

# Environmental Impact Assessment

## Screening according to Schedule III of S.L. 549.46

<b>ERA Reference no.:</b>	EA 00005/23
<b>PA Reference no.:</b>	PA 02725/20
<b>Project Title:</b>	To demolish existing structures and construction of commercial hub within committed containment area. Application includes parking facilities, Class 4B retail outlets, ancillary facilities and landscaping area.
<b>Location:</b>	Site at Schembri Barbros Ltd, Triq tal-Barrani, Għaxaq
<b>Screening date:</b>	28 July 2023

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## I. BACKGROUND

### 1. Outline of Proposal

1.1 The proposed outline development seeks to demolish existing structures and to construct a commercial hub at Triq tal-Barrani, Għaxaq. The proposed development is spread over 5 levels, including 2 underground levels. The proposal includes:

- Class 4B retail outlets;
- Supermarket;
- Gymnasium;
- Child care centre;
- Cafeteria;
- 1330 parking spaces;
- Complex management office;
- Ancillary facilities, such as storage, services and sanitary; and
- Landscaping.

1.2 The proposed roof level will include ancillary facilities such as air conditioning external units, generator, water storage tanks and photovoltaic panels.

1.3 The site area is circa. 36,000 sq.m of which circa. 24,000 sq.m is currently used as an Area of Containment (AOC). The proposal has a Gross Floor Area (GFA) of circa. 52,000 sq.m.

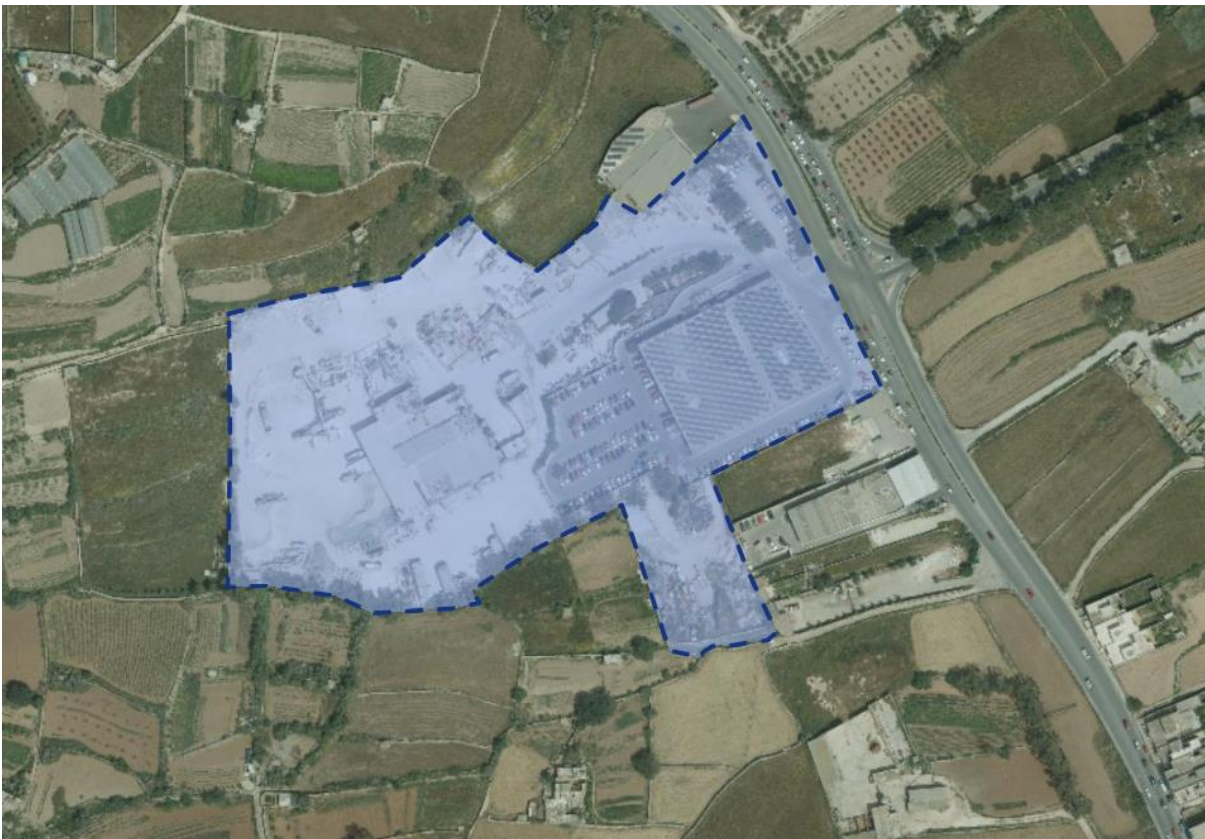
1.4 The PDS states that Infrastructure Malta intends to upgrade the junction east of the site, to a two-lane roundabout with slip roads at Triq Tal-Barrani to connect this road with Triq Vjal il-25 Novembru. Access to the commercial complex will be through the said upgraded junction.

