

The Executive Chairperson
Planning Authority
St. Francis Ravelin,
Floriana

Date: 25/05/2026
ERA Ref.: EA/00035/18

Planning Ref.: PA/02467/16

Project Title: To demolish existing building, excavation of site and construction of old people's home (class 2a).

Location: Buskett Forest Aparthotel, Triq ta' Sabbat, Ta' Sabbat, Dingli, Malta

Introduction:

Reference is made to the case in caption and ERA's correspondence of 27 January 2026 (Eapps docs PA/02467/16 – 463a-b) which involved screening in terms of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Appropriate Assessment (AA). Screening concluded that the proposal does not warrant an EIA but requires an AA in view of potential effects on the adjacent protected Natura 2000 site. The AA Report was submitted on 17 April 2026, as well as further details in terms of traffic generation and photomontages (as per Eapps docs 467b, 468b and 473b).

Follow-up in terms of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations, S.L. 549.46:

While screening had concluded that impacts are unlikely to be significant to warrant further assessment through an EIA, detailed clarifications had been requested in terms of operational traffic generation and the visual footprint of the proposed building.

Current and estimated peak hourly traffic flows were provided as per Eapps docs 468b and 473b, based on which it is determined that the project is unlikely to lead to a significant increase in noise generation in the area by vehicles visiting the site.

Photomontages (Eapps doc 467b) further detail the incorporation of landscaping with trees, to mitigate the visual prominence of the building, which was noted and considered adequate.

Appropriate Assessment (AA), as per Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations, S.L. 549.44:

The AA assessed the potential effects of the proposed development on the abutting protected Natura 2000 site, MT0000018 (L-Inħawi tal-Buskett u tal-Girgenti, Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area, designated as per Government Notices 1379 of 2016 and 112 of 2007, respectively).

While the protected site is known for the Buskett woodlands, the area consists of three valley systems (Wied l-Isqof, Wied il-Luq and Wied il-Girgenti) with 61% of the protected site being agricultural land. The management plan for the site identifies various objectives for the preservation and maintenance of this site, including the monitoring of the size, structure and functioning of important Annex I habitats, preventing trampling and over-use, maintaining foraging grounds for important bat and avifauna species, etc. Such were considered in the AA in relation to the impact assessment.

During construction works, potential adverse effects were assessed in terms of disturbance to terrestrial breeding bird species (loss of nesting/foraging habitat) and disturbance to migratory species on stopover. To mitigate such effects, the duration of the construction phases would need to be kept

as short as possible, demolition works would need to avoid the reproductive season of breeding bird species (February to August) (to avoid damage to active nests), and works that generate the most noise are to be avoided during the most sensitive period for the passage of migratory species (September - October). To further mitigate general disturbances from the works, proper hoarding is essential to contain materials and equipment to the site boundaries only and prevent spillages into the surrounding area. Hoarding can also serve to reduce dust and noise dispersion.

During use of the development, operational activity on site could also potentially disturb nesting, roosting, foraging areas for breeding bird species and other bird assemblages using the nearby rural area. In terms of lighting, night-time activities could disturb seabird fledglings and migratory birds (through disorientation and potential groundings, resulting in increased mortality). To this effect, all lighting should be installed in a sensible manner to avoid spill beyond the site boundaries and upward, through the use of downlighters with warm light colour only. While lighting issues could be equally relevant to the construction phases, such impact should not take place since construction works should be undertaken during day-time hours only. Landscaping with trees (indigenous species, typical for the surrounding environment) would provide additional foraging area and roosting habitat for all species present in the area.

Due to large, glazed surfaces proposed in the building's facades, potential bird-window collisions (resulting in increased bird mortality) were identified. To this effect, the plans have been updated to incorporate the installation of bird-safe window film on large, glazed areas, to mitigate such risks. Fixed markings (e.g. dots, stripes) would need to be no more than 5cm apart, for effective prevention.

In terms of alternatives, the status quo would involve the retention of the existing disused building. While such would avoid temporary construction-phase disturbance and the introduction of active operational uses, the AA Report indicates that letting the derelict site continue to deteriorate is also not desirable for the surrounding area, also noting the current presence of alien invasive species. Further downscaling would result in potentially lower intensity of use, however such is not expected to lead to a significant improvement in terms of environmental impacts assessed. It is noted that the current development assessed is already a downscaled version from the original proposal. No feasible alternative sites were identified for the proposed use. In view of the outcome of the current assessment, no further detailed evaluation of alternatives was considered necessary.

Considering the assessed environmental effects and subject to the proposed mitigation measures associated with these, the assessment concludes that the project is unlikely to significantly affect the protected site and would not harm the achievement of the site's management objectives.

Conclusion and way-forward

Following assessment, it is concluded that the proposal is not expected to significantly affect the surrounding environment and the integrity of the protected Natura 2000 site. There is no objection to the proposed development from an environmental point of view, subject to implementation of/ adherence to the environmental conditions listed in Annex I, and their inclusion in the development permit.

Yours faithfully,

Yves De Blick

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Disclaimer

The above assessment results, the ensuing conclusions and requirements are without prejudice to any required changes or updates should the development proposal be eventually modified again or should the information/assumptions provided turn out to be incorrect. Any deviations of the proposal from this submission would need to be re-assessed and the merits of this assessment would need to be reopened.