

The Rangitoto Observer

Takapuna, Milford, Castor Bay, Forrest Hill and Sunnynook

DELIVERED FORTNIGHTLY

Issue 116 – October 13, 2023

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE

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'create accident risk'... p3**

**Coastal track standoff:
How it came to this... p8-9**

**Flower power: wearable art
promotes good cause... p15**

Central Takapuna faces huge transformation

Takapuna's main street and beach outlook will change dramatically in the latest town-centre intensification proposal for four apartment blocks across sites now occupied by the vacant Commons and former Colmar Brunton building.

These properties are owned by the same company, HND TS Ltd, which wants to de-

velop a residential complex containing 213 apartments and rising to eight storeys, with ground-floor commercial use and three levels of basement parking.

As described in a recently lodged consent application, buildings would face to both Hurstmere Rd and The Strand, opposite Takapuna Beach Reserve playground.

The development will border Hurstmere Green and require existing shops, including the old McKenzies building, to be demolished, but the ASB bank building would remain.

Parking would be provided for 377 vehicles, with storage for 213 bikes or scooters,

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Music Hall of Famer joins the band



Sounding off... Fresh from his induction into the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame last week, local product Don McGlashan is teaming up with the North Shore Brass Band – including its youngest member, Celine Wu (8), from Sunnynook – for its centenary concert in Takapuna. Story, page 13.

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MANAGING EDITOR: Rob Drent
PUBLISHER: Peter Wilson
EDITOR: Janetta Mackay
REPORTER: Lochlan Lineham
PRODUCTION: Brendon De Souza

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Apartment blocks planned to replace low-rise above Takapuna Beach

From page 1

using existing access between the Colmar Brunton building and shops above, across the road from The Strand's civic complex.

The application is over the six-storey height for the zone under the Auckland Unitary Plan, but the developer's consultants say it is in line with both metropolitan town centre aims and government planning directives allowing for at least six storeys, so should be allowed as of right.

Auckland Council planners will decide how to proceed.

The application reveals extensive consultation has taken place already, in a series of meetings with council's Urban Design Panel over several years. The developers initially sought approval as a Covid 19 Fast Track project, but were knocked back.

The project – while smaller than the 39-storey tower green-lighted recently for the old Gasometer corner site, next to the Toka Puia car park – will visually transform street-level Takapuna.

Shoppers on Hurstmere Rd will see famil-

iar streetfront buildings demolished from the rear at 21, 31 and 33-45 Hurstmere Rd.

The two-storey horizontal bulk of the Colmar Brunton building at 6-12 The Strand will be replaced with higher builds of a type not previously seen so close to the beach.

A consent was obtained in August last year to demolish the Colmar Brunton building.

The application maintains shading of nearby residences will be limited.

Through-site linkages will be kept, except at night, to allow the public to move between the buildings. After-hours swipe cards would be used by residents for gated access.

The development's 213 apartments will include three-bedroom (71), two-bedroom (54), one-bedroom (68) and studio (20) units, plus four-bedroom penthouses at the upper levels of towers A and B on the seaward side of the site. The complex will also include a shared rooftop terrace, gym, indoor pool, restaurant, bar/eatery and retail and office tenancies.

Along with staged development plans around Waiwharariki Anzac Square, set to start next year, several other big applications are also in the pipeline for Takapuna.



Next up... The proposed development's four blocks A-D (from left) shown with Hurstmere Rd at right and the white ASB building next to Hurstmere Green



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Time for a trim... Hedges on roundabouts along Burns Ave are reducing visibility and increasing the risk of accidents, says Sandra Allen (pictured with Remy), who lives nearby

Hedges make speedsters hard to spot on busy route

Takapuna residents say a major accident is “waiting to happen” on Burns Ave and Auburn St, due to a lack of visibility and speeding motorists.

Sandra Allen, a member of the Takapuna Residents Association who lives nearby, says many people have had accidents or near misses on the route between Esmonde Rd and Anzac St.

Hedges on three of four roundabouts are too high, she says, meaning neither pedestrians nor motorists can see vehicle indicators.

When contractors trimmed the hedges last month, they only slightly reduced the height. Had it not been for a resident seeing them do this, “We wouldn’t have known they’d been.”