## 2. Site context

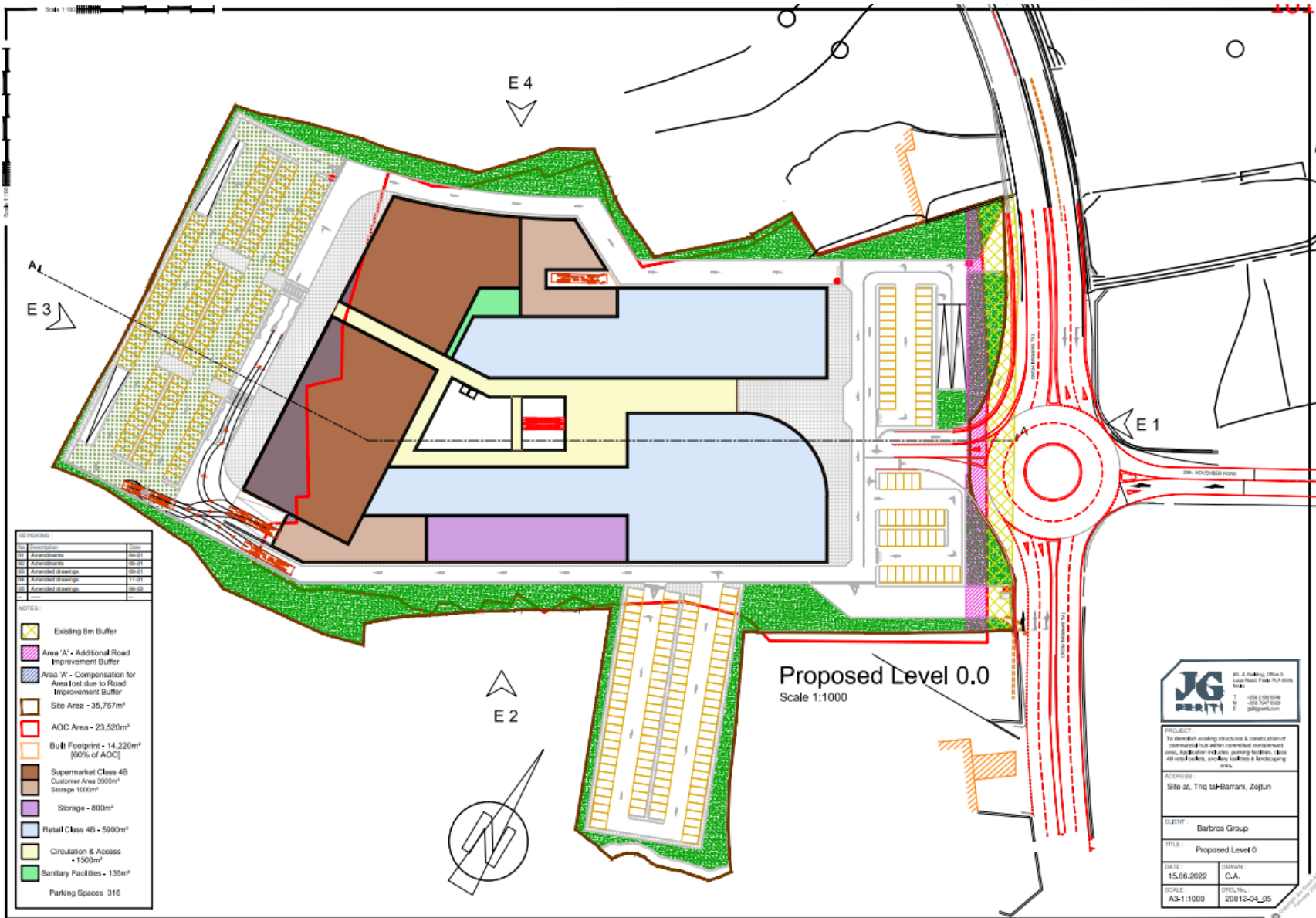
- 2.1 The proposal is located at the junction between Triq Tal-Barrani and Triq Vjal il-25 Novembru in Għaxaq/Żejtun, and lies within an Area of Containment (AOC). Refer to **Figures 1 and 2**.
- 2.2 At present, the area consists of a one-storey block comprising a supermarket and various warehouse outlets with parking at the rear, in total covering an area of circa. 8,000 sq.m.
- 2.3 To the west of the site there is a concrete batching and concrete blockwork manufacturing plant consisting of industrial garages, an office block and internal storage areas amongst others. The PDS states that the said industrial activities shall be relocated to an alternative site to accommodate the proposal.
- 2.4 The proposed area is located along at Triq tal-Barrani, Għaxaq and falls within Policy SMCM 05 - Areas of Containment as indicated in the South Malta Local Plan (SMLP, 2006), and illustrated in Map AC 4 – Areas of Containment (Industrial Commercial). The area is also designated as a Valley Protection Zone (SMCO 07). In addition, the site lies in the vicinity to an Aquifer Protection Zone (SMCO 08), is adjacent to an Archaeologically Sensitive Area (SMCO 04) and surrounded by agricultural areas (SMAG 01) as illustrated in Map GH3 of the SMLP, 2006.
- 2.5 The site is surrounded by agricultural land extending towards Għaxaq and Żejtun. Immediately flanking the site towards the south lies a fuel service station, whereas further north along Triq tal-Barrani there are other commercial/industrial uses. To the south-west and eastern part of the site, there are other industrial buildings, whereas the remaining areas are used for agricultural purposes.
- 2.6 Villa Mekrech is the closest scheduled building, which lies around 160 m to the south of the site. The feature is scheduled for Grade 2 architectural protection under G.N. 00689/13.



