

Environmental Impact Assessment

Screening according to Schedule III of S.L. 549.46

ERA Reference no.: EA/00028/22

PA Reference no.: PA/08500/21

Project Title: Proposed garden centre including underground storage, visitor parking, open storage for trees, ancillary class 4D cafeteria and class 4B shop, and visitor's park.

Location: Tas-Sejba Recycling Plant, Triq tas-Sejba, Triq il-Parrocca, Sqaq Nru. 1, Mqabba.

Screening date: February 2023

I. BACKGROUND

Outline of Proposal

- 1.1** This application entails a proposal for a garden centre within the boundaries of the former tas-Sejba quarry. The proposed interventions include:
- Decommissioning and dismantling of the existing rock recycling facility (see Figure 2);
 - Infilling of the quarry void in the eastern part of the site, with approx. 30,000 m³ inert material (see Figure 1, yellow shaded area);
 - Excavation in the western part of the site (Figure 1, purple shaded area), to bring the site levels down by 3.76 m for the construction of 2 basement levels (car parking [with 116 spaces] and pet grooming facilities at level -1, and 16 stores at level -2) (see Figures 4-5);
 - Construction of a greenhouse structure (steel frame with lightweight semi-transparent panels), to be used as garden centre, at ground floor (2,450 m²), including an ancillary cafeteria (see Figure 3);
 - Dog kennels in the eastern part of the site, with a maximum capacity for dog boarding services up to 64 animals (See Figure 3);
 - Installation of three reservoirs (with total capacity of 538 m³) for rainwater harvesting; and
 - Outdoor areas with landscaping, pathways and tree nursery (with underlying geo-grid to allow percolation of rainwater into the ground) (see Figure 3).
- 1.2** The site is currently not connected to the national electricity, water, surface water and sewer network, hence new connections would be required to service the garden centre. Surface water is proposed to be managed through the installation of two rainwater reservoirs, with the third reservoir to be used for grey water collection.



Figure 1 – Western (purple) and eastern (yellow) parts of the site (*Source: PDS*)

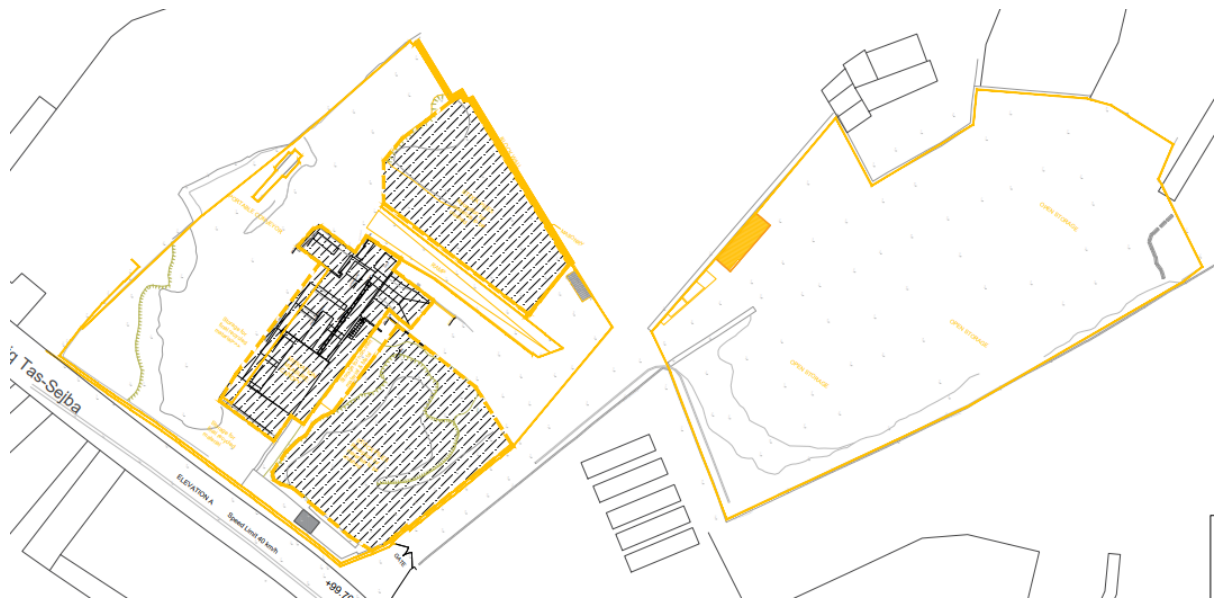


Figure 2 – Existing plan, with rock crushing and recycling facility in western part and open storage area in the eastern part (*Source: EApps doc PA/08500/21 – 52g*)