Lack of signage for a 30km/h zone in Burns Ave is a further issue. The limit is signposted at the corner of Anzac and

Auburn Sts and at the corner of Burns and Bracken Aves, but not elsewhere.

People go downhill on Burns Ave at speeds up to 80km/h, says Allen. Even some locals think it remains a 50km/h zone. She wants the speed limit painted on the road to make motorists more aware.

Speeding posed a serious risk to students walking and cycling to Takapuna Primary School, north over Anzac St. This was worsened by visibility issues at the roundabouts, where it was hard for youngsters to see if cars were turning. “My fear is a child being bowled, that’s what riles me up,” Allen said.

Another resident, Nerida Cath, said she had a near miss when turning right into Byron Ave from Burns Ave. A car “screeched” through the roundabout causing her to slam on the brakes, narrowly avoiding a crash.

“The hedges are just far too high.”

Allen brought the issue to the attention of Auckland Transport (AT) and the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board six months ago. As a result, the hedges were to be trimmed by just 60mm this week, after the Observer went to press.

Auckland Council said the hedge height was in accord with “horticultural best practice”. Excessive pruning could drastically affect the health of the plants.

If the site continued to be “an issue”, council would talk to AT about whether different planting would be a better solution.

AT said the roundabouts on Burns Ave and Auburn St provide some speed control so no engineering measures to further limit speed were proposed.

Two serious-injury crashes, both in 2022, and two non-injury crashes on the street have been reported to AT since 2018.

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'No quick fix' on track access

Auckland Council's acting chief executive, Phil Wilson, says "unfortunately there is no quick fix" to access issues for the Takapuna-Milford coastal walkway.

He was following a directive from Mayor Wayne Brown to respond to the Takapuna Residents Association (TRA), which presented a petition, signed by more than 7500 people.

The petition, calling for access to be safeguarded, was presented to the council governing body the day before the track was fenced off at Black Rock on 29 September, at the instruction of owners of a private property it crosses.

TRA chair Steven Salt told the Observer this week that Wilson's email acknowledged the petition and said council staff were exploring different options which would be put to the planning committee early next month.

Council signs have been installed on the track, redirecting walkers to roads to bypass the blockage. Many are clambering over lava rocks instead.

"Summer is arriving and people want to walk around," said local lawyer Alex Witten-Hannah, who is acting for beneficiaries of the Firth estate, owners of the property where the fence now blocks the path.

The council has set out a partial summary of track issues on its Our Auckland website.

Witten-Hannah says he is yet to receive a



Steven Salt

response from council to an offer made a year ago to gift a strip of the Firth property for the track if a heritage listing on the home on the land is lifted. Until there are indications of progress on this, the fence will remain, he says.

At the council meeting, Salt said: "There is overwhelming community support for this walkway and we are looking for something to be done."

He briefly traversed how, after a bridge at Black Rock was washed out in 2011, Paul Firth let walkers cross his land. Council had drawn up plans and consulted on a track upgrade, but nothing was done.

The Mayor – who said he had walked the track himself and "quite liked it" – took a dig at the Devonport-Takapuna Local Board for not putting money towards a fix.

Councillor John Watson noted: "This walkway must be the most popular and heavily used of any north of the bridge."

Salt told the Observer the TRA did not want to interfere in any confidential negotiations between council and a private landowner.

But it would not be the only time council did deals, such as was often the case for land acquisition for roads and the like.

"The point is they've had 12 years to do something," Salt said.

• Let common sense prevail, page 8-9

PM pops up at the last



It was Mr Whippy from Chippy at the Takapuna Sunday market, when Labour leader Chris Hipkins visited on the last weekend of campaigning before this Saturday's election.

Ice-cream buyers at a van arranged by North Shore Labour candidate George Hampton, co-owner of the Mr Whippy franchise, were surprised to see Hipkins dishing out cones then going on walkabout, just three days out of his Covid isolation.

National leader Christopher Luxon visited Takapuna earlier in the campaign.

• Final local candidates meeting, page 6

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Shore issues ventilated as poll boosts outsiders

Local concerns received a welcome airing at the final election candidates meeting scheduled for the North Shore electorate ahead of polling day this Saturday 14 October.

Housing intensification, flood damage and low police visibility were among issues raised in the meeting at the Milford Baptist Church on 26 September, hosted by local residents associations.

