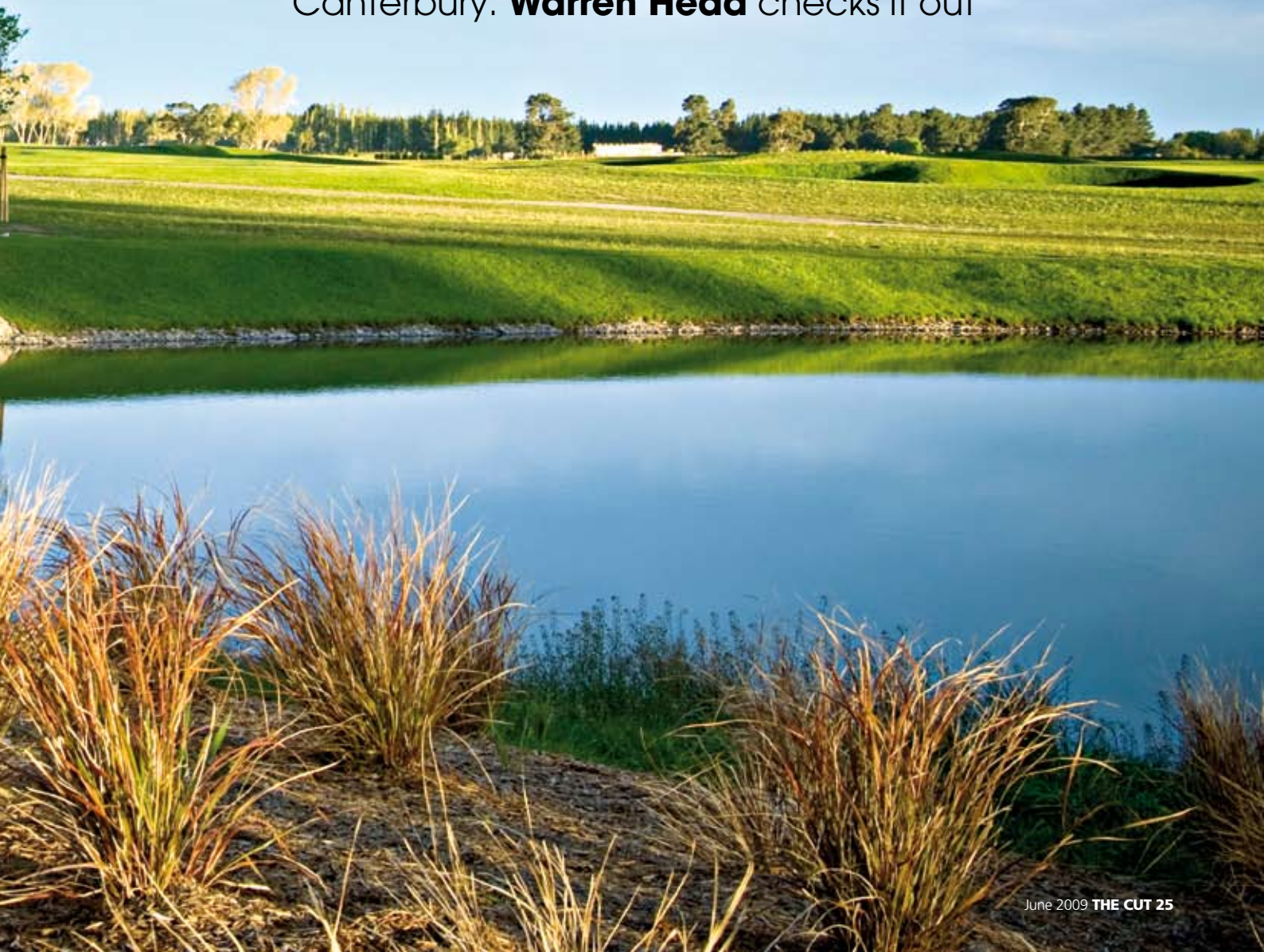


FEATURE **MAPLEHAM**



Canterbury creation

Prepare to embrace a fascinating new golf course and complex at Pegasus in north Canterbury. **Warren Head** checks it out





Mapleham, a new golf course just completing construction north of Christchurch, is described by its developers as a gently rolling, international-standard, parklands style golf course. It is shaped by water features, maturing trees and wetlands and framed by views of the Port Hills, Mount Grey and the Pacific Coast.