Figure 3 – Proposed ground floor plan (Source: EApps doc PA/08500/21 – 85b)

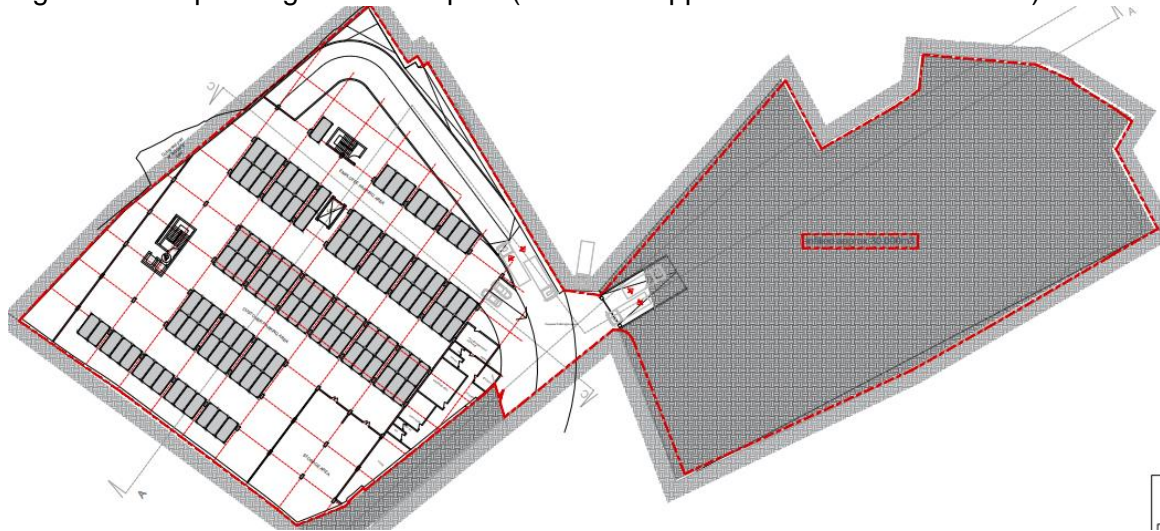


Figure 4 – Proposed level -1 – car parking (Source: EApps doc PA/08500/21 – 85c)

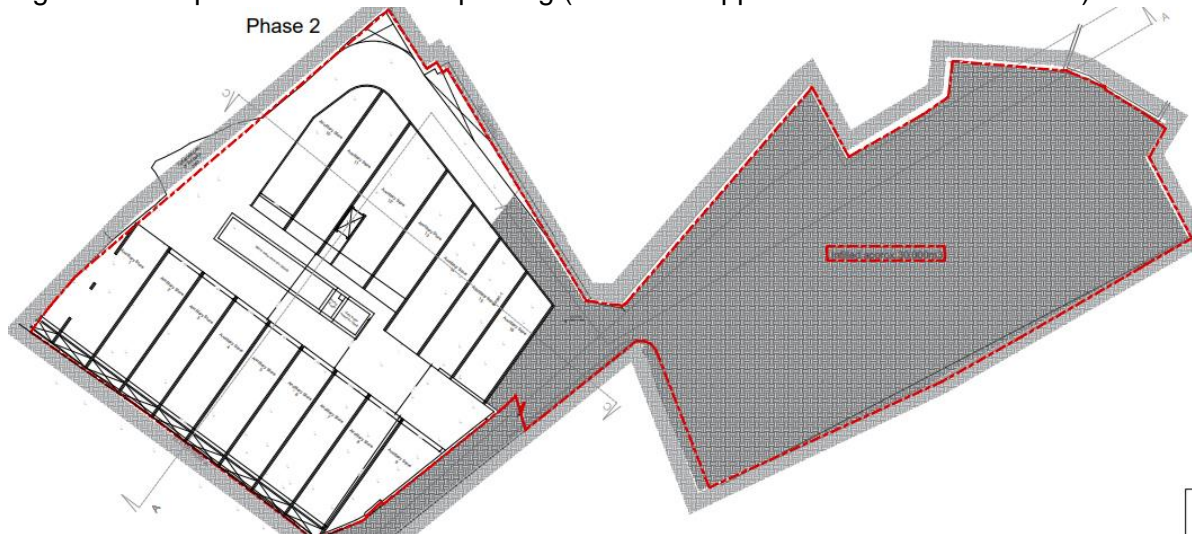


Figure 5 – Proposed level -2 – stores (Source: EApps doc PA/08500/21 – 85d)

