

Boathouse frenzy



Triq Sant Antnin in Ghajnsielem, Gozo, where an application to develop five residential units with garages has been approved. This entails the uprooting of a number of protected carob trees, against the condition that the northern side of the development will mark the end of all development in the area and that 300 indigenous trees are planted at an alternative site.

To the current frenzy of building stables and discos, we can add boathouses and hotel extensions. Snippets of information trickling through show plans for the dust-shrouded San Tumas enclave of around 140 boathouses, most of which are illegally-constructed, albeit on private land.

Through a tailor-made action plan, in a place identified as a 'coastal recreational area' by the South Malta Local Plan, the Malta Environment and Planning Authority is seeking to better manage the area to include facilities such as caravan and picnic sites. But, at the same time, the same action plan could envisage the sanctioning of some (or all) of the same boathouses, upon which 10 enforcement notices currently apply.

Even more galling (since public land is involved here) are the overtures by both political parties to the squatters at L-Afraz, which straddles over all the bay from Marfa to White Tower Bay, for a total of 1,200 'units', made on the eve of the last election in an archetypal case of political clientelism.

Details include the presumed promise that all pre-1992 'units' will be sanctioned, against payment of a paltry annual 'rent', and the replacement of the shanty town with an even larger one, comprising an increase of 500 'units'.

One may feel snug in the conviction that public uproar against such proposals will probably scupper the unabashed proposals, as they did way back in 2001. However, the groundwork is already being laid by statements to the tune of "it is difficult to speak of illegality when some of the owners are paying rent to the Lands Department, and when government authorities have supplied the owners with electricity and water" by the Office of the Prime Minister. This could effectively become a rubber stamp of the misdemeanours carried out by the notorious Labour administration of the early 1980s.

We may be part of the EU but the modus operandi over here is poles apart from that in other European counterparts, such as Spain, which embarked on a massive illegal house demolition in coastal areas last year. Politicians seem to draw parallels with other European countries only when it suits them, such as for the introduction of the euro, but the same parallels are not drawn when environmental action is involved.

The message from this sordid affair is that, no matter how scandalous your illegal development is, as long as you organise yourself in a lobby large enough to have some political leverage, you can consider yourself home and dry.

Żebbuġ supermarket? Not yet

The development of the second Lidl supermarket on an outside development zone site (after the one developed in Safi) has been prevented, at least for the time being. PA 1339.06,

referring to the construction of a supermarket with adjacent car park and demolition of existing building in the Ġnien il-Ward area, Mdina Road, Żebbuġ, was unanimously rejected by the DCC Board A, during its meeting on May 7.

The proposal was the umpteenth ODZ application submitted by developer Charles Polidano. Unlike the Safi ODZ supermarket case, when Mepa felt emboldened by the lack of objections received, at least one objecting representation was made in the Żebbuġ supermarket case, by Din L-Art Helwa. The case officer recommended a resolute 'refuse permission' for the 6,000m² project, which contemplated the demolition of an existing farmhouse on site, on a number of points.

The site lies outside the limits for development of Żebbuġ and so is located in an area which is supposed to remain undeveloped and open. The proposed development would run counter to this scheme and would represent unacceptable urban development in the countryside.

The proposed development conflicts with Structure Plan Policy SET 11, which does not permit urban development outside existing and committed built-up areas.

The development does not fall into a category of non-urban development which may be permitted outside existing or committed built-up areas in accordance with Paragraph 7.6 of the Structure Plan.

There is no justification for the development of this site as required by Structure Plan Policy SET 12. There are no reasons from a planning point of view as to why the proposed development cannot be located in an area designated for development or in an existing built-up area.

The proposal runs counter to Structure Plan Policy RDS 5 and Paragraph 14.6 of the Structure Plan which indicate that the arterial road network will not normally be used for parking or for direct access to property. The proposed development will have direct access onto an arterial road and will generate additional vehicle movements and on-street parking. It would therefore give rise to potential traffic hazards and adversely affect the free and safe flow of traffic on the arterial road.

The proposed development does not fully satisfy the criteria for assessment set out in Section 1.4.7 the approved Interim Retail Planning Guidelines (IRPG) for large supermarkets.

Accolades for Lija council

Over the years, we have been treated to a number of environmental misdemeanours by some of our local councils, including the illegal deposit of grit and aggregate on our beaches or the aversion to the use of bring-in sites.

Recently, however, we have started observing the first stirrings of green consciousness, with the Lija council being a sterling example. The council earns its accolade through its adamant stand against the approved residential development close to the Belveder in Transfiguration Avenue.

Approval of such an application would pave the way for the urban conurbation in central Malta which blurs the distinction between adjacent villages.

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