A petition calling for the safeguarding of the Takapuna-to-Milford coastal track was also circulated at the event, which drew an audience of around 60 and four of the five candidates in the seat: Abe Gray (Top), George Hampton (Labour), sitting MP Simon Watts (National) and Anna Yallop (Act).

However, it was a couple of candidates standing elsewhere but in attendance to fly their party flag who had reason to feel most chipper following a Newshub poll result the previous night showing improving fortunes for both the Greens and New Zealand First.

The former's Mt Roskill candidate, Suveen Sanis Walgampola, is ranked 21st on the party list, which looked a more promising position after a poll result which, if matched by voting, would carry 18 Green MPs to Parliament. Similarly, New Zealand First's Upper Harbour candidate, David Wilson, had reason to feel buoyed by his party clearing the 5 per cent threshold in a poll that would give it six MPs. He's ranked ninth on the list, so could be among the beneficiaries if Winston Peters can conjure a little more support.

The prospect of a revived New Zealand First only slightly muddies the waters for Watts, who is well positioned for advancement under a National-led government but could end up in competition with partner-party MPs for a worthwhile role.

For Labour's 41st-ranked George Hampton, the minor-party lift might have been salt in a wound, given the apparent withering of his own chances. With Labour's disappointing polling, he seems to have not much more of a hope than Yallop (ranked 21st, with the poll predicting 11 Act MPs) or Gray, ranked 10th by the Opportunity Party (Top), which has polled well short of the threshold.

From the floor, Devonport-Takapuna Local Board member Mel Powell emphasised the local impact of flooding early this year. She expressed nervousness about Auckland's storm recovery package, in the event of a change of government, drawing an assurance from Watts that the process would not be slowed or reversed under National.

Hampton didn't resist that opportunity to snipe at National's intention to cut climate-change initiatives.

Takapuna resident Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, who fought Auckland Council through the courts over intensification, raised the government's new housing-density laws, which National supported before backtracking this year.

"We no longer support that legislation," Watts was quick to emphasise. "We need to



Seeking your vote... Candidates (from left) David Wilson (New Zealand First), Anna Yallop (Act), Suveen Sanis Walgampola (Greens), Abe Gray (Top), George Hampton (Labour) and Simon Watts (National), with event MC Peter Feeney (front)

intensify in the right areas."

Walgampola's support of greater density drew the first heckles of the evening, from a local keen to educate the Green on the loss of sunlight, privacy and quiet suffered by residents due to multi-storey intensification.

Another questioner wanted to know about the promised savings from the creation of Auckland Council in 2010, comparing it unfavourably with the local councils that it replaced: "We used to know where the mayor lived."

New Zealand First's Wilson sympathised with dissatisfaction with the super-city structure. Answering the same point, Walgampola lamented the low voter turnout in local body elections, while Watts took issue with the "buffer zone of officials" who seemed in control.

In answer to another audience member, who took issue with the lack of a seven-day police station on the North Shore, Watts declined to make any promises but claimed "visibility" was at the forefront of National's policing policy.

He leapt on a question about truancy, claiming that "95 per cent of the kids who are ram-raiding are truant," before Hampton attempted to cast the issue in the light of challenges being experienced globally post-Covid.

Yallop offered Act's tougher line – fines for parents of children who don't attend school – while New Zealand First's recipe had a characteristically nostalgic cast: "We just want to get back to 'school is mandatory, full stop'," Wilson said.

– **Flagstaff reporter**

They said it...

Watts, who twice declared himself "humbled" to represent the Shore, hit the usual National Party touchpoints ("back on track", "strong and stable") but struck a boyish note in saying it was "18 sleeps" until polling day.

Hampton, after an obligatory Mr Whippy reference (he's the New Zealand franchise co-owner), went straight on attack over National's "inflationary" tax cut plans and intention to allow foreign buyers back into the housing market.

Gray emphasised his party's focus on young people, including through its 'Teal Card', despite their woeful under-representation at the meeting: "I just see one," he noted.

Walgampola, at 31 the youngest on the stage, said he was attracted by the Green Party approach shown in its successful campaign to give immigrants improved pathways to residency. Later, he suggested people do their own research on policy.nz.