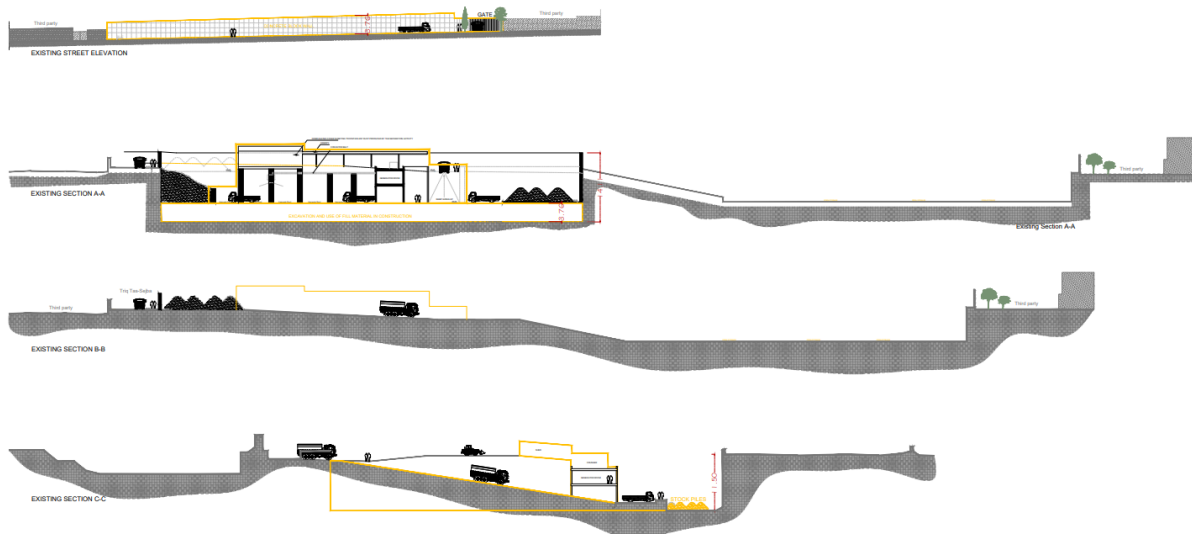


Figure 6 – Existing sections and elevation (Source: EApps doc PA/08500/21 – 85g)

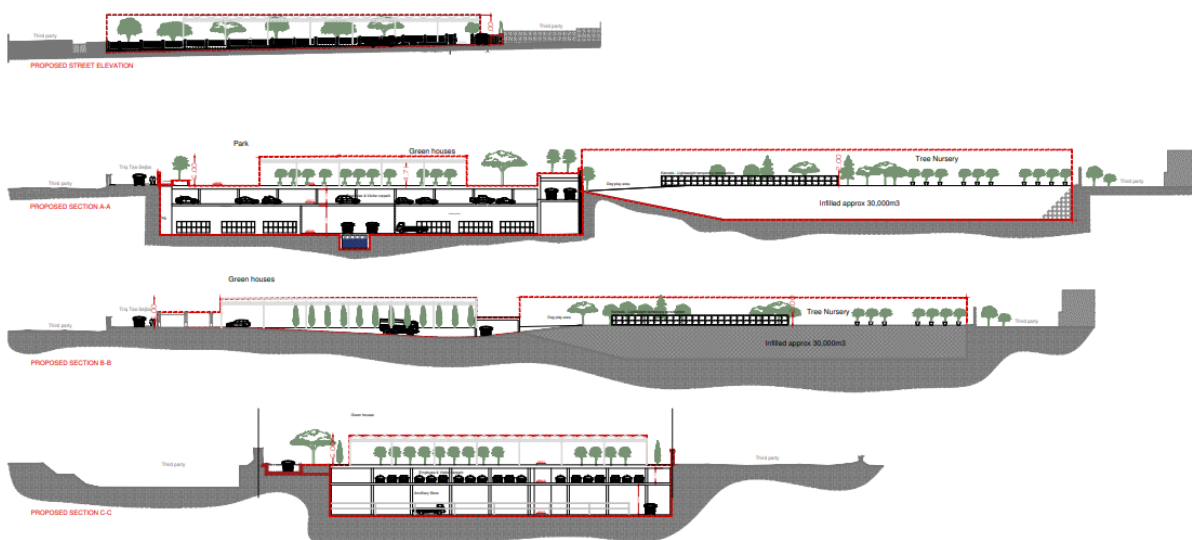


Figure 7 – Proposed sections and elevation (Source: EApps doc PA/08500/21 – 85h)

