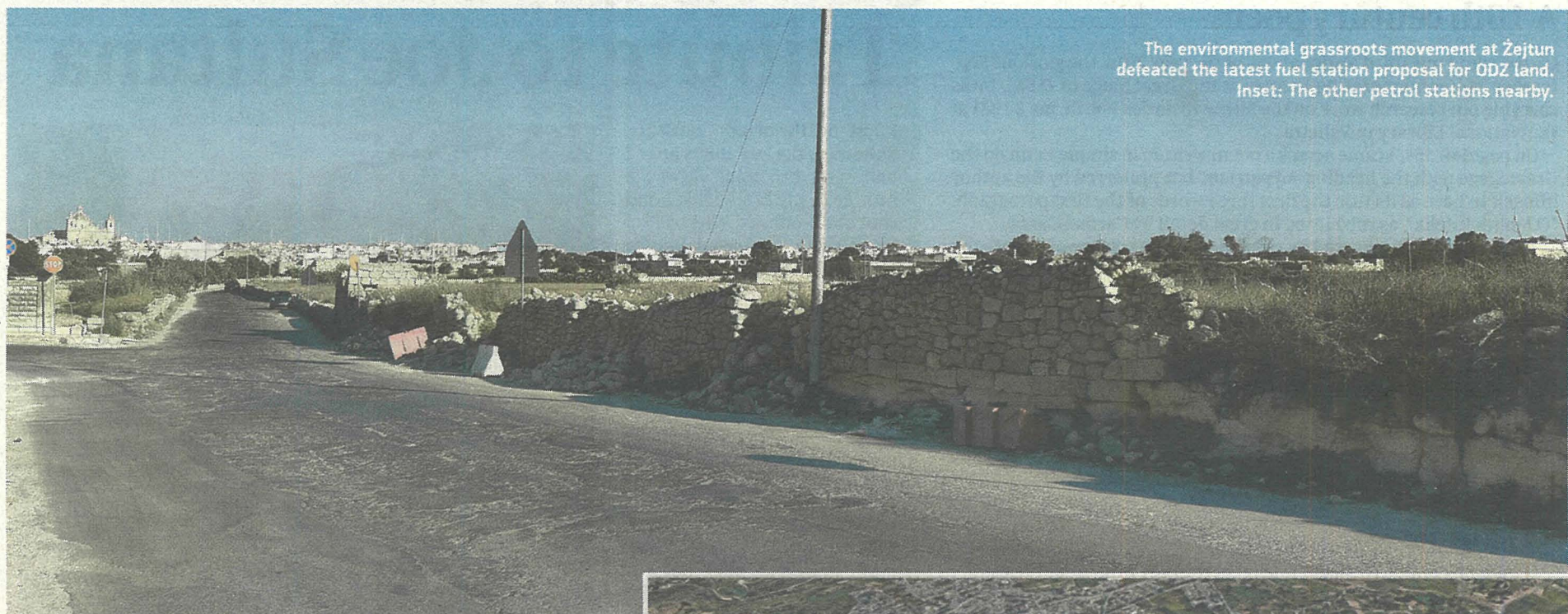


OPINION&LETTERS



The environmental grassroots movement at Żejtun defeated the latest fuel station proposal for ODZ land. Inset: The other petrol stations nearby.

Żejtun ODZ: a success story



ALAN DEIDUN

The quick succession of two recent high-profile rebuttals of ODZ development proposed for the Wied iż-Żeġir ODZ area in Żejtun (proposed government extension of the Bulebel industrial estate and a private proposal for a spanking new fuel station) should not go unnoticed. This is especially so in view of the grassroots nature of the opposition and the potential to emulate the success in ODZ areas elsewhere.

The opposition to the proposed development, in fact, hailed from NGOs, including the Wied iż-Żejtun one, which painstakingly substantiated the counter-arguments with the outcome of voluminous research, as well as individual citizens not necessarily hailing from Żejtun.

The unorthodox methods employed by Moviment Graffiti and Kamp Emergenza Ambjent may not be everyone's cup of tea but they certainly drove the point home, that is, the Planning Authority should not even be considering such preposterous fuel station applications prior to a total overhaul of the current policy.

They also dispelled the stereotyped mould we assign to our youth, that of a comatose bunch disenfranchised from the environment. The young people at the hearing in Floriana have definitely highlighted their backbone.

On the other hand, one cannot let oneself be swept away on the cusp of elation without realising that the fuel station applicant in

this case still has options to pursue and that the ODZ mill will never run out of steam.