Yallop declared Act to be "great fans" of the Treaty of Waitangi, though in terms that eschew co-governance. She promoted Act's plan to share new-house GST with councils, and on a question about decarbonising the economy, she offered Act's pledge to cut the number of flights by politicians to the capital.

Wilson managed an approximation of New Zealand First leader Winston Peters' eye twinkle in announcing unnecessarily that this was not the party's "first rodeo". The former CEO of Northland Inc pointed to the Provincial Growth Fund's impact: "When we're in government, we actually get stuff done. That's how we roll."



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Artist's impression

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How did it come to this for beloved Takapuna-Milford

With access for walkers blocked by a fence at Black Rock, Observer editor Janetta Mackay looks into an impasse that follows more than a decade of complex manoeuvrings.

It would be easy to typify the impasse between Auckland Council and the inheritors of a prime piece of coastal real estate as a case of public need and private greed. But that is reducing a complicated case to the sort of side-taking simplicity that threatens to leave everyone worse off.

The half-dozen beneficiaries simply want the estate they were lucky enough to inherit to be settled and sold. But so far it's proving a cursed inheritance.

The public is dismayed the popular Takapuna-Milford track is now blocked off where it crosses land owned since the 1920s by the Firth family.

The council is rightly cautious about setting precedents in striking any deal with the beneficiaries' lawyer, saying the track crosses 71 other private properties. Although that's a bit of a red herring in the current heritage-centred dispute, it's an important issue longer-term in regard to how the entire track is managed.

Since last summer's extreme weather events, council has shown increasing reluctance to fix high-risk coastal assets – such as washed-out stairs down to Castor Bay – in the face of tight budgets and coastal erosion. It has signalled challenges in gaining consents for repairs.

But in the case of the Firth property, it has had a dozen years to come up with a way of getting the public through this section of the long-established informal coastal walk.

Instead, it relied on the goodwill of Paul Firth from the time a bridge washed out in



End of an era... Fences were put up on 29 September, barring the way through the Firth property. The map shows a detour (in red) via a lane at Audrey Ave to the main road and into Minnehaha Ave to rejoin the track.



2011 until his death in 2021, and beyond.

Firth lawyer Alex Witten-Hannah points out then Devonport-Takapuna Local Board member Chris Darby – now a councillor – said the track would be fixed in 2012.

In 2018, council signed a heads of agreement to buy the Firth property for half-price, but officials pulled out of the deal a year ago. No reasons have been given.

Perhaps they realised being saddled with a property they gave a heritage listing to in 2014 might prove problematic. Council is struggling for funds to look after more meritorious listings such as the Kennedy Park World War II military fortifications.

Witten-Hannah asked in August 2022 for

the heritage listing to be removed, and conveyed an offer to give council a 1.5m strip of land for the track.

As someone who helped save the historic Lake House, today an arts centre, he is no heritage hater, but says the Firth listing was council initiated and family neither supported nor objected to it.

It has left the beneficiaries in a bind, with a protected run-down house, valued by council in 2021 at just \$50,000, sitting on land that will be hard to sell at anywhere near the property's \$6 million-plus valuation.

After more than a year without a response to his request for talks, the fence was erected.

The track's closing has made national news



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coastal walkway?



Looking back... The dilapidated Firth cottage has an asbestos roof and multimillion-dollar views

headlines since the Observer first highlighted the threat to access. Witten-Hannah says he isn't trying to blackmail council, he just wants to see it come to the table.

His clients did not have the wherewithal to seek a private plan change to have the listing removed, but council could initiate this. If council did this, the fence could come down.

Rates arrears "wouldn't be an issue" if a sale could be arranged, he said.

The heritage listing wasn't bestowed by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust. It is a regional classification, that followed work by North Shore City Council, taken up by Auckland Council. Effectively, it recognises an extended holiday bach as both an example of the type of modest early 20th-century home once common along the coast and as the scene of local arty gatherings.

An overblown heritage summary compares it to writer Frank Sargeson's listed house on Esmonde Rd. Paul Firth's father was a society photographer who liked to entertain other creative people, but this does not put it on a par with a place where New Zealand literature flourished and Janet Frame stayed.

Both Paul and his sister Ann, who died before him, understandably liked the notion their beloved family home was special. An artist's retreat was one idea for it.