Site Context

- 2.1 The site in question is located in Mqabba, within the boundaries of the former tas-Sejba quarry, which is currently used for rock crushing and recycling operations (see Figures 8-9). The site has a total footprint of 13,342 m² and is partially backfilled (western part, to accommodate the current recycling facility).
- 2.2 The site is surrounded by other disused quarries, of which some are used for storage purposes and other industrial/commercial uses (e.g. mechanic, garages), as well as agricultural plots and residential properties (See Figure 10).
- 2.3 Vegetation on site is mainly limited to ruderal, agricultural and invasive species along the site boundaries and at the border with the adjacent agricultural land. On the other hand, specimen of *Cupressus sempervirens* (Italian cypress), *Olea europaea* (Olive tree), and *Ceratonia siliqua* (Carob tree) were observed. No cultural heritage features are present within the site or the surrounding area.



Figure 8 – Site of the proposed development (Source: PA MapServer – 2018 orthophoto)

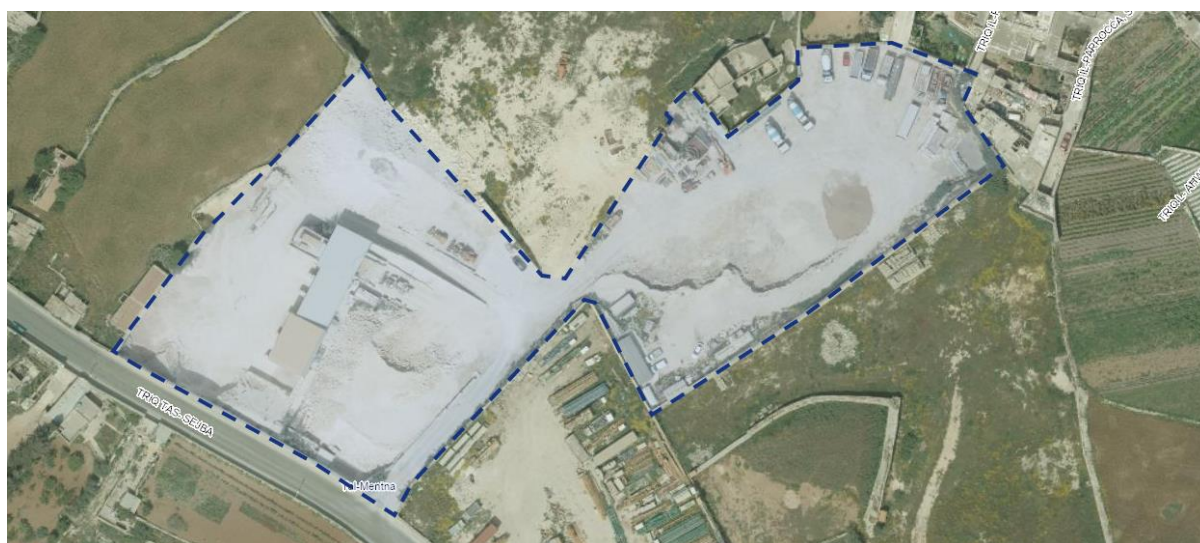


Figure 9 – Site of the proposed development - detail (Source: PA MapServer – 2018 orthophoto)