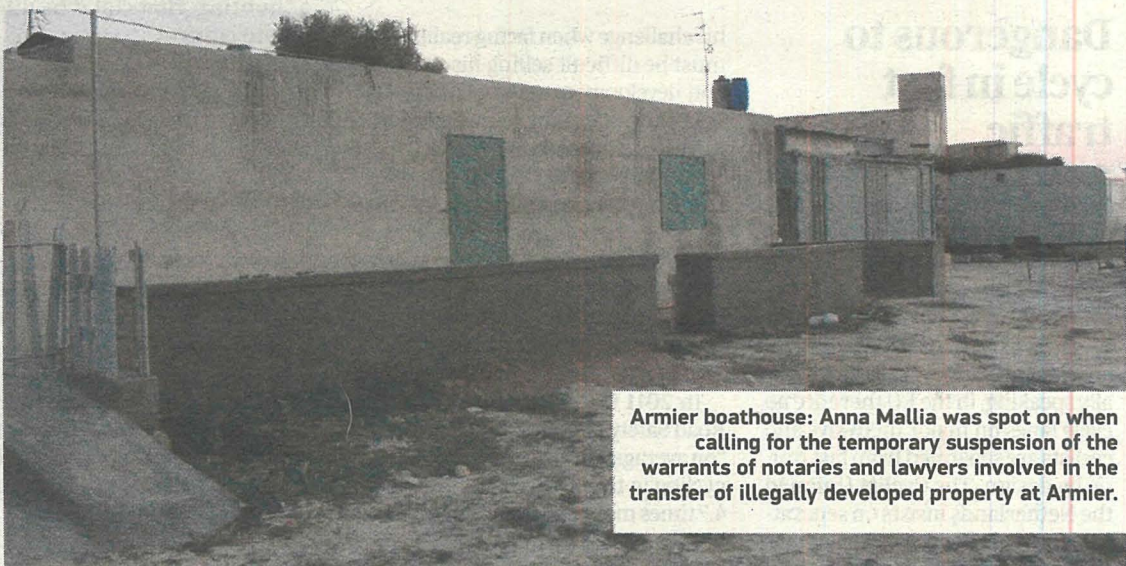
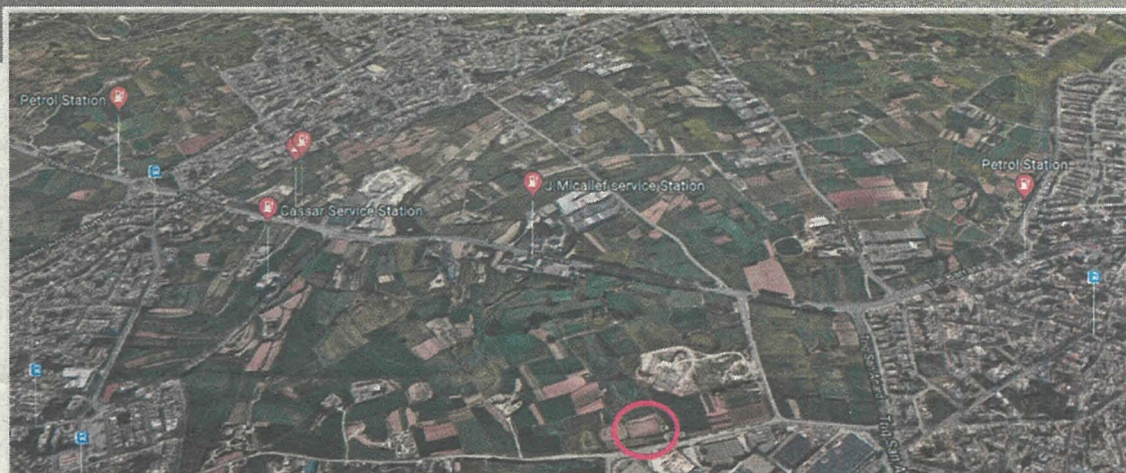
Invariably, one stumbles upon the cynics, who downplay the significance of these two successive environmental achievements at Żejtun, simply pinning them down to the area being a Labour stronghold. Irrespective of such petty considerations, Żejtun could and should constitute a valid case study of a well-organised environmental movement that overturned the odds in managing to ward off development from a cherished ODZ area.

Hats off to Anna Mallia

Lawyer Anna Mallia created ripples earlier this month when, being true to her outspoken self, she fielded the proposal of temporarily suspending the warrant of all notaries and lawyers involved in the formulation of deeds involving the transfer of illegally developed public land at Armier.

The proposal, although coming across as Draconian, is not without its merits given the brass neck shown by all the parties involved in such 'property transfers'. As if the annexation of public land for the unpermitted construction of seaside residences (excused under the palliative of 'boathouses') was not blatantly abusive enough, their 'owners' have the gall to place their 'property' on the market, even by advertising in online trading portals.

Since none of the two political behemoths on these islands have the grit to bell the cat where the Armier squatters are involved, we must make do with small graces, such as deterring the notarial and legal professions from giving any legitimacy to such profiteering from public land usurpation, as suggested by Dr Mallia.



Armier boathouse: Anna Mallia was spot on when calling for the temporary suspension of the warrants of notaries and lawyers involved in the transfer of illegally developed property at Armier.

Lidl's predilection for ODZ

It seems there is no quenching Lidl's thirst for ODZ areas. In fact, besides the two ODZ supermarkets Lidl opened in Safi and in Luqa in 2007-2008, and the supermarket in Xewkija, which partly overflows

over onto an ODZ area, Lidl is proposing two other supermarkets, this time in Żebbuġ and in Fgura.

Concerning the first proposal, the proposed development is mainly sited in an area of containment and encroaches only partly over ODZ land, which is currently composed of disturbed land. However, as frequently happens in these islands, if this disturbed land is committed, as rightly underscored by the Environment and Resources Authority, it would result in further commitment of undeveloped rural land and take-up of a substantial part of the remaining undeveloped fields.

This proposal has rightly raised the bristles of the Żebbuġ local community which is objecting to the use of ODZ land for ever more supermarkets.

The Fgura proposal refers to a scrapyards site which has been designated within the applicable local plan for the development of public urban open spaces, social and community facilities and residential and retail facilities, allocating 18 per cent of the footprint as a 'green open space'.

The Lidl supermarket proposal does away with this nod to open spaces in the local plan as it envisages a complete uptake of the site.

Environmental doyen passes away

The recent passing away of veteran ornithologist and environmental campaigner Joe Sultana has saddened many working in the vineyard, given his commitment to the green cause, especially on the island of Gozo.

Seeing yet another doyen and stalwart of the local environmental cause pass away is sobering indeed, especially considering that so few from the younger generations are following in their footsteps.

Fellow lecturer, naturalist and anthropologist Prof. Mark Anthony Falzon nailed it when he described Joe's contagious passion and energy and his generosity in sharing his knowledge about local avifauna.

Rest in peace indeed Joe.

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