Now it's near derelict. No one wins.



Rocked... Walkers ask about access near the Firth property, south of the Black Rock pumping station (at rear), after the track's closing where it crossed private land. This has led many to clamber over rocks.



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Making magical spaces

"It's not about the plants!" says Claire Talbot, garden designer and proud owner of Sculpt Landscape Design.

The perception that garden design primarily emphasises plants is a common misconception, she says. "Plants are just like sprinkles on a cake – it's the last part of the design process."

She says the purpose of garden design is to entice people to leave the comfort of their sofas and spend time outside.

Garden designers transform spaces into settings where families and friends can come together, share stories and enjoy each other's company. "This is where the magic happens."

Talbot believes garden design is a dynamic process that can evolve along with a household. "The garden requirements for a young family with small children differ significantly from those of an older couple whose children have left the nest," she says.

Garden designers must adapt to fit diverse needs and preferences.

Her natural curiosity means Talbot is well-suited to reach an understanding of what kind of design might best work for a particular household.

"I love to see people in their homes and find the variety of human existence utterly fascinating," she says.

Do you entertain? Have dogs? Do you like solitude and reading books in your garden? Is a pool or spa part of the mix? Do you want a productive garden or just need some herbs? Do you need angles of privacy to be created? Do you own a boat? Is a fish filleting sink needed? What about sheds, bikes, surfboards, bins for composting or a fireplace? And if you're opting for the latter, where does the wood go? All these questions and more produce information that feeds into a design process.

"The New Zealand lifestyle lends itself to acquiring a lot of stuff and if organised well enough we can live tidily," Talbot says.

She is also well aware that priorities can alter according to the time of day: what needs to be a space for kids to run loose in the daytime might need to double as a more intimate setting in the evening.

Talbot arrived from the UK 23 years ago. She lives in Hauraki with her husband and three children, who attend Takapuna Grammar and Belmont Intermediate Schools.

After studying psychology at university in Birmingham, Talbot's love for gardens came about after she wrote a book called *Relax and Grow Rich* – which is both a nod to Napoleon Hill's best seller *Think and Grow Rich* and somewhat inspired by the story of Archimedes having an epiphany in the bath.

"The point being that we have our best ideas when we are in a relaxed state," she says.

"Everyone has an activity where you go into this state of flow. For some people it's running, some it's knitting. For me, it's placing plants into the ground. I'm in this state of calmness.

"This was especially important for me when at one stage I had three children under five. The garden was my only reprieve."

And although planting is the last part of her garden-design process, she admits it's still her favourite part – and something she likes to get just right. As something of a perfectionist, she has been known to move plants by centimetres to find the perfect spot.

Talbot says she offers her clients a different perspective and a new, expert set of eyes on what might seem a problem.



She finds personal relationships within a household can also provide exciting challenges. "You might face a 'yin and yang' scenario such as one person preferring straight lines and the other curves."

She strongly emphasises the importance of future-proofing gardens, ensuring they remain relevant and functional over time.

One example of this is the use of a mulched area under a trampoline that can be repurposed when the trampoline is outgrown. She always looks to provide a flexible canvas for potential future adaptations.

Her gardens also reflect the particular challenges of Auckland weather and soils. "Most people have had something die this year due to the large amounts of rain we've had clogging up the clay soil we have in this region," she says.

It's often important to identify plants that can thrive in wet conditions but also survive in the event of a summer drought.

Mounding – typically involving the use of bottomless planters – and mulching can also help plants succeed in variable conditions. "The mulch on the top layer breaks down and creates nutrients to filter down," she explains.

Even if garden design isn't all about plants, creating the conditions for greenery to thrive is all part of the formula for producing spaces "where the magic happens".



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Joyriding teens behind car thefts

A group of around 10 young people was behind the wave of about 50 car thefts that plagued the Takapuna and Devonport peninsula areas over the last two months.

Police believe most were local, and that those that were not knew some of those who were.

While sporadic vehicle break-ins to take items continue, the Waitematā East Area Commander, Inspector Stefan Sagar, said the spike of conversions that police first picked up in August had been halted by investigations identifying suspects.

The young people were not one group or gang, he emphasised, but handfuls of youths, aged 13 to 16, who mostly took cars and abandoned them not far from where they were targeted.

