

Assessment of Environmental Effects – Heritage

Gisborne Battery Gun Emplacement, Tītīrangī

26 August 2021

1. Introduction

This AEE has been commissioned by 4Sight Consulting to assess the effects of the proposal to develop the summit of Tītīrangī (Te Panuku Tu) on the Gisborne Battery gun emplacement, a Category B listed heritage place (under the Gisborne District Council Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan [TRMP]).

The emplacement was part of the battery complex that was erected on Tītīrangī in 1942-43 to defend the port of Gisborne from enemy attack. The battery was located on the tihi of Tītīrangī Pa, an ancient pa of Ngāti Oneone, who remain strongly connected to the hill and its environs.

At the conclusion of World War II, the battery consisted of the emplacement, battery observation post (BOP) directly behind and a camp that housed the battery garrison. The camp was disposed of in 1946, but the reinforced concrete BOP and gun emplacement remained in situ. In the wake of the demolition of the battery observation post in 2019, the only surviving intact structure is the gun emplacement. There may be some concrete foundations of the camp buildings still extant.

For more on the history of the battery, see 'Gisborne Battery, Titirangi Summit, A summary of in situ heritage', prepared by the author in 2019.

The surviving emplacement consists of the former location of the gun (the mountings have gone or been covered over), the cantilevered, splayed 'Colchester' cover and locked space(s), including the former magazine, behind. With the exception of the removal of the gun and other minor modifications e.g. fence at the front, the emplacement is thought to be largely unmodified.

The advice from 4Sight Consulting is that the proposed works, the incorporation of the gun emplacement into a whare containing a visitor's centre and interpretation, are considered likely to trigger the following rule:

4.1.12(14) – Discretionary Activity (Heritage Overlay 4)

Demolition of, relocation of, or alteration to the heritage fabric of any heritage item in Category A, B or C in Schedules G4 or G5 but excluding demolition of, relocation of, or alterations to the interiors of buildings, the relocation of the Matawhero Bridge and minor works.

[Please note that I have not seen the emplacement in person, so the assessment below must be qualified for that reason.]

2. Status of the structure

The Gisborne Battery Gun Emplacement is listed on the TRMP - Category B Post European Contact Schedule. It is not listed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga.

3. Relevant objectives and policies

C4.1.9 Objectives (Category A, B and C – post European Contact and Central Business District Schedules Overlay 4)

1. Sustainable management of the built heritage resource through the adaptive reuse of heritage items.
3. The recognition and protection, where practicable, of the heritage resource in categories A and B of the post European contact schedule.
5. Avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on post European Heritage items by:
 - a) Using appropriate building materials and techniques.
 - b) Retaining, where practicable, the architectural and historical integrity of the item.
 - c) Considering the location of the item and its importance in the cultural landscape or townscape.

C4.1.10 Policies (Category A, B and C – post European Contact and Central Business District Schedules Overlay 4)

1. To enable the adaptive reuse of heritage items provided that:
 - a) The adverse effects of the activity on the heritage values can be avoided, remedied or mitigated.

4. Impact of development

I have reviewed the resource consent development plans prepared by Isthmus and consider that the redevelopment of the summit of Tītīrangi, including the incorporation of the former gun emplacement into the proposed whare, will have a number of implications for the structure.

- It will transform the context of the emplacement through the construction of a broad, low-rise building across the summit, along with other changes in landscaping and roading.
- It will envelop the rear of the emplacement into the building and alter the landscaping around it.
- It will utilise the emplacement as a lookout (as it is at present) and for interpretation purposes.

5. Assessment of Effects

The effects of the transformation of the summit of Tītīrangī on the emplacement will be significant but there are notable mitigations as well.

As an observation, one of the most significant obstructions to any development was the presence of the BOP (later augmented with an observatory). While it is difficult to understand why this wasn't listed together with the gun emplacement, its demolition has removed what was a distinctive component of the summit landscape and opened up the opportunity for the planned redevelopment.

The removal of the BOP means the emplacement is now without any associated context. In such circumstances, it will be even more imperative to rely on interpretation to explain the history of the emplacement and other contextual information.

The development will give a role to the emplacement that it would not otherwise have had. It was more than likely destined to sit on the hill for the foreseeable future as a curiosity from World War II. Giving the emplacement a new purpose is a positive outcome.

The opportunity for Ngāti Oneone to reclaim the mana of Tītīrangī is a significant cultural mitigation, particularly as any remains of the tihi have been destroyed. The occupation of Tītīrangī for military purposes during World War II barely lasted three years. Compared with centuries of Māori occupation, it is a small period of time. It is appropriate that the hapū is able to develop Tītīrangī on their terms and that, allied to that, the importance of the country's defensive efforts during World War II is being recognised, preserved and interpreted.

I provide some commentary on the TRMP policy direction below.

C4.1.9 Objectives

1. *Sustainable management of the built heritage resource through the adaptive reuse of heritage items.*

The use of the emplacement in the development of the summit and the associated interpretation and visitor experience will give the structure new meaning and purpose. It will ensure that the structure receives funding for care and maintenance.

3. *The recognition and protection, where practicable, of the heritage resource in categories A and B of the post European contact schedule.*

The emplacement is remaining in situ and will be largely unmodified, although some practical health and safety requirements will need to be incorporated into the development.

5. *Avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects on post European Heritage items by:*
 - a) *Using appropriate building materials and techniques.*

The design of the adaptive reuse of the emplacement will need further work to ensure that effects on the structure are the minimum necessary.

- b) *Retaining, where practicable, the architectural and historical integrity of the item.*

No reduction in the integrity of the emplacement itself is proposed, although there will be new elements added to the structure for health and safety reasons.

- c) *Considering the location of the item and its importance in the cultural landscape or townscape.*

There will be some diminution of the role the emplacement plays in the landscape, simply because it will be incorporated into a much larger structure that will dominate the top of the maunga and obscure the rear of the emplacement. The loss of the typical context of a World War II era emplacement will need to be explained through interpretation.

6. Conclusion

The redevelopment of Tītīrangī will have significant effects on the historical context of the gun emplacement but these are mitigated by a) the provision of an adaptive reuse of the emplacement that will secure its long-term future, b) the use of interpretation to explain its former context and c) the opportunity to reinstate Ngāti Oneone as the mana whenua and custodians of this important site.

7. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Any alterations made to the emplacement for interpretation or visitor experience purposes should be approved by an experienced heritage practitioner to ensure that changes to heritage fabric or the introduction of new fabric are the minimum necessary. In particular, any intrusion into the existing fabric should be carefully considered.
- Any balustrade built on the outside edge of the gun cover should not be solid in form. A glazed balustrade (in design) may be the most appropriate option. Incorporation of interpretation into the balustrade is appropriate. This recommendation references and supports the design proposals displayed in Appendix 5: Proposed Gun Emplacement Design in Te Panuku Tu Resource Consent, Design Package.
- Consideration be given to how the interior of the emplacement could be integrated into the visitor and interpretation experience. (It is noted that it is currently in use for essential civic purposes and may not be available in the short or medium term).

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