

Missing the wood for the trees



No way to improve access to the sea. The recently-constructed concrete pathway at Marsalforn is nothing but an eyesore, and certainly not 'embellishment'.

It was recently reported that the attendant of an improvised car park at the Gianpula entertainment complex, limits of Żebbuġ, was making a hefty sum each weekend, running in the thousands by his own admission, despite allegedly not paying the commensurate tax returns on such a plum sum.

The news triggered a flurry of online comments, almost all expressing revulsion that the attendant was raking in so much money on a single weekend. This response typically reveals how, as a nation, we always manage to spectacularly mistake the wood for the trees.

The real issue here is not how much the attendant in question is making each weekend but rather the glaring illegality of the car park in question, which involves an unauthorised change of use from fallow fields to a parking facility.



The entertainment facility itself is subject to an additional enforcement notice for other contraventions, but the parking of cars in what are essentially fields is illegal in itself, since such a heavy density of cars on weekends obviously disturbs the topsoil, destroying its crumb structure and kicking up dust bowls of fine soil with every tyre movement.

Tackling soil erosion on our islands may be challenging but it can be tackled head on by stopping one field car park at a time.

An 'embellishment' that is an eyesore

Recent roughshod works undertaken by the Gozo Ministry along the rocky seashore at Marsalforn have been flagged on the Newsbook portal for the way they evidently jar with their surroundings. The works involved the construction of a concrete pathway meandering down the coastal cliff side to afford better access to the sea for pedestrians and physically-impaired people.

The motivation for the new 'facility' may be noble and valid but, as the above photos show, the structure in question is uninspiring, highly obtrusive and is a blot on the typically rural coastline. No efforts were made to blend the structure with the surroundings such as through the use of wood or weathered stone.

The ministry claims that its 'embellishment project' is not in breach of any regulations as no excavation in the coastal rock surface was undertaken and no new flight of steps was etched out in the rock. The ministry may have played by the rules but the new pathway can best be

described as an eyesore and not even remotely an 'embellishment', despite the political rhetoric.



The construction of two villas in scenic Fekruna Bay is still on the cards, with an Appeals Tribunal hearing scheduled for Tuesday to reconsider the rejection of two applications first submitted in 1998.

Some applicants just never give up

Fekruna Bay, nestling between Xemxija and Mistra, is renowned for its scenic beauty and visitors to it are regaled with its perception of remoteness. Despite this, the bay has been within the crosshairs of developers for almost 20 years, with two similar planning applications (PA 02947/98 and PA 02948/98) for the construction of villas that were first submitted in 1998.

After being rejected for a variety of legitimate reasons, the developer requested a reconsideration of the decision based on a number of arguments. These included (i) that the Planning Directorate cannot stop the excavation of Blue Clay as this has been permitted in other parts of the islands; (ii) that the applicant is being discriminated against as permits for other plots in the same area had been granted; (iii) that no species or habitats of scientific importance live at the site, and as the cherry on the cake, (iv) that the proposed development will actually have a positive effect on the area as it will close off further development as stipulated in the 1988 Temporary Provisions Scheme boundaries (which, by definition, are temporary, and hence can be overridden, as rightly pointed out by the Planning Directorate).

Luckily, the case officer and the Planning Authority stuck to their guns, and last January the reconsideration request was rebuffed as well, since the proposal is for an urban residential development in a rural protected area and is incompatible with the environmental characteristics of the area designated as a protected site by Policy NWSP 12 of the North West Local Plan, which prohibits all development except those permitted by the Scheduling Order.

In addition, the proposal does not comply with the Strategic Plan for Environment and Development Policy Thematic Objective 1.1 and Rural Objective 4.3.

Despite this, the case is scheduled for an Appeals Tribunal hearing on Tuesday. One cannot fathom how the tribunal could possibly overturn the PA's previous decisions given the site's sensitivity and significance, but in this country you never know, we have seen so many cases of volte-face we have grown accustomed to it.

Spot the Jellyfish photo competition

The annual photographic competition organised as part of the Spot the Jellyfish citizen science campaign has been launched again this summer through financial assistance received by the University of Malta's Department of Geosciences, which runs the campaign, and from the International Ocean Institute (IOI).

People may submit photographs of jellyfish taken underwater or of beached specimens through the campaign website – www.ioikids.net/jellyfish - until August 31.

When making such a submission, participants should type the word 'Competition' next to their name and must include their contact details.

Participants may submit an unlimited number of photos for the competition, and the photos will be displayed digitally for a limited period at the Malta National Aquarium. The best photo will be selected by a panel by mid-September and the winner will be presented with an underwater camera as a prize.

The Spot the Jellyfish initiative, which is currently funded by the IOI and the Malta Tourism Authority (MTA), has been running since June 2010 and enjoys the support of Nature Trust, Friends of the Earth, Ekoskola, the Blue Flag Malta programme and Sharklab.

The jellyfish reporting is done by matching the sighted jellyfish with a simple visual identification guide, giving the date and time of the sighting, and indicating the number of individual jellyfish seen.

Sightings may also be reported online at www.ioikids.net/jellyfish or by sending an e-mail to ioi-moc @um.edu.mt or to my e-mail below.

People who see jellyfish that are not included on the leaflet should try to catch one and keep it in a bucketful of seawater, prior to contacting staff at the Department of Geosciences for it to be collected to attempt a definite identification of the species.

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Time to grab your cameras for the Spot the Jellyfish photographic competition. Seen here is the *Oceania armata* species, courtesy of www.oceanfoto.co.uk.