This included thefts in Takapuna, Hau-raki, Bayswater, Belmont and Devonport.

"We're confident this group has been held to account," said Sagar. Its members had been referred to the Youth Court.

Young people made mistakes, he said, and he hoped those arrested would be put on the right path.

The Flagstaff sought an interview with police last month to get an accurate picture of the spate of offending.

At the North Shore police headquarters on Constellation Dr, the interview with Sagar and the Waitematā East Area Prevention Manager, Inspector Todd Moore-Carter,

revealed that 50 cars had been taken in the recent surge. But the inspectors emphasised crime was generally lower than in other Auckland suburbs.

Moore-Carter said the increase in vehicle thefts was first picked up from daily briefings. This prompted more youth investigators to be deployed and increased patrols put in the area, leading to the arrests.

"Other crimes stayed as usual," said Sagar.

Police continue to keep a watching brief on activity in the area and urge the public to report anything suspicious, so they can respond quickly, or to use the 105 number or online reporting to record non-urgent matters so patterns can be established.

Moore-Carter urged people to consider the value of installing CCTV and sensor lights at their homes, and for tradespeople to engrave their tools to make identifying them easier, along with the usual advice on removing valuables and locking vehicles, even when parked on private properties.

Neither Sagar nor Moore-Carter would be drawn on other topics, such as public demand for the Takapuna police station to be open evenings and weekends, and for a more visible police presence around town centres or from community constables.

Moore-Carter said: "There's lots of people working 24/7." Police could quickly deploy patrols, dogs and the Eagle helicopter if needed, he said

Forrest Hill pets killed amid citywide rise in dog attacks

A Forrest Hill man's cat and two ducks and his neighbour's two guinea pigs were killed by two dogs late last month, just ahead of the release of new statistics showing a rise in aggressive dog behaviour across Auckland.

Kevin Zhong's family pets died after two unleashed dogs entered his property.

Zhong didn't see the incident himself but has CCTV footage from his neighbours that show the two dogs jumping his fence.

He reported the incident to Auckland Council animal management but was told nobody could be prosecuted unless he finds a witness or had footage of the incident itself, he said.

The council revealed last week that dog attacks across Auckland have increased 28 per cent and aggressive behaviour by 59 per cent in 2022-2023 compared to the previous year.

Since July this year, four dog attacks have been recorded in Castor Bay – as many as were reported in the suburb for all of 2022-23. Forrest Hill has had two attacks since July, after five were reported for 2022-2023.

Auckland Council acting chief executive Phil Wilson recently suggested that the number of staff dealing with dog compliance issues might have to rise.

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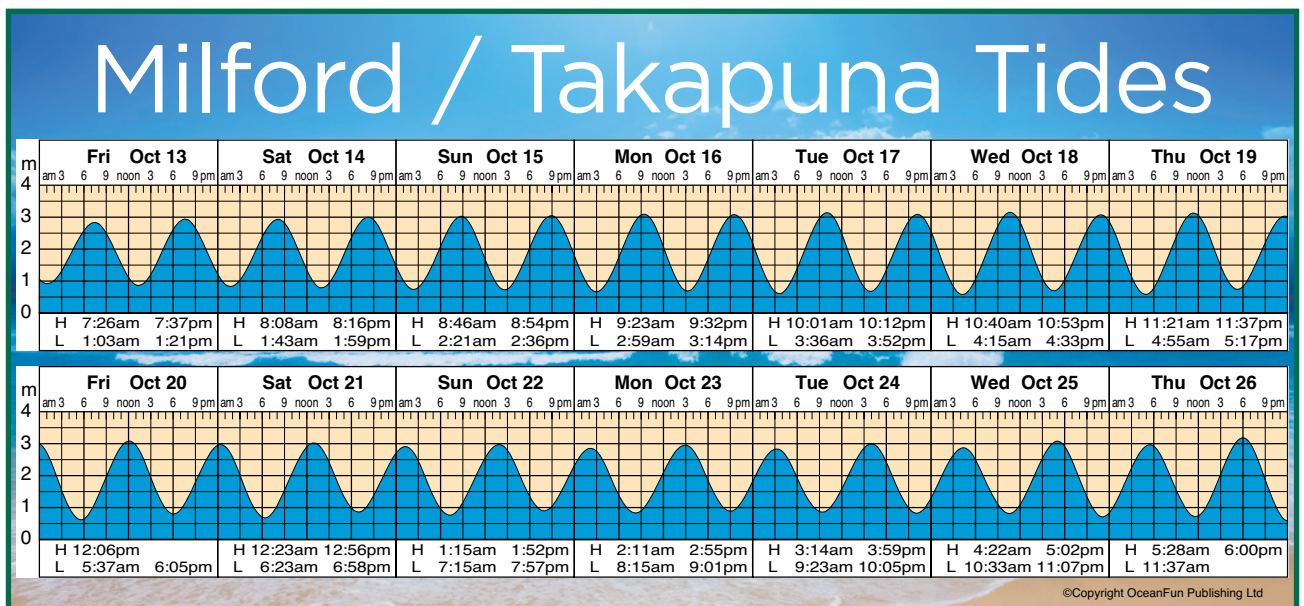
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Blam adds glam to brass party

