

Tal-Balal St Michael's Foundation School update



In the rush to grant the Tal-Balal school permit, calls to save the 3,000-odd six-year-old vines have fallen by the wayside and no attempts are being made to schedule the area despite numerous clamourings by Nature Trust (Malta) - why can't the vines be uprooted in winter time to give them a fairchance of surviving the transplant?

The permit referring to the Tal-Balal school was granted by the MEPA board with volumes of conditions by which the developer must abide. However, strangely enough, no mention was made in the conditions that the 3,000 vines to be axed should be transplanted in winter time to bolster their chances of survival. Waste appears to be our prerogative in this country - some might say that the vines were planted illegally six years ago; now that there is a fait accompli, shall we waste six years of watering 3,000 vines? So much for the rural development plan!

Also, strangely, the MEPA Directorate did not press for the area to be scheduled. I have forwarded these two queries to MEPA, but I have had no answer to date.

Having attended the second public hearing on the issue, I was flabbergasted at the attitude of the applicant and his team. At every step of the hearing, parents from the school, present in large numbers, sighed and expressed things in the vein of "Ma niflahomx!" (I cannot stand them), referring to the outlining by MEPA Directorate of the ecological importance of the site at San Gwann. It would not surprise me to know that these are the same people who vaunt that they separate waste in their homes, hence considering themselves 'green' individuals, while at the same time downplaying the importance of maquis species.

In addition, the applicant's team continuously passed snide remarks towards the case officer in case, who was stoic enough to proceed - MEPA should learn from this to give greater moral (and not just physical) protection to its employees who are frequently grilled by the applicant and sometimes even intimidated.

But the cherry on the cake certainly came when the applicant's lawyer continuously haggled over the bank guarantee he had to provide as a precaution against any infringement - the sum in itself was already a pittance (just Lm30,000 compared to the millions to be spent on the project). Yet the applicant's lawyer bogged down proceedings by claiming that the sum was too high and asking for a reprieve - fortunately, this was not granted, since it would otherwise have defeated the whole reasoning behind precautionary bank guarantees.

Most often developers choose to forfeit such guarantees since it does not bite in their tender flesh - what is there to safeguard against hordes of schoolchildren or the construction team to play havoc with the maquis species just five metres away?