

Ta' Cenc project

Ramblers fear ecological damage, loss of access



Ta' Cenc is considered the most important rambling site in Gozo offering unequalled vistas of country and sea.

The Ramblers' Association of Malta is objecting to the development of the Ta' Cenc area into a heritage park and multi-ownership tourist hotel development.

In a document sent to the director of planning of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority, the association said the Environment Impact Assessment put forward by the company did not treat the development in its totality but considered only the so-called first phase.

"It is incomprehensible how Mepa could consider the exercise because the second phase, whose impact has not been assessed, has a big impact on ecologically sensitive areas," the association said.

"Mepa will be absconding its terms of reference if it accepts two separate EIAs for one single project just because it will be constructed in two phases," said the association. It strongly disapproves of the proposed later construction of a golf course complex on the Ta' Cenc promontory because this would be "the final blow to the unique character of the area, with incalculable repercussions".

With the proposed project, the right of way that leads to the coastal zones and the heritage sites on the promontory will not remain free for all citizens as it has always been, the association complained.

"The unhindered right of access has to be preserved and protected whatever the nature of the development."

Gozo, it said, has always been portrayed and even officially projected by the Malta Tourism Authority as an island that is different from Malta, where peace and tranquillity are the main characteristics of its quaint and quiet villages and idyllic countryside.

"Tourists are enticed to cross over for this reason and come back satisfied for the expense. Even more importantly, the Maltese psyche is conditioned to Gozo as prevalently an away-from-it-all haven."

The scale of the development poses a real danger that Gozo will soon become an "extension" of Malta and consequently lose out economically in an irreversible manner, the association charged.

"The claim that the project will have a positive effect on the employment situation in Gozo is true only with respect to the hotel extension/ upgrading. It will be utterly disadvantageous with respect to villas and bungalows, that do not generate employment after they are completed."

The association maintained that the development cannot be justified by the lack of up-market supply of property. The number of up-market projects in "tiny Gozo" coming on line in the near future belied even a situation of "wishful-thinking demand". With projects like Chambrai, the former Mgarr Hotel, San Lawrenz, ex-Duke of Edinburgh Hotel, ex-Andar Hotel and many others, the supply situation in Gozo was very likely to cause a glut, with potential consequences of disastrous proportions not only to the developer but to Gozo as a whole.

Considering the recent closure of up-market hotels in Gozo, it made sense to concentrate on bringing the Ta' Cenc hotel to its former glory and prestige, protecting its beautiful environment, rather than indulge on a massive project of villas and unnecessary car-parks and reception centres "that promise to bring irreversible damage to the ecosystem of the promontory".

The association maintained that the Ta' Cenc development will deprive not only the Sannat people but all Gozitans, Maltese and foreign visitors alike from the most important rambling site in Gozo offering unequalled vistas of country and sea.

It called on Mepa to abide by the policies of the legally binding Structure Plan and apply the intent of the 2002 approved draft of the Gozo/Comino local plan by toning down the proposal to ensure that the development is sustainable economically both for the developer as well as for Gozo.

The association also urged Mepa not to allow the development to infringe on the social character of the islanders nor deprive them and visitors of their current rights and liberty.

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