



BirdLife Malta's objection to PA 6655/23

Sanctioning of reservoir and registered trapping station. Proposed natural stone cladding around registered trapping station
in Wied Ghomor
7th December 2023

The proposed development featuring a stone cladding around a trapping station and sanctioning of a reservoir and a trapping station is highly controversial from an environmental perspective, hence BirdLife Malta would like to be registered as an official objector to the planning application in question.

Firstly, the scheme is located in a valley designated as an Area of Ecological Importance and a Site of Scientific Importance. Apart from that, the area is a scheduled buffer zone of Level 4 protection (GN 409/99). A general prerequisite is therefore that such an area should be left undeveloped so as not to compromise the ecological integrity of a valley system. Furthermore, the site is clearly falling within the limits of ODZ, and the plans to develop/sanction a building there cannot be justified. Thus, the proposed scheme goes contrary to the North Harbours Local Plan.

The SPED (2015) declares the named area as an Area of Landscape protection. The planning application does not align with the SPED objectives either, namely the Rural objective 4:

“To protect and enhance the positive qualities of the landscape and the traditional components of the rural landscape by:

- ***Identifying and classifying the hierarchy of landscapes to protect the most sensitive landscapes of cultural importance and natural beauty; guide the control of location and design of development within the landscape.”***

Same objective also urges to avoid formalisation of the countryside.

The Rural Policy and Design Guidance does not approve such sort of development in the rural area. Policy 1.2G of RPDG dealing with the conservation of scheduled, listed, designated or protected areas including Areas of Ecological Importance and Sites of Scientific Importance (including buffer zones) and Protected Landscape Areas, prescribes:

Proposed developments which would have an unacceptable adverse environmental, landscape, cultural or archaeological impact will not be permitted.



Policy 1.2H protecting important features of the landscape states:

The Authority will seek to conserve, maintain and enhance important landscape features that contribute to:

- the connectivity, appearance and/or integrity of protected areas, sites and/or features,***
- the character, scenic or ecological value of the rural area.***

Proposals which would have an adverse impact on important landscape features, including their integrity or character, will not be permitted, unless the adverse impact is avoided or mitigated to the satisfaction of the Authority. The Authority will seek to establish a legal management agreement with the applicant to ensure adequate protection and continuous management of important landscape features.

Additionally, according to Policy 2.7A of RPDG, scheduled locations including Areas of Ecological Importance/Site of Scientific Importance are considered inappropriate locations for developing a reservoir.

Apart from the mentioned above, we find the whole idea of formalising and developing such a trapping site questionable, since the decision on issuing the trapping licence is taken by WBRU every year, and having the licence in 2023 does not mean that the activity will be legitimate in the following years, given that it is subject to a derogation applied by government on a yearly basis. At the same time, the sole fact that the area is proposed to be used for trapping is against the law since the site is registered for finch research and not trapping. In addition, using nets for catching finches either to keep or research them is currently the subject of European Court of Justice proceedings which may result in the practice being abolished in the near future. In this context, the proposal to further develop the trapping site is highly dubious.

We noted that ERA had expressed their concern with regards to this Planning Application, and we urge the Planning Authority to rely on ERA's expertise and make sure the proposed development is not favoured. The valuable and sensitive valley system of Wied Ghomor should be protected and reserved from any inappropriate intrusions such as proposed.