



Comments on Environmental Planning Statement of PA 02767/16 27th February 2017

As a reaction on the Environmental Planning Statement of the proposed development PA 02767/16 “Redevelopment of an existing derelict hotel including environmentally friendly measures and provision of public ancillary facilities” in Ta’ Kalanka, Delimara, BirdLife Malta would like to submit the following comments:

1. *The development does not contribute to conserve, protect or improve the natural heritage of the area and is breaching several policies which are listed in chapter 4. The mitigation measures in the EPS to avoid destruction and disturbances of the surrounding habitat, particularly caused during construction and operation is insufficient.*
2. The development site covers an area of approximately 3,646sq m including landscaped areas, however, the current buildings’ footprint covers an area of approximately 343sq m. The replacement buildings should not exceed the total floor area of the previous buildings as per the Rural Policy and Design Guidance, 2014, part 6. The building area is set to increase from 343sqm to 561sqm., and accordingly shall fall short of such guidance. *This is against the national policy frameworks and should disqualify the planning application. It appears that the conditions that would allow this development to be allowed in an ODZ area are not met, and accordingly these development plans do not qualify for the granting of a permit. This point is not mentioned in the EPS.*
3. As stated correctly, Policy MD01 of the SPED designates Delimara Peninsula as the Delimara National Park. Hence, in accordance with Structure Plan Policy RCO14, the greater part of the Delimara Peninsula, as defined on the Policy Map, will be designated as a national park where priority will be given to conservation, protection and improvement of the natural heritage. In this location, positive provision will also be made for recreational uses consistent with this objective. Limited commercial development related to the needs of park users will be considered. Other uses likely to have a harmful or conflicting impact will be refused.

In chapter 6.23 of the EPS, the survey of the habitat status identifies that the entire area of the Delimara Peninsula is in a poor conservation status. Consequently, the area has suffered from severe habitat degradation already which has to be properly addressed by the respective governmental authority. Developing a hotel complex and thereby increasing human activity to a great extent will lead to further degradation. This breaches several national policies (including SPED, MD01 Delimara National Park, and Rural Policy and Design Guidance) and destroys the already endangered Maltese natural habitat.

The above conclusion concerning the conservation status of the area, cannot however be taken seriously given that the ecology baseline survey for the area has been undertaken in August 2016. **As both the consultant and ERA should know, August is not the right time to conduct such surveys given the seasonal nature of some flora, which with a survey undertaken in the midst of summer would have not even be recorded. The impact on the ecology as a result of this development is**

therefore inconclusive at this stage, up until both ERA and the consultants can assure with certainty what sensitive receptors may occur within this Area of Ecological Importance.

Statements such as 6.17 *In view of the above, this habitat is considered to have limited ecological value and is recorded throughout its extent as having a poor habitat quality*, appear to be none more than speculative with respect to the limited studies undertaken.

ERA is obliged to safeguard and protect these areas/sites and therefore has to ensure that the proposed development meets the relevant environmental assessment criteria prior to taking decisions on this development.

4. It is stated correctly, that “the construction phase of the project will lead to the loss of all the habitats found on the scheme site” (p. 114), however, the statement goes on with “the site was identified as being of low ecological value and mostly composed of ruderals and alien species. The impact is therefore considered to be not significant.” This is a wrong conclusion due to the fact that the development lies within two Areas of Ecological Importance (AEI) and in the direct surrounding of a Site of Scientific Importance (SSI), and an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV). Furthermore, in the non-technical summary it is stated (p.10), that educating guests on the importance of avoiding trampling of sensitive habitats and general disturbance to the natural areas around the Scheme Site should serve as mitigation measures to address habitat destruction caused by future hotel guests. ***AEI’s, SSI’s and AHLV’s require protection from developments because of their considerable ecological and scientific values. As highlighted in point 3 above, the consultants cannot reach any conclusion on the impact on ecology from the proposed development, given the limitations of the ecological study undertaken.***
5. Section 6.44 and other sections mention the possible impact on habitats and flora as a result of dust generation. No appropriate mitigation measures are however suggested other than simply stating that this might be a temporary impact. The EPS should delve into what dust containing measures are to be considered by the developer (and enforced as permit conditions) given the development is within an AEI. **Timing of construction is essential to ensure dust generation has no widespread impact.**
6. Chapter 6 mentions in various parts the presence of the endemic *Salsola melitensis*, which is a plant which has a good population around the Delimara peninsula. The EPS does not clearly highlight however if such an endemic is present within the site proposed for construction. This needs to be ascertained.

In relation to this, it has to be noted that the landscaping plan presented in Figure 3.20 omits this species which is typical of the area, yet introduces other plants such as *Hedera helix* which are not typical of the surroundings and probably will also not thrive in the coastal conditions.

7. The development may introduce excessive lighting during the constructions and operational phase, bringing light to an area which is otherwise not provided with any street lighting. The impact of the development in relation to contributing to sky glow in relation or addition to other major developments in the area needs to be carefully assessed, especially with regards to the impact of certain wildlife such as seabirds which are sensitive to coastal light pollution. ***Furthermore to the light management approach pointed out on page 28 it is important to not only***

install dim and switch lights but rather to adjust the direction of the light beam to shine onto the ground and not in the direction of the coast and cliffs.

8. In relation to point 5 above as well as the predicted noise generation from the development, the EPS does not delve much into what ERA should consider as mitigation during the operational phase of the development. The development concerns a hotel situated within a national park and an area of ecological importance. There is a real risk that the hotel, for its operational reasons, operates lighting and noise, perceivable to the exterior of the hotel during the night. The EPS mentions that regulations require the cessation of noise until 23:00. **Unless any conditions are imposed via an operational permit for the hotel, these conditions will simply in the long run be dismissed, and the hotel during its operational phase, will cause detrimental noise and lighting which will invariably and undoubtedly diminish the ecological value of the site and its surrounding.**

9. The statement (p. 60)“The Scheme will not result in a significant growth in vehicular traffic, either during the construction phase or when it comes into operation; hence, there will be no significant impact on air quality (particularly PM10 and NO2)” can be evaluated as incorrect. Traffic will increase both, during construction and operation of the project, including heavy-vehicle traffic and traffic due to visitors to the area. ***This will cause negative impacts on air quality and will limit the availability of public space. Additional parking demand will be caused by the development, resulting in an impact on surrounding land, particularly if parking is poorly managed and illegal parking along the road increases. This is very likely if the beach facilities will be developed adjacent to the hotel complex.***
The cumulative impact section of the EPS marginally suggests that this impact may occur, yet no mitigation measures are being proposed. The provision of transport is commended and may indeed help alleviate the parking problem, however, the development will likely increase the amenity use of the beach and therefore increase parking pressure. As long as this is available in off-road areas or in make-shift car parks (as has been the case with an illegal car park operated in the vicinity at St Peter’s Pool during summer 2016), such measures will simply not work.

10. ***We fully support the recommendation to omit the tunnel and related beach facilities from the Scheme (p. 90).***

11. The national power plant facility is in the immediate surrounding of the proposed development. Emissions and noise resulting from the power plant might have an impact on hotel users which needs to be considered. ***This point has not been addressed in the EPS.***