This appetising outline by Infinity Investment Group and co-developer Brookfield Multiplex is part of the drive to stimulate interest in Pegasus, a new township project in North Canterbury. Following a decade of planning, it is one of New Zealand's biggest development projects.

This enormous undertaking includes mixed density residential areas ranging from semi-rural houses to apartments adjacent to a town centre with a large retail and entertainment precinct, public library, school, hotel, aquatic centre, retirement village, swimming bay and yacht club connected

by walkways to a coastal surf club and equestrian centre.

Stages 1 to 4, involving 357 lots in the township, are fully titled, as are Mapleham stages 1 to 3 (60 lots) on the golf course.

Pegasus Town managing director Bob Robertson told *The Cut* the golf course makes a strong entrance to the entire project and its manicured appearance is a great statement for the town.

Taking a first-hand look at the course in the making, my first impressions were of a thoroughbred farm. An elegant rail and post boulevard, to be double lined with oaks or limes, splits the golf course as it winds towards the site of the new clubhouse of the Mapleham Golf and Sports Club. House lots flanking some fairways are separated by post-and-rail fences.

The second impression is indeed of rolling fairways, accommodatingly wide (until tree-lined in future years) and giving those players

who seek a pleasant stroll as much as a fair score all the room needed.

In addition to the par-72 course, by opening day next summer there will be practice greens, a driving range, pro-shop and clubhouse with bar and restaurant and a sports cluster comprising tennis club, swim pool and gymnasium. The Mapleham Golf and Sports Club will become a social hub for owners of the 98 houses to be built on-course and the wider Pegasus community.

The initial course layout was drafted by Francis Whitaker of architectural planners Mason & Wales and designed and evolved further by international designer Kristine Kerr of Kura Golf Course Design for landscape consultants and masterplanners Boffa Miskell.

Kerr, who has been involved in course projects in Italy, Czech Republic, Egypt, India, France, Malaysia, China, Thailand, Vietnam and Singapore as well



as New Zealand, says her brief was for a parkland course.

“Given the rural setting and general openness we’ve tried to create a gentle, rolling effect with big and sweeping land forms to fit naturally into the wider surrounding landscape,” she says.

“It reflects a ‘modern’ take on the classic principles of strategic golf course design, and is designed to be fair yet challenging for all levels of golfer. It has four tee positions for each hole, generally large landing areas of 40 to 60 metres on the fairways, and generous greens averaging 600 square metres.”

Robertson says the developers wanted a community course but with an international flavour. “Kristine has enhanced the brief and the course is able to present commercially up to international level.”

There are no ocean views, which is no great loss when mountains are framed by fairways. The views across the parkland setting are alluring enough; imagine playing it in the lifting mist of an autumn or spring morning, negotiating the swelling curves of big fairways and finding, in all the right places to cause a bogey, lakes and sand-pits of potential gloom.

The parkland effect will only fully emerge when trees presently 4-5m tall are moved from nurseries into positions plotted by GPS technology.

Equal nines of 36 strokes (for a par of 72) comprise four par-5s, four par-3s and 10 par-4s.

“The aim is to have plenty of variety in the features and direction of each hole,” says Kerr.

She has used water to increase the quantum of risk on several holes, notably the starting holes, 1 and 10. The thrill factor of a small island as the 10th tee could make this quite a daunting starting hole for those casual golfers with a rusty swing, especially being in full view of the clubhouse.

All of the par fives run in different directions. Although the predominant wind is from the north-east, golfers can expect a number of likely wind changes during a round.

Doglegs are a popular design feature and Mapleham has four. A notably good challenge is the third where a 90deg corner follows the direction of a lake.

Kerr has posed a different test on the fourth where four greenside traps await the inaccurate shot. It’s a precursor of the fifth where there are eight traps. Some look ominously like those famously-cratered Scottish courses. Kerr concedes some are “quite deep”.

