

Those nasty trees in Qala



If Victor Borg is concerned about littering and bird shooting on his property at Mġarr ix-Xini, he could easily allow bona fide ramblers through a gate, if Mepa allows one to be installed at this site. This would result in a win-win situation for all the parties involved.

Qala mayor Clint Camilleri recently wrote on his Facebook page that the long-awaited works in Qala parish square could finally start as the local council already had permits to uproot the palm trees on site, while permits to uproot the remaining mature Ficus trees were still awaited from the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

The mayor's post soon triggered a barrage of justified complaints from residents and non-residents alike about the removal of this valuable tree cover. Among other considerations, it transpires that despite not being indigenous, the trees concerned are an important roosting site for white wagtails.

There is a hypothesis that deforestation of the remote Easter Island in the Pacific Ocean contributed to the demise of its native civilisation. The similar 'treeless culture' prevalent on our islands, which can be seen in online comments such as "remove those trees which are a source of hayfever, bird droppings and continuous mounds of shed leaves", should not be abetted by those in authority.

The latter should know better, since their rise to authority presumably comes on the back of a cultured lifestyle, which in turn would expose them to examples of how, in other countries, trees are assimilated and integrated in development plans so they don't necessarily have to face the chop. They should certainly not bow to populism.

Is the proposed Hondoq yacht marina still on cards?

Eyebrows have been raised, among others by Jane Carr's insightful letter to the editor in a Sunday newspaper a few weeks ago, about Mepa's failure to issue the Development Planning Application Review (DPAR) report for the Hondoq ir-Rummien project application.

The report, once finalised, would have been presented to the Mepa board before it takes a final decision on the proposed yacht marina saga, which can be traced back to the original application of 2002. The last known development concerning this long-drawn-out affair was in May 2013, when Mepa asked the developers to submit a new planning application in view of the fact that the development proposal had been considerably amended since it had been first submitted (for example, by removing the yacht marina from the proposal). This Mepa decision is currently being appealed.

Against this climate of uncertainty, the procrastination in issuing the final DPAR report for the application is a cause for concern to all those who have strived since 2002 to spare Hondoq from being included in any development footprint. One hopes there are no major surprises on the cards for Hondoq and that this self-declared pro-business government does not bow to developers intent on turning Hondoq into yet another Marsalforn.

During the recent launch for public consultation of the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED), a member of Mepa's top brass said this holistic plan will entail "minor

revisions to the local plans". One such revision that would be welcome would be to relinquish Hondoq's past status, which was obscenely changed in 2006 through an infamous local plan revision, to one where touristic and maritime development was possible. Only by excluding the area from such development can Mepa put a definite stop to all the speculation at Hondoq and put people's mind at rest once and for all.

Also within the precincts of Qala is the Tal-Muxi area, which was subject to a stop and enforcement notice back in 2010 when trucks of Road Constructions Ltd were caught dumping construction debris in the vicinity of a quarry on site. Various news portals subsequently reported on the alleged demolition of a number of stone corbelled huts (giren) and rubble walls in the area by the same contractor, who, in 1996, had bought a large tract of land of almost 180,000 square meters which fringes the sea along the northern flank.

Fines amounting to €20,000 have been imposed on the perpetrator in the past but it seems these are no deterrent... the perpetrator and owner of the land must reinstate the site by clearing all the dumped material and Mepa must act on the 2010 stop and enforcement notice rather than let the case be lost in oblivion.

In other countries, trees are assimilated and integrated in development plans so they don't necessarily have to face the chop

Tal-Muxi quarry lies a few kilometers to the south of the massive coastal quarry fringing Gozo's northeastern coast. Both quarries have been touted as possible locations for a yacht marina in Gozo, now that similar plans for Hondoq might have been shelved.

The Coastal Strategy Topic Paper (2002), which, to date, is the only comprehensive coastal strategy document issued by Mepa, lists the latter quarry in Qala as an 'unlikely site' for housing a hard-standing facility, or yacht marina, in view of the technical, environmental and social challenges the site entails. Will this opinion change one day?

A win-win situation at Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra?

I recently attended an Appeals Tribunal hearing concerning Mepa's rejection of a planning application by Ta' Ċenċ Hotel owner Victor Borg to erect a timber gate to bar access to the upper reaches of the Mġarr ix-Xini Kantra (PA 01202/13), a privately-owned rocky peninsula to which public access is already barred by means of a second gate and which is the only point of access to the sea (and to the inlet known as Ta' Ċenċ creek). The issue of the permit for this lower gate is regrettable, as it effectively bars public access to the foreshore unless one decides to embark on an enterprising 600-metre-long swim from Mġarr ix-Xini beach.

Borg, buoyed by veteran lawyer Ian Refalo, vehemently defended his case for the gate on grounds that the current unfettered access to this property was resulting in littering, bird shooting and other infringements to the detriment of tourists and other paying guests make use of the beach furniture at il-Kantra. If Borg's motivations for the erection of the proposed gate are genuine, he could easily grant access to bona fide ramblers who bind themselves to a number of conditions, such as not to litter or disturb any paying guests.

As I explained to Borg, this could easily change into a win-win situation, with his private property becoming the first ever to grant controlled public access to the foreshore. The ball is now firmly at his feet... a counter-proposal from his end would be in order.

Possible recycling of coloured PET bottles?

To date, coloured plastic bottles made from the PET (polyethylene terephthalate) compound have posed an insurmountable hurdle for recycling processes. This is set to change, through the SupercleanQ project aimed at the development of processes and quality procedures that add value to recycled plastics for food contact applications.

The project, which is funded by the EU Commission under Seventh Framework Programme (FP7), is investigating new chemical processes that would recycle coloured plastic bottles into food packaging material. While plastics are currently normally mixed together in a waste management stream, the project is investigating the application of a spectroscopy system which identifies coloured from non-coloured plastics.

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