North Shore-raised composer, singer and multi-instrumentalist Don McGlashan is returning to where it all started to help North Shore Brass Band celebrate its centenary.

He will join the top band on stage in a special concert at the Bruce Mason Centre in Takapuna on Saturday.

Band president Owen Melhuish said: "He's doing some of his iconic songs, with the brass backing."

McGlashan – who was inducted into the New Zealand Music Hall of Fame at the Silver Scrolls Awards in Auckland last week – played a range of instruments while a student at Westlake Boys High School, including French horn. He gigged locally as a teenager, including in Blam Blam Blam.

Later, he played with The Front Lawn and The Muttonbirds, went solo, composed for films and established an international reputation. While he was not a member of the brass band in his youth, he has collaborated with it on and off over the last decade.

Melhuish said the *A Century of Brass* show would be a mix of brass and contemporary sounds catering to all tastes and ages.

The senior A-grade band, conducted by Harmen Vanhoorne, would lead the way, showing its style as reigning Auckland champion band, and runner-up at national championships held in Dunedin in July.

As well as the welcome drawcard of McGlashan, who was part of the band's

Topp Twins Tribute Show earlier this year, the evening would feature the recognised rising talent of North Shore Brass.

This included New Zealand's Champion of Champions, Matt Donaldson, who, aged just 15, won the coveted title as the youngest of the finalists at the national championships this year. He was also named national Junior Trombone Champion.

Sunnynook's Celine Wu, aged 8, who remarkably won the under-15 cornet category at nationals, will show her talent, along with three band members who aced junior categories, and adult soloists.

"Concertgoers can expect to hear from 70 musicians at the top of their art."

Melhuish said North Shore Brass was proud to be a leading conduit of talent, with four bands and high musical standards.

"Participation remains popular with young people and is a good place to continue music after leaving school. It is a safe environment with a family atmosphere."

To recognise its rich local past, a book is being prepared for the centennial by historian David Verran. Records showed the band had played at the opening of the Milford Cruising Club in 1926, the Wilson Home in 1936 and the Harbour Bridge extensions in 1969, said Melhuish.

• *A Century of Brass* is at the Bruce Mason Centre, Saturday, 21 October, 7.30pm. Tickets at ticketmaster.co.nz

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This advertisement is authorised by Megan Bowden.

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Age-old women's issues underpin challenging play set in the past

Women's roles and how they are perceived are at the heart of a new play, *The Welkin*, now on at the PumpHouse in Takapuna.

Written by acclaimed English playwright Lucy Kirkwood, it had its debut at the National Theatre in England in 2020 and this is its first performance in New Zealand. The action is set in rural England in 1759, yet it has themes that have parallels to modern times, says producer James Bell.

His interest was piqued when he read the play, described as a cross between the classic *The Crucible* and more modern production *The Vagina Monologues*. Both plays have been put on in the last few years by North Shore-based company Foolish Wit Theatre, which he helped found eight years ago.

A critic for the *Guardian* said *The Welkin* "set itself up as a winking feminist twist" on *Twelve Angry Men*. This time the jury convened to decide the accused's fate comprises 12 women.

The crime at issue is a child's murder.

