

TO:	Perit Vincent Cassar – Chairman
FROM:	Christine Tanti – Unit Manager (Environmental Assessment Unit)
CC:	Kevin Mercieca – CEO Aimee Brincat – Director Alex Camilleri – Deputy Director
DATE:	July 2025
SUBJECT:	EA 00021/21 (PA 05420/21) - Amended Application to PA 3134/19 - Construction of Corinthia Oasis - Works include amendments to previous permit - Construction of Hotel and 25 Residences. Site at, Corinthia Oasis (ex Ħal Ferħ Complex), Triq il-Kappella Tal-Militar, Triq in-Naħħalija, Mellieħa.

1. Introduction and Case Background

PA05420/21 is an application for the Corinthia Oasis development at the ex-Ħal Ferħ Complex in Mellieħa and proposes changes to the approved permit PA03134/19 (renewal of PA04906/10). The latter includes a tourism complex of 228 units in an undulating building, together with ancillary services such as a restaurant, small convenience shop, pools and bars, spa, and underground parking facilities. The current proposal introduces a residential component (25 villas) in the southern part of the site, in addition to a 161-room hotel complex in the northern part of the site (122-room conventional hotel building and 39 detached suites), swimming pools, food and beverage amenities, wellness, sports and meeting facilities. The reconstruction of the road network (widening of eastern Triq il-Manikata and upgrading of junction between Triq San Pawl il-Baħar and Triq Għajn Tuffieħa), the construction of the surface car park on the grounds of the Scouts Association, and the removal of all existing structures of the Ħal Ferħ complex (apart from a hall within the Chapel area, across Triq il-Kappella tal-Militar) have already been undertaken (or are being undertaken) in accordance with the approved permit PA04906/10.

The approved development had been subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in 2012 and the then Environment Protection Directorate (under the former MEPA) had not objected to the development from an environmental point of view. The current proposal has been assessed through a new EIA and an Appropriate Assessment (AA), with Terms of Reference for such studies issued in April 2022. The EIA and AA Reports were submitted to ERA on 31 October 2024, with final versions (following conclusion of the review process) submitted on 10 April 2025. These documents are available on the ERA website <https://era.org.mt/era-project/pa05420-21/>. A detailed summary of the EIA and AA process and findings is being annexed to this document.

2. Outcomes of the Consultants' EIA and AA Reports

The EIA and AA reports assessed the likely environmental effects of the proposal as compared to the existing situation on site (disused site), to allow a fair comparison with the impacts assessed for the already approved development (as discussed in section 3 below).

While most assessed residual impacts are either not significant or up to minor significant, the EIA Report still identified moderate and/or major adverse residual impacts in relation to the effects on:

- landscape character and visual amenity of the surrounding area (notably from short- and medium-distance viewpoint – *major significant*),
- geology (removal of geological material, mostly soil - *major significant*); and
- vertebrate fauna (localised disturbance due to operational lighting – *minor to moderate significant – cumulating with the already existing emissions of the adjacent hotel*).

The AA report assessed potential impacts from the proposed project on the designated protected species/habitats within the designated SACs (MT0000024 - Rđumijiet ta' Malta: Ir-Ramla taċ-Ċirkewwa sal-Ponta ta' Bengħisa; and MT0000101 - Żona fil-Baħar bejn Rđum Majjiesa u Għar Lapsi) and SPA (MT0000111 - Żona fil-Baħar fil-Lbiċ). It concluded that as long as the specifications indicated in Section 5.1 of Annex I are adhered to, the proposal is not expected to significantly affect the integrity of the protected area.

3. Directorate's assessment and recommended way-forward

The Directorate acknowledges the development commitment established for this site with the granting of development permit PA/03134/19 (renewal of PA/04906/10), through which the site clearance (removal of existing structures, apart from the chapel) and road works (including public car park) have been undertaken/are being undertaken. In addition, the provisions of the 2021 revisions to the Development Brief are noted, listing separate residential accommodations as an acceptable secondary use for this site (besides tourism as predominant use).

The main residual effects assessed for the current proposal are similar to those previously envisaged for the approved development and relate to the core principle of developing the currently disused site for urban development. No additional significant adverse impacts over and above those approved have been identified through this assessment, and the Directorate considers the following:

Removal of geological material – while the extraction of 127,000 m³ of ground material is substantial, the assessment has clarified that most of such material (91%) is soil, of which most would be retained and re-used on site in view of the extensive landscaping proposed.

Landscape character and visual amenity – the current design is considered to be more sensitive to the surrounding rural landscape as compared to the approved development. While the proposed development will still lead to noticeable changes in the visual appearance of the Ħal Ferħ site, the proposed dense vegetation cover, once mature, is expected to adequately screen the low-lying development from the surrounding areas and will therefore limit the adversity of such changes.

Operational disturbances – Impacts relating to the operational phase such as light and noise generation are expected to be generally similar to those generated from already approved plans. Furthermore additional measures such as lighting plan are being included in the recommended conditions.

In view of the above, the Directorate has no objection to the proposal, subject to the implementation of environmental conditions, as listed in Annex II.