

ODZ applications continue



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Of the 98 outside development zone applications submitted in April, six propose development on relatively pristine sites.

In what has become a cliché, a disproportionate number of these 'sprawl' applications refer to sites in Gozo - namely PA 01259/08 for the construction of two residential units with a garage along Triq Marsalforn in Xaghra, PA 01177/08 for the construction of a garage and three flats along Triq tal-Masri in Xaghra and, still in the same village, PA 06549/01 for the construction of flats and garages along Triq Għajn Qamar.

More flats are proposed for Triq Habel it-Twil in Marsalforn (PA 01372/08), while PA 01141/08 proposes the construction of a new garage in an ODZ area along Triq l-Isperanza in Mosta. In view of the current hubbub over fireworks depots and stashes, the application to construct a new fireworks factory in Wied il-Qlejja, Rabat (PA 01369/08), smacks of cheek.

Two other ODZ applications worthy of note are PA 06329/07, referring to the proposed extension of Mellieħa Bay Hotel at Ghadira by 98 apartments, and PA 01168/08, referring to the proposed construction of a fourth floor at Paradise Bay Hotel, with an increase of 36 units.

Will authorities now factor in the fact that over 800 new apartments have been approved at Mistra before giving the green light for a further 134 in Mellieħa?

One may take heart from the relatively small number of proposed developments on completely uncommitted land - however, most of the submitted ODZ applications are from the agricultural sector, often disguised as much-needed extensions or amenities for the hapless farmer. For example, PA 00719/08 refers to the proposed construction of a dwelling for a full-time breeder, along of one the most scenic areas of the islands - Bingemma.

PA 03493/08 refers to the proposed extension of an existing building at another sensitive site - Tal-Palma, Mġarr - while PA 06221/04 is a spin-off of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority's recently revised agricultural policy as it proposed to demolish a disused chicken farm and to erect a dwelling in its stead at Triq ix-Xgħajra, Żabbar, in line with the farm diversification policy.

A precedent has been set in such a context, with an approved dwelling in an ODZ area at Safi. Needless to say, applications for proposed pump rooms and reservoirs abound, raising

eyebrows as to the real motives behind such applications while raising concerns over further pillage of groundwater resources.

The stables fad, so rampant in the previous months, shows no signs of abating - in fact, PA 01340/08, PA 00623/08 and PA 01740/08 refer to the proposed stable construction in Magħtab, Qala (Gozo) and Marsa respectively.

Coastal access still elusive

Lino Bugeja from the Ramblers' Association rightly stresses that access to the foreshore is a birth-right for all Maltese citizens. Up to a couple of years ago, our political top brass were falling over each other to shake hands with exponents of the Ramblers Association and to seemingly champion their case.

Many had pledged to ensure public access to many coastal areas. Such momentum has, however, petered out.

Fomm ir-Riġ is somewhat detached from the political rallies at the Granaries or the Luxol Grounds. Its expropriation by the Lands Department is still in the air after a full 30 years. As a consequence, Villa Delfino, perched above the beach at Fomm ir-Riġ, still bars public access to the beach, since the only other alternative is a treacherous narrow path from Baħrija.

The site has been subject to two different enforcement noticas ever since 1996 (for the construction of a cliff edge wall and for illegal additions to a surrounding military pillbox), which have been in abeyanca ever since.

To further rub salt into the wound, PA 05953/06 proposing the erection of a wall to cordon off part of the area was approved last year, despite recommendations to the contrary in the DPA report, under the premise that the wall keeps people away from damaging habitats and fauna and flora.

PA 06321/07 to 'reinstate and marginally extend a security fence, planting of indigenous trees/shrubs and reinstating rubble walls in the vicinity of existing dwelling, repairing damaged internal roads and footpaths, was dismissed by Mepa, which, however, stated that the developer's architect can rectify sore points in the application, effectively leaving a ray of hope for the applicant.

Auspicious election day

The election of the new Labour leader could not have fallen on a more auspicious day - June 5, World Environment Day. Such an uncanny coincidence should be seen as bolstering the party's green credentials and auguring for Joseph Muscat's repeat performance of his pro-environmental stance as an MEP, even locally. Dr Muscat's questioning the need for more golf courses in Malta is beneficial for a greener political agenda.

Photovoltaic installation by HSBC

As part of the HSBC Global Environmental Efficiency Programme, HSBC Malta has commissioned a pilot project with a photovoltaic system at its new branch in Attard to reduce its carbon footprint.

The system is expected to improve energy-efficiency by 20 to 30 per cent. The project has been tailor-made in close collaboration with the University of Malta, which will be monitoring the system's performance and derive important data according to different parameters, such as weather conditions and panels direction.

The system is the largest of its kind in Malta to be connected to the national electricity grid. In its first two months of operation, the panels generated 747 kWh of green electricity. It is estimated that the system will generate an average of 4,200 kWh per annum, enough to power the 24-hour Express Banking Lobby at the Attard branch, making this service carbon neutral, and offsetting 3.7 tonnes of CO2 emissions per annum.

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