Accused woman Sally Poppy, an unfaithful wife seen as something of a witch, has been sentenced to hang on the word of her cuckolded husband.

But she claims to be pregnant. If this is believed by the jury, the sentence would be commuted, which is why a group of village matrons are called in to decide.

"They are given a small amount of power because they are the ones that know the most about childbirth," explains Bell.

A male doctor and a midwife are influential figures in the unfolding story, as the women seek to exercise their voices, with an angry mob baying for blood outside.

Nothing is straightforward in this courtroom drama, which also explores ideas of bodily autonomy.

A cast of 18, with two understudies, make up the ensemble, drawn from across Auckland.

Ages range from young teens to seniors. Among the latter is Sue Golding, a former Belmont resident who appeared in *Electra* in 1977, the first year the PumpHouse was open as a theatre after community-led restoration.

The director is Matthew Diesch from Glenfield.

Bell said Foolish Wit was carrying on the strong tradition of independent community theatre, but trying to take it up a notch from the purely amateur model, with a co-operative approach, offering



Truth time... Actors Meg Andrews and Max Easey rehearse swearing on a Bible for a courtroom scene, with Amy Henwood at rear

the cast a profit share in box-office proceeds.

He admits that is a challenging model and that staging an unfamiliar play to New Zealand audiences is risky, when rolling out a regular is more reliable.

The cast is rehearsing three nights a week, after first getting together in July.

It is using the MSCC Hall in Milford for its rehearsals, after reading in the Observer that it was available for new hires.

Previously it used Shoreside Theatre's base in Forrest Hill.

Foolish Wit is primed to tell a tale which is anchored in women's everyday experience through the centuries, undercut with a dash of up-to-date social commentary.

Bell hopes audiences are eager to try something that is at once new and also evocative.

"We could do with more people going along," he says.

• *The Welkin* is on at the PumpHouse until Sunday 15 October, with evening sessions and some matinees. Tickets are \$29 for adults, with concessions available. Bookings online or at the theatre box office.

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Sunny side up as creativity and charity coincide

WOW show entry gains second life promoting good cause

Takapuna artist Oliver Cain's daffodil-be-decked creation for the World of Wearable Art extravaganza inspired a fundraiser benefiting the Cancer Society.

While Cain did not win his category in what was his second year making the finals at WOW, he was happy with the outcome.

"I felt like the dress was really well shown, the choreography was really good for what the outfit needed," he said. "You could hear the audience react to it."

WOW finished its two week-run in Wellington last week, with half the net proceeds of a ticket bought for the 3 October performance using a special daffodil code going to the Cancer Society. The dress, entitled *Hope*, is what brought the parties together.

Cain made it from 19,000 unwanted daffodil pins sourced from the society after it switched from using fabric to paper flowers for its annual collection. It donated the surplus to Cain, impressed he could put them to a sustainable use, rather than them being dumped.

The chief executive of WOW, Meg Williams, said: "When we saw *Hope* take the stage, we were inspired by its celebration of the power of art to transform and uplift and saw a great opportunity for us to work with our audience to support a cause we know means a lot to New Zealanders."

The amount raised was not confirmed when the Observer went to print.

The show's head of competition, Sarah Nathan, said the initiative was "serendipitous". The outfit's selection in the competition was not influenced by the materials used, but it had prompted the organisers to think about how they could amplify its impact for good. "*Hope* is an extraordinary garment with beautiful craftsmanship, storytelling and stage presence," she said.

Cain said he was influenced in the design by videos he had seen generated by artificial intelligence of "big floral blobs" walking. "They look pretty singular."

The AI idea had prompted "maximum daffodil usage", he said.

In 2022, he entered a dress made from ceramics, which the Takapuna Grammar old boy and arts school graduate specialises in making.

In choosing the flowers, a symbol of hope, he was also keen to acknowledge the resilience of those affected by cancer.

He has now offered the dress to the society on permanent loan. Cain hopes it will go on display at the society's head office in Auckland or be used for promotions, but says: "It's up to them how they use it."

As for competing in WOW again, he says it is a lot of work, but once New Year comes around he expects he will start thinking about what he might do next.



Floral tribute... Takapuna artist Oliver Cain (left) recycled Cancer Society daffodil pins for his World of Wearable Art entry

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