is one indication of the degree of local opposition and this will only increase over time.
7. A surprising number of us have generational links back to the 1920s and before. Walking the coastal route to Takapuna has been an important and habitual feature of family and community life and is the basis of a strong, shared memories of what makes the coastline and our suburb so unique. To local people, it is the coastal route itself that deserves the A Heritage listing, rather than the dilapidated cottage. Yet Council does not acknowledge the importance of this historic context and has preferred to come to uninformed conclusions to support blocking the track.
8. We point out that Council's recent reports do not acknowledge the much longer history of the route, which has been in continual public use, for many years prior to 1935.<sup>i</sup>
  - a. In 1926, at the Dunedin Exhibition, a display about Takapuna was a dominant feature of the Auckland Court. It sought to attract tourists from the South. In the promotional material, the Takapuna coast's glory was identified as its beaches (including Milford) and the great Pacific surges rolling in. The coastal route, the link between Milford and Takapuna, was also clearly identified as

part of the area's attractions: 'There are charming walks along the foreshore, over the rocks, under the trees, and past many seaside homes as far as Milford Beach.'<sup>ii</sup>

- b. The coastal route became accessible to even more walkers from 1927 onwards, with the construction of the present-day sea wall and the various sewer encasements associated with the Black Rock sewage chamber.
  - c. On 5 December 1935, the *Auckland Star* reported on the issue of residents' riparian rights along the route. A Thorne Bay resident had stated his intent to build a high wall to his riparian boundary to protect his privacy and offered six feet of the property to the Council to maintain the track's continuity. Such a wall is not in evidence at Thorne Bay today although the Council expressed its concern at the time over similar claims by other residents.<sup>iii</sup> However, with hindsight, we can see that over the decades since 1935, residents with riparian rights along the beaches and coastal route have not walled off their land to the riparian edge and prevented public access. Instead they have created privacy through walls built at the edge of the sand and rocks, allowing access below to the beaches and coastal track not just for the public but for their own use also. It does not seem to have occurred to Council that landowners appreciate the coastal track and the generosity of their landowning neighbours just as much as the general public and have no wish to obstruct it.
  - d. The Firth property is unique to all the other properties in this regard. Due to its position on a high rocky outcrop, the public track through their property did impinge on family privacy. However they generously allowed access to continue over many decades.
  - e. What is also important in the 1935 *Auckland Star* article is the account of the Mayor of the active part Takapuna Borough had and continued to play in delineating the route over the volcanic rocks by smoothing and filling areas with concrete. These areas can still be seen today and are clear evidence of earlier Councils (1) recognising that people valued the coastal route highly and (2) taking responsibility for providing an identifiable and smoother track through the rough.
9. The latest positioning by Council is at odds with the history of legacy council actions above and further actions since which have actively promoted the route's significance

and attractions or supported the resolution of the 9 Kitchener Road access issue.

These include:

- a. the promotion of the significance and heritage value of the entire route (e.g. the Takapuna Milford Walk, North Shore City, January 2002),
  - b. the wooden bridge built by North Shore City was placed out beyond the rock edge of the Firth property and partially solved the issue of privacy versus access until it was swept away in a storm in 2011.
  - c. the Heads of Agreement (signed September 2018, later withdrawn) to buy 9 Kitchener Road (Auckland Council),
  - d. support for the inclusion of the route as part of the nationwide Te Araroa Trail.
10. Devonport-Takapuna Local Board plans have repeatedly valued the coastal route highly as a prized community amenity. The Milford Centre Plan 2015 refers to the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board Area Plan (map 1) which identifies the entire coastal route between Takapuna and Milford as part of a long walking route along the east coast of the Board's area. This ties into the Local Board's long-standing goals of celebrating the area's natural features and open spaces, encouraging walking connections, and opportunities for residents' fitness and recreational activities.
11. Surprisingly, the report to the DTLB, Takapuna to Milford coastal walkway public access, 17 October 2023, states that the Council 'is in the process of removing the route as a walkway in the local board greenways interim review'.<sup>iv</sup>
  - a. When was this decision made to reverse policy and remove the coastal route's status?
  - b. What are the criteria for land to be included in a greenway?
  - c. Who has responsibility for changing such a policy – our elected representatives or council staff?
  - d. How can the route be summarily removed after 90 years of continuous access, without any consultation with residents and with the recently stated position of the local board that the route remain open? <sup>v</sup>
12. We support the submission by Richard Burton and Christine Handford regarding the dubious Heritage A listing on the cottage at 9 Kitchener Road. What was the basis for the cottage receiving a Category A listing? If part of the heritage rationale was that Clifton Firth lived there, then Firth's real legacy is his photography rather than the

house. That legacy is already largely in public ownership as part of the Sir George Grey Special Collection at Auckland Libraries.

13. We do not support a heritage listing on a dilapidated cottage that creates an extreme burden on the owners in terms of the cost to renovate, loss of valuation and the inability to realise development potential. This heritage listing has effectively denied the long term owners their property rights. In this instance, it is widely perceived by local people as a weaponisation by Council of the heritage process against the owners. Takapuna already has one heritage bach conserved, the Frank Sargeson bach in Esmonde Road, Takapuna. On Rangitoto Island, there are 35 original baches which are far better maintained and are more interesting examples of the simplicity of materials and living than the Firth house is purported to represent.

The Milford community is only too aware of the generosity of the Firth family in allowing public access across their land over two generations. With the death of Paul Firth, we hoped that Council would respond sensibly and in a spirit of reciprocal generosity to the family to secure access. In fact, it is again the Firth family who have shown generosity by offering the gift of a public easement in exchange for Council instigating a Plan Change to lift the heritage listing. We ask the Council to agree to this win-win-win offer. The Council resolves this long-running issue at little cost, the public gains permanent access and the Firth descendants are able to realise their inheritance.

Milford Residents Association rejects entirely the position that the route is unimportant enough to warrant the securing of access across 9 Kitchener Road. The entire coastline between and including Milford and Takapuna Beaches has to be seen as a single stretch of sea, sky, beach and volcanic coastline, uniquely placed alongside an intense, suburban setting. It is of national significance geologically and of high regional and local value as a place of natural beauty and recreation. To divide it in half, as Council is suggesting, would be an act of vandalism. We ask for the voice of the people to be heard and for common sense to prevail at last.

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<sup>i</sup> Papers Past, *Auckland Star*, 5 December 1935, p.9.

<sup>ii</sup> Papers Past, *Otago Daily Times*, 4 February 2026, p.10.

<sup>iii</sup> Papers Past, *Auckland Star*, 5 December 1935, p.9.

<sup>iv</sup> Devonport-Takapuna Local Board, 17 October 2023, Takapuna to Milford coastal walkway public access, File No. CP2023/14389, p.11.

<sup>v</sup> Devonport Takapuna Local Board Minutes, 17 October 2023, 11. Resolution DT/2023/183, p.5.