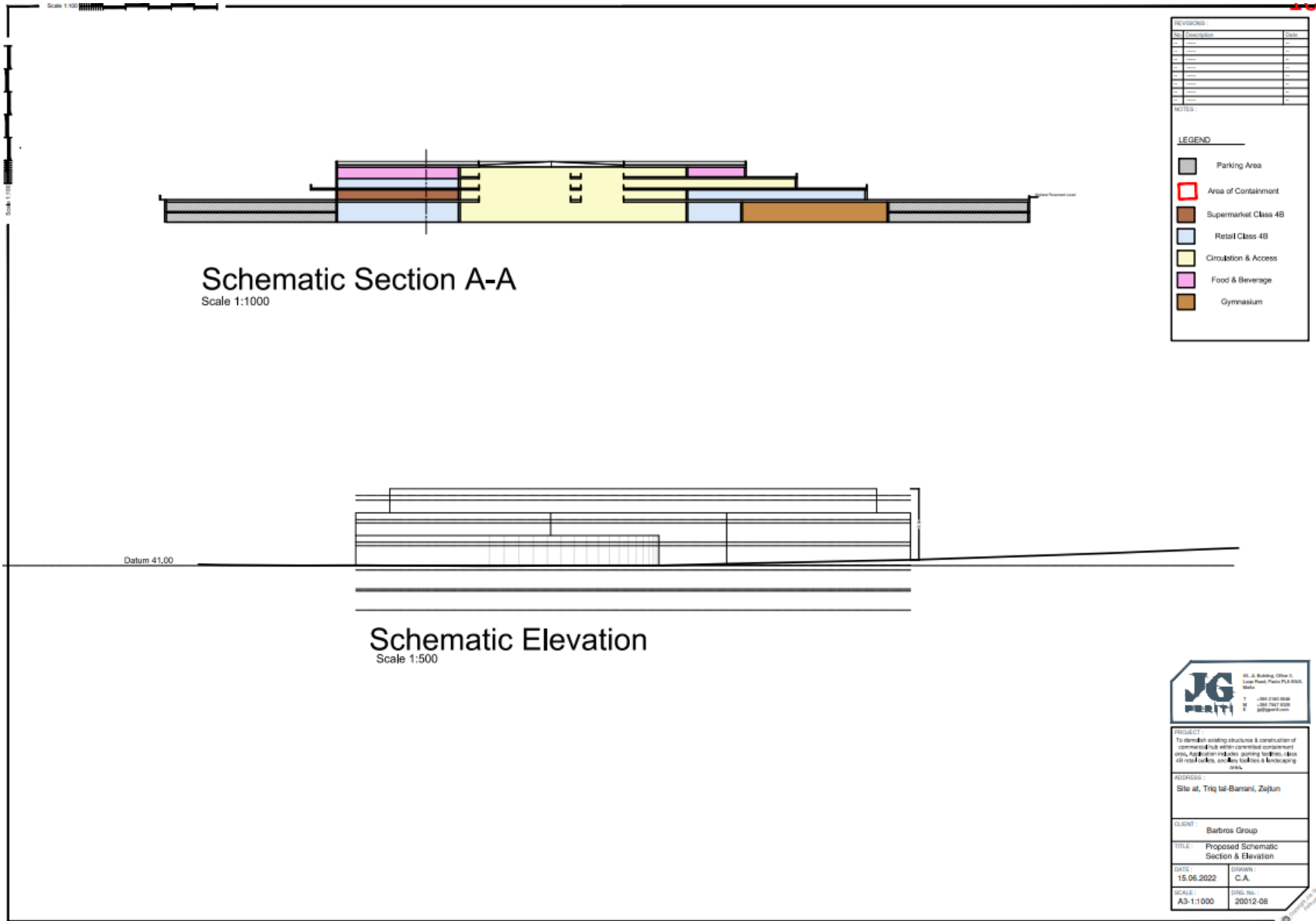
**Figure 1:** Aerial ortho-photo (2018) showing the location of the site (Source: PA Geoserver).



