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Planning Authority
St. Francis Ravelin
Floriana, FRN 1230

5th October 2017


Dear ██████████

**Partial Review of the Central Malta Local Plan (2006) Maghtab Planning Strategy Area, Approved Plan (May 2017)
Consultation in terms of Regulation 4(6) of S.L. 549.61 (Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations)**

ERA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the SEA Screening consultation on the partial review of the Central Malta Local Plan (2006), Maghtab Planning Strategy Area, dated May 2017. ERA has already provided comments on the draft policy, dated 29th March, 2017, which are being included in Appendix 1 for your perusal.

ERA has reviewed the information provided with your consultation and considers that, strategically, the proposed partial revision to the Central Malta Local Plan is unlikely to have significant environmental effects. However, proposals within these sites may still require further environmental assessment, including an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening procedure in terms of S.L. 549.46 (EIA Regulations, 2007), and possibly environmental authorisation from ERA, as may be relevant depending on the scale, nature, location and operation of specific projects. Such projects may include the expansion/upgrading of the waste management facilities, widening of roads, other projects entailing take up of additional rural land, and the general acceptability of proposed developments in relation to their specific site location, etc. Issues regarding potential contamination which may have resulted from leachate run-off and/or air-borne transmission from the old landfill, may also need to be addressed.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Louise Spiteri
Chief Executive Officer
Environment and Resources Authority

Appendix 1

ERA feedback on the Partial Review of the Central Malta Local Plan Magħtab Development Strategy Public Consultation Draft

29th March 2017

1. General

- 1.1 ERA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Partial Review CMLP, 2006 - Magħtab Development Strategy Public Consultation Draft. It also welcomes the Planning Authority's intent to plan for the future development of the area in a comprehensive manner through a consolidated and proactive plan. It is noted that the emerging strategy for this Plan is directly related to environmental aspects.
- 1.2 These comments are being provided without prejudice to ERA's review at project stage, when more detailed environmental assessment will be required. Depending on their nature and their scale, these proposals may also require different types of environmental assessments, including an Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) screening procedure of projects in terms of the EIA Regulations, 2007 (S.L. 504.79).

2. Background

- 2.1 The area covered by the Magħtab Planning Strategy, (see Figure 1) lies directly beneath the Victoria Lines escarpment. The Plan area is highly visible from various stretches of the Victoria Lines which is situated at higher elevations. The escarpment and its environs, which are characterised by garrigue and patches of maquis, form part of the scheduled Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) for the Victoria Lines, and include the Tree Protected Area of Wied Anġlu and the immediate stretches of the Victoria Lines escarpment [designated under Legal Notice 200 of 2011 and G.N. 473 of 2011]). These features need to be duly considered in any planning document for the area.
- 2.2 The area covered by this Local Plan revision, and its wider surroundings have been subjected to various development pressures over the past decades. Figure 2 below, shows that the process of intensification and sprawl of development in a piecemeal manner has resulted in almost enclosing a stretch of rural area between the Victoria Lines escarpment to the South, the development zones to the East (Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq), the development clusters at Magħtab and the T'Alla u Ommu/Wied il-Għasel Industrial Area. The latter Industrial Area itself is the resulting effect of a similar process of continuous

development pressure, until the site was eventually formally designated as an Industrial Area (refer to Figure 2).



Fig. 1 - Maghtab Planning Strategy Area Boundary

3. Overview

- 3.1 Experience has shown that the designation of formal policy boundaries tend to accentuate the rate and degree of development intensification at particular sites with risks of further sprawl of development onto adjacent undeveloped land, rather than attenuating or containing the development. In view of this, it must be ensured that the Maghtab Area is not over-developed and the rural character continues to dominate the area.

Such possible development intensification, resulting in further adverse environmental impacts in the area includes: additional take-up of undeveloped rural land, urban sprawl and possible displacement of genuine agricultural uses; proliferation of new buildings in a rural context; loss of traditional/topographic rural features; and adverse impacts on the character and scenic qualities of the countryside. Maghtab's rural characteristics should be preserved and improved. This is in line with Objective c (v) of the Government Objectives for this policy.

- 3.2 There are concerns regarding the rate of environmental degradation of the Plan area and the wider rural context. ERA supports the objective of the strategy which seeks to protect, maintain and restore the rural characteristics and environmental qualities of the area particularly in view of its high visibility from key vantage points from the Victoria Lines escarpment.

4. Strategic ERA feedback

4.1 ERA's review of the proposed plan strategy focuses on the information available at this stage. These include the following:

4.1.1 The Area under study includes a considerable amount of agricultural land, with a number of small clusters of built up units. ERA recommends that there should be no displacement of agricultural uses. It is recommended that appropriate further policy safeguards are included to limit further environmental degradation of the area. Agricultural areas which are not in use and are instead being used for storage of material, as well as for illegal dumping, should be controlled and cleared.

The policy area includes a number of dispersed residential units, agricultural development and industrial activities. To avoid issues of interpretation, the policy ought to include clear and unequivocal delineation of what use, specific location and amount of permitted development for each character area. This should be done following a meticulous and comprehensive consideration of the existing permitted development, whilst addressing conflicting land use activities.

4.1.2 The policy document does not refer to the Ghallis landfill area which is currently in operation, which invariably has impacts on the policy area and its surroundings. It is therefore recommended that the impacts arising from this activity onto the Maghtab Planning Strategy area are taken into consideration and are also addressed.