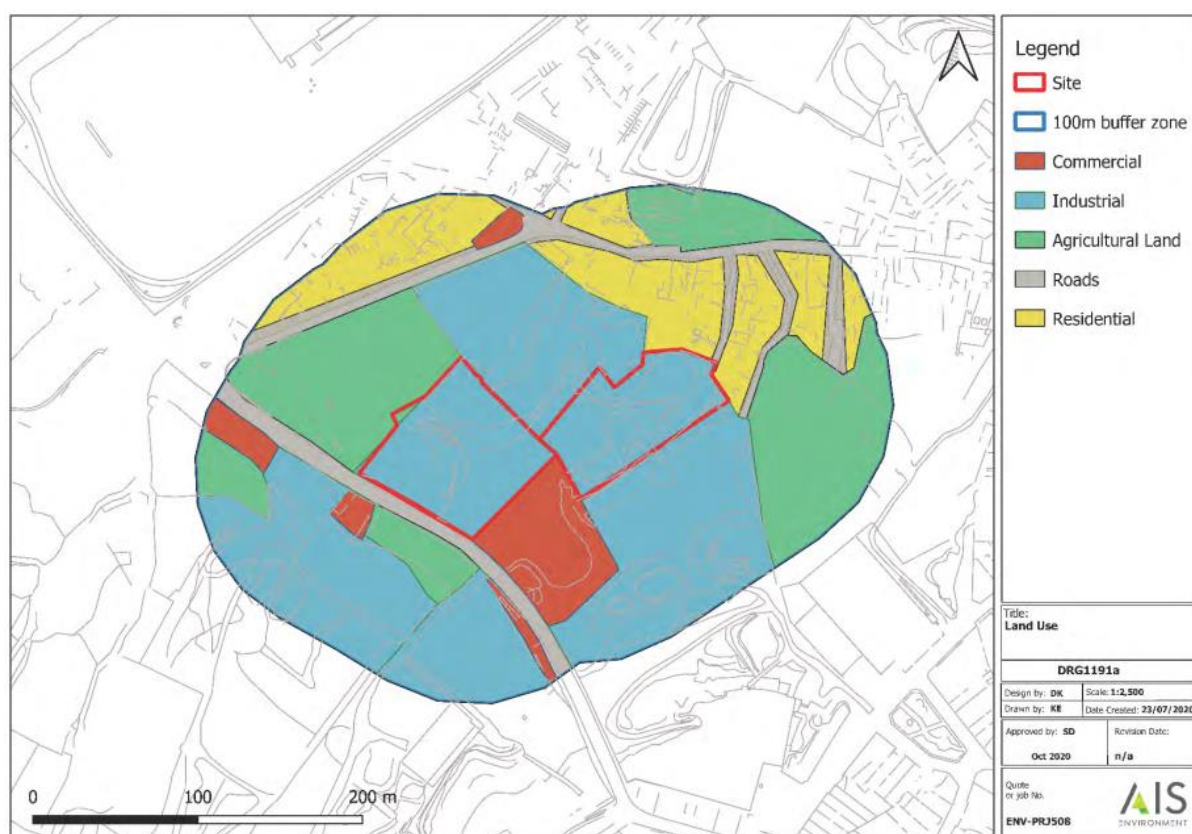


Figure 10 – Land uses on site and within the surrounding area (Source: PDS)

Case History

- 3.1** The site was previously subject to the following planning applications and enforcement notice:
- PA/02393/13 - Reconstruction of pre-1967 room meter room which accidentally collapsed together with tas-Sejba Road as per police report. (Application withdrawn)
 - PA/05852/09 - To sanction the construction of a waste recycling plant in a disused quarry under the level of the road including a crusher, loading bay, and supporting structure and to construct additional facilities such as shading device, wheel washing facility, and formation of retaining walls for material. (Application suspended, in view of the application in subject)
 - EC/00166/10 - Installation of crushing plant, deposit of inert material in quarry, change of use into a parking of heavy vehicles / machinery and creation of access in Sejba Road without permit. (Suspended, pending outcome of PA/05852/09)

Screening criteria:

- 4.1 EIA Screening** (citations refer to S.L. 549.46, except where otherwise specified):

The proposed development falls under the scope of Schedule I, Category II of the EIA Regulations (S.L. 549.46), namely Section 9.0.2.3: *Restoration and after-use of existing or discussed quarries or mines, other than for restoration of the site back to its pristine state*. In this regard, screening in terms of Regulation 14 of S.L. 549.46 is required.

Documents used for screening:

- a. ERA's Correspondence, at docs PA/08500/21 – 50a and 69a, dated 30 March and 22 September 2022;
- b. Project Description Statement (PDS), referred directly to ERA by the Architect on 11 January 2023;
- c. Various plans and drawings, at docs PA/08500/21 – 52g and 85a-h; and
- d. Planning Authority Map Server and South Malta Local Plan.

II. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL (Screening in terms of Schedule III of the EIA Regulations, S.L. 549.46)

Land use

- 6.1** While ERA in its initial correspondence (Eapps doc 50a) indicated that there is no in-principle concern about the construction of a garden centre within this particular site, the Authority had raised concern about the then proposed parking/manoeuvring area taking up most of the eastern part of the site (yellow marked area in Figure 1). The proposal was subsequently amended to include soil and tree cover within this part of the site, for use as tree nursery and landscaped areas, which is considered an improvement and more in line with the wider site context.
- 6.2** In addition, in the eastern part of the site, dog kennels (with a max. capacity of 64 dogs) and an outdoor dog park are proposed for dog boarding services. The introduction of such kennels *per se* is not considered to be in conflict with the surrounding area, and the dog park is limited to soil cover. However, ERA requires that spread of built structures is minimised, hence the kennel structures is to be shifted closer to the garden centre, aligned with the site boundaries, to retain the eastern part of the site predominantly open with soil cover and trees/vegetation (landscaping/nursery). Hence, no significant impacts on land use are envisaged, subject that the above is adequately addressed.

