



21 May 2014

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

**Re: Longbush Ecosanctuary**

It is difficult enough arranging the gathering of 70 landscape architects in one place, but try to fit them all into two city buses and navigate them up a narrow, windy, gravel road to a rare piece of Eastland bush and you are achieving the near impossible! But that is exactly what the annual professional Conference of the New Zealand Institute of Landscape Architects (NZILA) did in February this year. The five-hour visit to the Salmond's Eco-sanctuary at Longbush didn't prove to be long enough and, by the end of the field tour, reluctant landscape architects were being prized off the land like limpets off a rock.

We were, I believe, guinea pigs for the endeavour of bringing visitors to this Gisborne laboratory of cultural, ecological, architectural and historical transformation. So what was so compelling about the visit that would lead one delegate to say:

*"It was incredible arriving at a place created almost solely by the strong vision, passion and collaboration of the people involved. The warmth and welcoming nature of the hosts and the rest of the team really made this landscape feel like, as Anne Salmond stated, 'a place of the heart'. And the scale of the work they had achieved was truly impressive." [Kess Aleksandrova]*

And how does it stack up as a cultural, architectural, historical and educational destination for savvy landscape architects?

To answer this question, let me describe the nature of our field tour there. We arrived at the 'Welcome Shelter' (still under construction) where we heard from the vibrant young architect Sarosh Mulla who had designed and is project managing the construction of the shelter on a voluntary basis. Following this Megan Wraight, landscape architect, talked us through her interpretation of Dame Anne's vision for a 1769 garden in the immediate surrounds. Megan and Anne then guided us on a gentle meander through the property telling us of the master plan for the property, showing us the former kumara pits, leading us up Pa Hill for the spectacular views and then to the homestead where we enjoyed morning tea. After this, Steve Sawyer, ecologist, took us on a wander through the riparian Longbush Reserve and later told us of the major stages of habitat restoration and species recovery including the creation of a predator-proof area for petrels to colonise. Janine Te Reo talked of the Pa Harakeke as kaitiaki of its care and supervisor of its uses for local weavers. She enthralled the group pointing out subtle aspects of the more than 50 flax types: their different character, growth habits and uses.

Lastly, Dame Anne talked of her broad vision for the property, the treasured people involved with the restoration project (the living taonga) and her dream for the Waimata River. This rich and diverse tour concluded with lunch, wine and cheeses sitting around the homestead in the sun. Delegates did not want to leave!

There are six outstanding processes at Longbush which underpin this letter of support for funding applications for further work to be completed at Longbush:

1) Generosity and inclusiveness

Longbush has long been the site of picnics and other community events, and a swimming hole in the Waimata River much loved by many people raised in Gisborne. The Longbush Ecological Trust has demonstrated great vision in preserving this place, and embarking on its ecological and riverine restoration. They are not doing this for themselves; they are doing this to reveal and preserve the property's potential for future generations and to share their passion with the community of Eastland and future visitors to the property of all kinds. They are also part of a network of Tairāwhiti regional projects which over time will restore an ancient bio-diversity that belongs only to Eastland.

2) Ecological restoration

More than a decade of ecological restoration work has gone into Longbush. Anyone who is familiar with so many of our sad bush remnants often overgrown with old man's beard, wandering willie, wilding pines and infested with all manner of pests, will be stunned by the weed-free understorey of Longbush's reserves and the stories of endangered species' return and re-introduction to the property, sometimes with the use of creative technology (such as the novel sound system for attracting petrel back to the property). The likelihood of the return of black beech forest to the nearby hills is a tantalising ecological promise that will be exciting to witness.

3) Cultural practices and story-telling

The Pa harakeke at Longbush is just one aspect of cultural story telling potential on site illustrating the kaitiaki/preservation of former cultural practices and knowledge such as weaving. Additional to this there is the potential to uncover the stories of early Maori habitation/history linked to this fertile valley fed by the Waimata River, linked to Pa Hill and its kumara pits and stories of the Waimata River and its earliest historical flow path theorised to flow via a quite different route to Tolaga Bay!

4) River restoration vision

Not one accustomed to doing things by halves, Anne has sown a seed about her clear vision to undertake an ethnographic study of the Waimata River, researching and layering a rich human and bio-physical history of the river from source to sea across time.

5) Educational facilities with luminous architecture

The provision of a welcome shelter/visitor centre/educational hub on the property plants a clear message about the serious intent to widen the role of the property to one that will be used to educate children, scientists, historians, visitors of all kinds and the local community

of neighbouring properties and the people of Tairāwhiti. Many of them will find it difficult to resist the temptation to be transformed from visitor to recruited Longbush volunteer.

6) The 1769 Garden

The vision for a 1769 garden at Longbush showcasing local plants grown from native seed from Kew Garden collected on Cook's voyages, goes to the heart of Dame Anne's research about the voyaging, arrival and the first meeting of Captain James Cook and early Maori in 1769. The garden to be built around the 'Welcome Shelter' will link to the Navigations Project along the waterfront of Gisborne, enticing visitors to travel a short distance inland and see a piece of regional bush that is returning to a similar condition that Cook and his botanists discovered nearly 250 years ago.

### **Recommendation**

The NZILA 2014 Conference Committee and the Hawkes Bay-Manawatu Branch of NZILA supports the Longbush Ecosanctuary Trust in its endeavours to secure the necessary funds to further the cultural, scientific, ecological, architectural and educational endeavours at Longbush in order to achieve their goals and vision for this outstanding venture.

Sue Dick

Convenor

NZILA 2014 Tairāwhiti Conference

Registered NZILA Landscape Architect, Napier