4.1.3 The Maghtab Planning Strategy Area document actively promotes arable farming, horticultural and animal husbandry activity in the area. Nonetheless, the document makes little reference to the adjacent landfill and impacts on policy area. Though it is not part of the area under study, the landfill and its possible impacts should feature more. Possible percolation of contaminants from landfill onto surrounding area is a possibility. Therefore, it is being recommended that feedback is obtained from the Environment and Health Directorate on any required studies to assess the potential contamination from leachate run-off and / or air-borne transmission onto adjacent area of landfill, especially onto the agricultural fields, prior that these are earmarked for the growth of agricultural produce.

4.1.4 All forms of measures and related developments are to ensure minimal impacts (both physical and visual), upon the features mentioned in point 2.1, especially on habitats. Where possible, any development should compliment the habitats and their assemblages. In this regard, green landscaping with tree planting (as mentioned under policy CMMB 06 Site Specific Considerations), should use tree and/or flora species

characteristic of the above mentioned locations. Such an action may also serve to contribute to the habitat's resilience by providing near-by enclaves for the area's characteristic species.

4.1.5 The Magħtab area had been a hub for various uses, including a mix of Use Classes 1, 5 a b c, 6, and 7. Given that this proposal is aiming to set a strategy to improve the existing area and also to guide the development of land, this proposal is welcomed, provided that:

- From an air quality point of view – ERA highlights the need to avoid increases in traffic flows, in particular avoidance of intensive development, particularly large residential complexes, or commercial activity.
- From a noise perspective - Any new development considered under this strategy, especially in the zones designated as Magħtab Residential Settlement Area and Industrial clusters, a well-balanced approach is required in order to conserve and ameliorate the current noise climate. As well as the improvement of road infrastructure in order to reduce traffic and hence traffic noise sources within the area.

5. Policy-related feedback

5.1 Map MTB 1 departs from portraying rural settlements in indicative boundaries, and is instead zoning residential component in full brownish colour, normally associated with zoning for residential development within development scheme. It is unclear whether this designation follows the criteria of Policy CG 04 of the Central Malta Local Plan (2006). This proposed depiction for the residential settlement, as shown on map, could be interpreted to delineate all lands, which otherwise would not be eligible for development as per the provisions of Policy CG04. This can give an erroneous impression that agricultural land may be developed into residential development. It is also unclear whether this interpretation follows the criteria of Policy CG 04, in particular the section defining 'uncommitted land'.

5.2 Policy CMMB 01 - In addition to comments made earlier, reference is also made to the Malta NBSAP with particular reference (but not limited), to Theme 6 - Sustainable Use of Natural Resources: Soil, Water and Land. Measures described within the document related to sustainable agriculture and the use of related resources, including local crop and animal varieties, should be considered and integrated with in this strategy, as much as possible. This would apply also to CMMB 02 Animal Husbandry Area and CMMB 03 Arable Farming Areas/Arable Farming Buffer Area.

5.3 Policy CMMB 04 - With reference to the statement "Strict criteria for the identification of "existing buildings" and "uncommitted land" are also identified by the policy to ensure that the minimum amount of fresh land is taken up by development, in line with the overall strategy of consolidation";

it is also suggested that the committed land can also be restored, if necessary.

- 5.4 Policy CMMB 05 - ERA recommends that the policy defines a clear building height limitation for industrial development, such that it ensures negative impacts on the surrounding landscape.
- 5.5 Policy CMMB 05 - The use of landscaping as buffers in industrial clusters should prioritise on the use of native plants as per existing regulations, in order to minimise/avoid the possibility of spread of alien and invasive plant species. In addition, noting the ODZ and farming context, a landscaping plan for the area should be proposed.
- 5.6 This area manifests problems of parking, conflicts between traffic flow and difficulties of access (considering the nearby main transport route). There is also considerable absence of landscaping. In this respect, it is recommended that existing development should not be used as a model for future development. To address this deficiency, an additional requirement for new parking areas are to be introduced, in Policy CMMB 05, where redevelopment of the industrial clusters should require to provide additional parking spaces. These parking areas as a requirement, may include surface parking considerations on committed areas. It should be ensured that the Urban Improvement Fund (UIF) Scheme should not be applicable to the Industrial clusters in view of the current condition related to the existing lack of parking that requires measures for the provision of new physical parking to ameliorate on the present situation.
- 5.7 Policy CMMB 06 - Site Specific Considerations: green boundary landscaping treatment with tree planting should use only indigenous tree species, preferably using native stock. Alien species are to be avoided at all costs. Reference should be made to the Guidelines on managing non-native plant invaders and restoring native plant communities in terrestrial settings in the Maltese Islands (MEPA, 2013).
- 5.8 With reference to condition (C) in Policy CMMB 06, "Built site coverage is not to exceed 40 % of the site area. The remaining 60 % of the site is to accommodate access requirements, open space provision and green boundary landscaping treatment with tree planting"; it is highly recommended that the policy is more stringent on the requirement for a high percentage of natural landscaping and tree planting. It is emphasised that such planning parameter should not be in any way compromised during any future development application process of any site within the sites covered by the policy.
- 5.9 In addition to the above, thresholds might be necessary in sites that are particularly large, to ensure that soil sealing in these areas is limited.

- 5.10 Point (d) of Policy CMMB 06 which states that the 'Overall height of buildings should not exceed two floors without semi basement. Structures at roof level shall only provide access to the roof.' The current phrasing may be subject to interpretation. It is recommended that the policy is revised to clarify further, that no semi-basement would be considered, in order to limit impacts on the environment and its characteristics.
- 5.11 ERA notes that there may be site-specific and localised environmental considerations which would need to be assessed later on at project stage. These include the expansion/upgrading of the waste management facilities, widening of roads, other projects entailing take up of additional rural land, and the general acceptability of proposed developments in relation their specific site location, etc.