Landscape and visual amenity

- 6.3** Visual screening of the development is proposed through landscaping along the site boundary, including as seen from the adjacent road Triq Tas-Sejba. Furthermore, the proposed garden centre will be constructed as a green-house structure with lightweight semi-transparent panels and glass, which are a typical occurrence in rural areas. Noting the current baseline (quarry-related activities, rock processing plant) and the presence of established industrial/commercial developments in adjacent sites, no significant impact is envisaged from the proposed garden centre development on the landscape character and *visual amenity of the surrounding area*.

Construction-phase impacts

- 6.4** The proposed works, notably excavations in the western part of the site and backfilling activities in the eastern part, are expected to generate dust, noise and vibrations. However, noting the current situation on site (rock processing operations with its associated disturbances) and the temporary duration of such works, such impacts are not envisaged to be significant and can be minimised at source through proper adherence to the requirements outlined in the Environmental Management Construction Site Regulations (S.L. 552.09). In particular, it is recommended that the following good site practices are adhered to:
- To inform neighbours about the construction stages and timing of the works, and to adjust timing of works to prevent potential complaints;
 - To ensure that noise enclosures from equipment always have all doors and hatches closed when in use;
 - To keep stationary equipment such as pumps and generators away from neighbours; and
 - To integrate hoarding in such a manner that it, besides containing dust and debris, also serves as a noise barrier to abate and reduce construction noise.

- 6.5** In terms of waste generation, the present fill material that would be excavated for the proposed construction of the basement levels (approx. 20,000 m³) will be shifted to the eastern part of the site as backfill, hence no rock waste will be generated from such activity. In fact, the site will be absorbing additional inert material, as 35,000 m³ of inert material is required to bring the eastern part of the site to the required site levels for soil deposition and planting of trees. To this effect, waste generation from construction works will be limited to packaging and offcuts of raw materials used for the construction of the garden centre and kennels, which is not considered significant.

Operational impacts

- 6.6** In terms of emissions, while noise and dust emissions from the proposed garden centre *per se* are envisaged to be lower than those generated by the current rock processing facility on site, the proposal will be attracting vehicular traffic to the site, with its associated potential implications on the ambient air quality. In order to determine whether such impact is likely to be significant, and whether any further investigations in terms of air quality are necessary, further information on the traffic generation by the proposed development is to be provided (i.e. AADT – Annual Average Daily Traffic, in terms of passenger vehicle trips generated during operations, compared to the existing situation on site). From a noise perspective, the existing aviation noise in the area is expected to mask any additional noise from operational traffic, hence operational noise impacts are not envisaged to be significant.
- 6.7** With respect to waste generation, excrement from the proposed dog kennels will be collected in an underground cesspit and disposed of according to the relevant regulations (S.L. 439.15 - Minimum standards for operating a boarding establishment for cats and dogs regulations), and wastes generated by the garden centre and tree nursery will be limited to organic waste (which will be composted and reused on site), plastic, packaging, and offcuts from operational equipment (e.g. drip irrigation). In addition, the cafeteria, office and groomer will be generating common municipal waste, which will be appropriately sorted and removed by licensed waste carriers. In this regard, no significant impacts are envisaged from operational waste generation, as long as all wastes are managed in accordance with the afore-mentioned regulation and the Waste Regulations (S.L. 549.63).

III. ERA CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDED WAY-FORWARD

The above screening has concluded that the proposal does not warrant an EIA, in line with Regulation 15 of S.L. 549.46, subject to the following requirements:

- The relevant plans are to be amended to shift the proposed kennels closer to the garden centre, aligned with the site boundaries, to reduce spread of built development and retain the eastern part of the site predominantly open with soil cover and trees/vegetation (landscaping and nursery); and
- Further information is to be provided in terms of passenger vehicle trips to be generated by the development during operations, as compared to the existing situation on site (in AADT values – Annual Average Daily Traffic).

ERA will issue its final position and recommended way-forward, including any environmental conditions, following the outcome of the above required information.