



Comments on PA 4710/18 “Proposed demolition of existing hotel and excavation of site” at Jerma Hotel, Marsascala

15 March 2019

As part of the ongoing public consultation of PA 4710/18 “Proposed demolition of existing hotel and excavation of site” at Jerma Hotel, Marsascala, we have reviewed the provided documents and would like to highlight the following points to be considered for drafting the EIA Terms of Reference.

EIA Terms of Reference Criteria

The Pre-Screening report states that the protected species on site are “species [that] are common throughout the Maltese archipelago and therefore any impacts resulting from the proposal are not expected to be significant”. According to several local legislation and policies with the aim to safeguard our natural heritage in Malta – including for instance the SPED section 2.23 “Living organisms and the variety they represent are valuable not only for their inherent value, but they also provide life-support systems upon which we are dependent. The diversity of habitats and species exhibited by the Maltese Islands is not limited to rural and coastal areas as urban environments also contain living organisms of conservation value. Despite the legal protection afforded to important habitats over the last 15 years the Maltese Islands’ biodiversity continues to be threatened by land development, invasive alien species, overexploitation and climate change”. We disagree with the statement that the impacts of removing such species is insignificant and are of the opinion that protected species need to be safeguarded under all circumstances. Rather than going on a path of further destruction of our natural heritage we need to eliminate potential threats and destruction. The EIA needs to further investigate suitable mitigation measures for permanent destruction of protected species and habitats on site. Furthermore, the site is currently located adjacent to and covers **Areas of Ecological Importance and Sites of Scientific Importance (SMCO 03)** according to SMLP (Map MS4).

The site of the Jerma Hotel is not identified as suitable for tall buildings. Given that the development reaches 17 storeys as described in the Pre-Screening report (ground floor, first floor and second floor plus fifteen overlying storeys), the proposed development is contradicting to the Floor Area Ratio Policy 2014 (FAR) by proposing a tall building in an area that has not been identified as such according to Policy Map “Strategic Locations for Tall Buildings” in Malta. In contradiction to the EIA screening proposed in the PDS, land use in our view will not have a positive impact on the area but rather the opposite due to overdevelopment and an increased footprint.

We would furthermore like to refer to FAR section 5.11 where it is stated that “Tall buildings need to respond positively to their context including natural topography, scale, height, urban grain, streetscape and built form, and the skyline. Tall buildings should be sited where visual impact on sensitive historic environments and their settings such as World Heritage Sites, conservation areas and scheduled buildings is minimised, and should retain and enhance key strategic, long distance views and important vistas at a national and at the local level”. In our view, these criteria are not met, and the EIA should include an Urban Design Study, Visual Impact Assessment, Transport Assessment, Social Impact Assessment and



Design Statement as recommended under the FAR, section 6.6. The EIA needs to investigate impacts of scheduled sites and propose suitable mitigation measures.

As pointed out in the Pre-Screening report, further structures are necessary to protect exposed hotel structures to the coast side from extreme weather and sea conditions. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that negative impacts on the marine environment will occur in the future resulting from this development. The EIA must take any potential impacts of structures on the foreshore and marine area adjacent to the proposed development into consideration.

Light pollution will be generated temporarily during construction phase and permanently during operation phase of the proposed development. Due to its immediate location at the foreshore, there is a high risk of generating light pollution leading to attract seabirds – among others protected species such as the Yelkouan Shearwater, the Scopoli's Shearwater and the Mediterranean Storm-petrel. Although seabird colonies are located distant to the proposed development, it is likely that increased light sources directly at shore will attract these birds leading to strandings on shore which pose a threat to the species. The EIA must investigate light pollution impacts and propose mitigation measures.

Furthermore, as required under Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations, 2017, the EIA should identify alternative sites for the proposed development.

Additionally, we would like to highlight that – although included in potential plans to design the public space on site – the impact on cultural heritage can already be assumed to be negative. This conclusion comes from blocking off the coastal view from St. Thomas Tower due to proposed plans of a tall building in front of it. The watch tower thereby loses its traditional heritage and functionality which is to watch seaward approaches and to raise alarm in the event of imminent threat and danger. Here again we would like to refer to FAR section 5.2 stating that “A proliferation of isolated tall buildings with different heights and shapes scattered randomly over the urban areas can make the skyline appear arbitrary or accidental. Dotted tall buildings around the urban areas can completely lose the impact and sense of their importance. Equally, a misplaced tall building that blocks or competes with a view to an existing important landmark could undermine the legibility of urban areas”. The EIA needs to take these aspects into account.

As a positive effect, the section on social impacts in the Pre-Screening report identifies that it is expected that surrounding real estate value will rise due to development. This, however, creates incentives of further developments in the area and pushing housing prices up. It is questionable how this will benefit the social well-being of residents in the area. Again, we would like to refer to FAR section 5.4 that outlines “It is therefore essential that adequate attention be afforded to the assessment of proposals for tall buildings to carefully identify the impacts, both on the national and local scales, and in terms of use, location and design. It is important that new tall buildings are sited and designed for good townscape, economic and environmental reasons rather than simply as a response to commercial pressure”. As part of the EIA, the Social Impact Assessment should delve into socio-economic benefits and risks of the proposed development.



Conclusion

Given our remarks above, and the plans for the proposed development and its expected impacts, we recommend ERA demands an impact assessment on the following criteria:

- Assessment of alternative sites for the proposed development
 - Coastal ecology (both marine and terrestrial areas impacted by the development)
 - Conformity with relevant policies and site designations (e.g. SPED and FAR)
 - Urban Design Study
 - Visual Impact Assessment
 - Transport Impact Assessment,
 - Social Impact Assessment
 - Socio-economic impact assessment
 - Lighting scheme and light pollution impact
 - Cultural/historical heritage impact
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