Kerr’s clever use of undulations makes Mapleham a course full of surprises. On the third the bunkers appear to be in play yet the landing area turns out to be surprisingly generous, danger averted for the moment. From the fifth tee, a wall of bunkers stand like sentinels but again the threat is easily negotiable.

The design is intended to provide everyone with a fair chance of success and a choice as to the degree of assumed risk and reward. Kerr explains that from her strategic design perspective she wanted to guide players of all abilities.

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Off the ladies' markers on the fifth tee the choice is to head over the right-hand bunker, which would tempt low handicappers, but also have the option of an alternate line of play.

Wetlands are the flanking feature on the ninth. "Where a player chooses to go right they'll find the green receptive to the approach shot, but if they're short and left they'll face a long carry over the wetlands and have difficulty in stopping the ball on the green."

Holes 10 to 13 have a liquid look and the 15th offers the 'which way today?' novelty of a fairway split longitudinally by a gully. The 17th is marked by more wetlands and, with a huge lakeside stretch, the 18th shapes up to be a dramatic closing hole.

Kerr says she can't pick a favourite but hopes she has produced a course of a high standard design that will attract members and fee paying players while still being considered championship length off the back markers. It certainly looks long enough to host major tournaments.

After initial earthworks by Works Infrastructure and JSB, the fine shaping of features and grassing was undertaken by GRASS, a specialist construction company. The fairways are planted in drought resistant fine fescues and the greens in Egmont Browntop suitable to the Canterbury climate.

Highly detailed construction plans with computer modelling of specific contours were prepared by Kerr, who has been on site monitoring construction, and Boffa Miskell.

"The greens are built to USGA specifications," says Kerr, "with sub-grades including herringbone drainage trenches, then a gravel layer, and a sand layer of 300mm well watered to settle in shape before being planted."

"The golf course irrigation of tees, fairways, greens and the bunker surrounds is all computerised and we can target certain areas. The greens have run-off features and everything drains back for piping to lakes with a quick recovery rate."

The course will be fully completed by late autumn and after a grow-out period should be open for play in December when we'll see if Mapleham has become the golfing gem it is shaping up to be. ☺

Course economics

The economics of keeping golf clubs afloat in tighter times is very much a talking issue in golf circles. What is the financial position of Mapleham, which has probably cost \$1m a hole to build and with the \$8 million to \$9 million costs of a new clubhouse and sports complex on top?

Bob Robertson, managing director of Pegasus Town Ltd, says the sale of the 98 on-course house lots ensures that Mapleham is debt free and the new club not reliant on membership to pay for its development.

Several further stages of the residential project are yet to be launched. With over 770 properties sold to date, generating sales of \$178 million (over 90 per cent of the properties offered for sale to date by the joint venture developers) Robertson says Pegasus is funded to completion. "Instantly we have two thousand (life) members."

The general life membership fee is \$20,000 but Mapleham and Pegasus residents have free perpetual membership tied to their property purchase. They will also enjoy a 50 per cent discount on yearly subscriptions. Robertson emphasised that membership stays with the title to each property section.

Discounted life memberships will also be open to residents in nearby coastal towns such as Waikuku Beach, Pines Beach and Woodend.

Life members will be offered preferential membership to the golf and sports club with 50 per cent off separate subscriptions for the golf club, and other discounts at the bar/cafe, tennis centre and gym club.

Robertson adds, "There will be no obligations to meet other costs associated in the running of the course. It will be run as a corporate entity by the developers, we expect, for at least the first five years."

Unlike most golf clubs, management of the club restaurant, cafe and bar will be in the hands of a qualified commercial operator.

Local resident members will pay an annual subscription of \$800 – all others \$1600 – on top of their life membership purchase. This includes gym and tennis memberships.

Green fees at \$90 a round will reflect pricing at similar premium courses in the region, but will be discounted for members' guests. Mapleham will offer casual golfers the right to play there up to 12 times annually for a fee of \$450.

The structure has yet to be tested as owners' rights have yet to be translated into active annual sports club subscriptions. But what golf club wouldn't relish the opportunity?

