

More ODZs on virgin land



Għajn Żejtuna - No more bungalows should be constructed along the Għajn Żejtuna coastline, which is already subject to rampant ribbon development. Public access to the sea should be ensured at all times.

During May, 14 per cent of outside development zone (ODZ) applications (17 out of 123) submitted to the Malta Environment and Planning Authority proposed extending the development boundaries further out onto uncommitted land.

In June, such applications rose to 20 per cent (24 out of 118). The lion's share of all ODZ applications is consistently taken up by proposed sanctioning, symptomatic of a culture which prefers to regularise and make amends once there is a fait accompli.

Yet another ingrained attitude seems to be favouring ODZ development in Gozo, despite the island being branded as 'the untainted land' in a real estate promotional magazine distributed last Sunday with this newspaper. There was also a proliferation of applications of pump- and tool-rooms, and swimming pools, as the exploitation of groundwater continues unabated.

'Outstanding' ODZ applications

The following are some ODZ applications which stand out:

- PA 00513/08, proposing the addition of a further three rooms within an existing fireworks factory on the upper reaches of Wied il-Qoton in Għaxaq (a conglomerate of rooms already exists on site);
- PA 07747/07, proposing the construction of industrial garages on the site of an existing rabbit farm at Magħtab (a massive conversion of agricultural land to industrial premises is underway at the site);
- PA 01698/08, proposing the construction of warehouses on the site of a chicken farm at San Leonardu in Żabbar (by virtue of recently-amended agricultural policy, which permits the development of abandoned farm operations, despite their ODZ siting);
- PA 01989/08 and PA 02428/08, proposing the construction of two dwellings with underlying garages and swimming pools at Triq Birbuba and two dwellings along Triq San Pietru respectively in Għarb (in what is becoming an established plunder of the former Għarb hamlets of Birbuba and San Pietru);
- PA 01685/08, proposing the construction of two dwellings with garages along Triq Marsalforn in Xagħra;
- PA 01292/08, which proposes the development of a two-storey old people's home at Triq il-Blata, Għarb;

- PA 02527/08 to construct a new terraced house at Pjazza Orvieto, Kerċem;
- PA 02536/08 for the construction of new residential units and garages in the former hamlet of Bidnija;
- PA 02576/08 for the construction of new residences and garages along Triq Sir Temi Zammit, Mġarr; and
- PA 05872/07 for three new proposed residences and swimming pools at Ta' Ganton in Kerċem.

Why are all the above applicants eyeing ODZ areas for residences, when we have a surplus of existing buildings?

PA 01880/08 is notable for its eloquent wording: "To sanction ancillary buildings to stables and surrounding walls" at a site in Ta' Ziri, along Triq il-Fawwara in Siġġiewi.

This application reinforces my conviction that not all applications for stables are borne out of a genuine interest in horses.

Why would ancillary buildings need to be close to stables - are these simply there for fodder storage? What is the nature of such ancillary buildings - de facto dwellings, for example?

The questions are legitimate given that the development was carried out without prior approval in an area where such developments have mushroomed.

PA 07449/07 is a further tentacular approach towards St Thomas Bay, proposing new residential units for Triq id-Daħla ta' San Tumas, Żejtun.

PA 02658/08 is more candid in its wording, proposing the "construction of a dwelling on two floors with an underlying semi-basement garage in a committed built-up area adjacent to, but outside, the limit to development".

PA 02597/08 surely takes the biscuit this time round, proposing amendments to the approved permit so as to accommodate bathroom facilities and an extension to the car wash facilities on the site of the Pit Stop petrol station, off Mdina Road, Attard. For the uninitiated, this Attard petrol station application caused many an environmental stir last year in view of its ODZ siting and the fact that a number of mature Aleppo pines had to be uprooted due to the ancillary road alignment. The operator does not seem to be satisfied as he is now seeking a further extension.

Another ODZ supermarket?

Works are still in progress on the development of the Lidl ODZ supermarket in Safi. The uproar caused by this approval, which was lambasted even by Mepa's Ombudsman, has still not completely died down. In spite of this, a new ODZ supermarket could still be on the cards, with PA 07528/07 having been submitted for the construction of a supermarket in Xewkija, as the sister island latches on to the ODZ momentum.

Ghajn Żejtuna boathouses

A fortnight ago, this column featured a photo of the boathouses at Ghajn Żejtuna, where a legal dispute between the landlord and the boathouse owners has given rise to a new application for boathouses - PA 07534/07. Contrary to other boathouse sites, these boathouses are legal since they have been purchased legitimately.

The landlord, Albert Mizzi, who has another pending application for the opposite flank of Għadira Bay for a number of bungalows in an ODZ area behind the Mellieħa Bay Hotel, has demanded that the boathouse owners pay an annual fee to be able to use the open concrete platforms in front of their boathouses.

As the owners refused, Mr Mizzi escalated matters by applying to build boathouses on the footprint taken up by the same concrete platforms, which would mean that boathouses encroach further on the rocky coastline with the consequent spilling of construction rubble on the coast.

The Ghajn Żejtuna area has been pillaged by rampant development over the past three decades - further development should not be contemplated, so as to protect the public's right to enjoy the rocky coastline and shingle beach and ensure that the area is not exclusively enjoyed by a select few.

Two positive steps

The decisions to limit the height of buildings in Transfiguration Avenue, Lija, to just two floors so as not to hem in the Belvedere Tower, and to give NGOs access to full development details

via the e-access facility, should be commended. Perseverance by the green lobby pays off, sometimes.

The authorities must not be deterred from reversing previous decisions or revoking permits by the threat from developers to seek legal redress and financial compensation. Mepa should also strive to make its website less of a labyrinth.

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