

Rural Għarghur under the axe



Għarghur's rural character will be further spoiled if development of this plot of land goes ahead.

In a bid to further expose brazen Outside Development Zone applications, I will highlight Planning Application 05214/08 to develop a site in a rural area on the outskirts of Għarghur.

In what is becoming a time-honoured tradition, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority case officer's report on the application makes exhaustive reference to relevant environmental legislation and rightly recommended that the application be refused. Nonetheless, the application was granted an outline permit in April 2011.

One hopes common sense will prevail in the spirit of the presumption against further ODZ development

- Alan Deidun

The case officer's report justified its negative recommendation by referring to the Central Malta Local Plan (CMLP), which prohibits any form of urban development in strategic open gaps, and to the Structure Plan, which prohibits any such development in rural conservation areas of particular scenic value, as is the case for this parcel of land in Għarghur.

The CMLP also prohibits any urban development in areas of agricultural value and the proposed development does not qualify as a type of development permissible in rural conservation areas. The local plan also designates the area as a site of scientific importance.

In addition, as rightly underscored by residents opposing the development, the proposed development will be accessible from two alleys – Sqaq Charlotte and Sqaq Kromb il-Baħar. Both these alleys are particular not only for their traditional winding, narrow lanes bordered by old and restored village houses, but also because they integrate the village core with the surrounding rural areas.

The rubble walls leading off the existing buildings and the winding earth paths to the fields will be destroyed by the development. Any further development along these lanes will destroy their very nature. The site is not an infill one and so should be not be allowed to be included in development boundaries.

Residents proactively presented a petition to Mepa against permitting the development and filed a third-party appeal, which is set to be heard on November 29.

One hopes common sense will prevail in this case in the spirit of the current presumption against further ODZ development.

Dwejra environmental education centre

A letter to the editor by John Dabill entitled Is It Gozo or Go-Slow (The Times, October 4) and subsequent online comments cast doubts on the eventual opening of the environmental

education centre at Dwejra, Gozo, despite Mepa's timely reply.

Almost three years ago, I conceived, together with a small group of Sicilian counterparts, the concept behind the two-year Panacea project, which eventually attracted European funding 18 months ago and is set to run till next April.

Currently, the local project partners are the International Ocean Institute's Malta Operational Centre at the University of Malta and the San Lawrenz local council. We immediately thought of using the centre that had recently been built at Dwejra to host the proposed environmental education centre to fulfill the aim for which the construction was originally approved.

One of the project's objectives – that of developing educational tools related to marine protected areas – has already been achieved, with the launching in May of two underwater documentaries, which have received widespread acclaim. These can be viewed online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArJOWrwwz98 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzpPK1pAILA.

Since then, it has been a rough and uphill struggle and there are still numerous stumbling blocks in the way, not least bureaucracy and opposition from some quarters.

But the motivation, that is, to open the first educational environmental centre for a Maltese marine protected area – as well as the unwavering support for the project from Environment Minister Mario de Marco and his team – has made it all worthwhile.

The centre will eventually feature interactive and didactic interpretation panels, themed on marine issues, dioramas (representations of underwater landscapes using resin replicas of marine life), an audiovisual panel (where the underwater documentaries can be viewed by the public, among other activities), a small replica of a kannizzata (a net trap used for Lapuki fishing) and other features to explain to visitors, in an entertaining way, the marine assets of Dwejra and Rđum Majjesa.

I reiterate that the going these past three years has been tough but we are hopefully approaching the culmination of all the partners' efforts – the opening of the centre, which should materialise sometime next year, before April. Given all the effort invested, it would be welcome if the cynics could give us a break.

It's just sheer highway madness in Tanzania

It was thought the plans for a motorway in North Serengeti to link this remote Tanzanian region to the rest of the country had been definitely shelved last year.

However, the plans, bankrolled by Germany it seems, were exhumed last spring, with the Tanzanian Government trying to lessen its impact (and silencing the ever-growing global opposition to the plans) by including long unpaved stretches in it.

The Serengeti region enjoys iconic status worldwide for its array of wildlife, not least the compelling annual migration of wildebeest and zebras, which attracts fascination and awe for their sheer numbers.

The massive 30,000-square-kilometre region includes two World Heritage Sites and two biosphere reserves, and has inspired writers of the calibre of Ernest Hemingway.

Facebook pages have been created to voice opposition to the plans, such as www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Serengeti/189842174391832.

www.alandeidun.eu