

NGOs against proposed development at Ta' Cenc

Din L-Art Helwa, BirdLife (Malta), Nature Trust (Malta) and Friends of the Earth are totally against the proposed development at Ta' Cenc which is not in the vicinity of the hotel.

Developments like these should be kept in the current style of the hotel and relatively small in size, the organisations said, and the expansion plans show that they will not be. Furthermore they are against any proposals for a golf course in the area.

Ta' Cenc as an area has high landscape value, and is of scientific, ecological, archaeological and agricultural importance, according to the NGOs. It contains one of the largest and most important colonies of sea birds, and part of the development is actually on a bird sanctuary.

The pressure groups insist that the development goes directly against the Structure Plan passed by Parliament in 1992, which states that the development must be in the vicinity of the hotel, and that the majority of the area must be a National Park.

After sending their objections to MEPA, the groups have called on the authority to reject the application and ensure that any future applications are in line with the provisions of the Structure Plan.

Public petition

The public are also voicing their objections with a petition doing the rounds addressed to MEPA's director of planning.

The petition states: "We are writing to voice our strong objection to the development, which seeks to develop large tracts of virgin land at Ta' Cenc as a Heritage Park, including approximately 49 bungalows and 67 villas.

"This proposal, which seeks to develop land which is of ecological importance, should not be permitted for the following reasons:

"It develops an area of ecological importance and a site of scientific importance as categorised by MEPA.

"It seeks to develop an area which is strictly Outside a Development Zone and which should never be allowed any form of development as per Structure Plan policies. To allow such a development ridicules the very concept of ODZ areas.

"It reduces the precious little natural landscape that we as Maltese citizens seek in times of recreation

"It gives in to pressure from the mass tourism market that has already spoiled so much of the coastline in Malta, and increasingly so in Gozo.

"The development will cause irreversible harm to the flora and fauna that inhabit the Ta' Cenc garigue, including unique species that may only be found in this area."

The petition continues to say that it is not simply an ordinary letter of objection, "but a plea from a number of concerned citizens to protect our natural environment, of which so little is left.

"The Malta Tourism Authority Website utilises beautiful photographic shots of open countryside, including Ta' Cenc. It is incomprehensible how this application seeks to spoil this very same scenic spot in the name of promoting tourism. Such developments simply create short-term gains but result in a long-term loss of the very attractions that create a tourist destination in the first place.

"In short, this development should never be permitted if MEPA truly serves as an independent authority that protects and safeguards the environment."