**Figure 2:** Close-up aerial ortho-photo (2018) showing the location of the site. (Source: PA Geoserver).



**Figure 3:** The proposed Level 0.  
Source E-Apps PA 02725/20 Doc 101e.



**Figure 4:** The proposed Section AA and Elevation. Source E-Apps PA 02725/20 Doc 101i.

### 3. Case history

3.1 The site was previously subject to the following relevant Planning Applications:

- PA/07494/07; Change of use of existing warehouse into supermarket and creation of car parking area – Approved;
- PA/00765/09; Construction of a security room in vehicle parking area (site boundary part of PA 3712/93) – Approved;
- PA/03353/10; Change of use of part of upper area to class 4 and to utilise foundations for car parking – Approved;
- PA/03178/14; Installation of galvanised steel car park shading devices supporting photovoltaic panels – Approved;
- PA/03664/16; Extension of supermarket approved in pa7494/07, change of use of 1 warehouse to an internal loading/unloading bay, and extension of parking area within parking area approved in pa 765/09 – Refusal overturned following Appeal, PAB 00187/17;
- PA/03785/16; Demolishing of existing structures and construction of Class 4A offices, 4B and 4D shops, in an infill site within an AoC boundary. Works to include fixing of signs, construction of basement parking and amendments to interconnect with approved basement parking permit on PA 3353/10 – Withdrawn;
- PA/01649/17; Outline permission - proposed rehabilitation of existing area, including demolition of existing structures and machinery & construction of commercial hub within committed containment area. Application includes 3 levels parking facilities, supermarket, Class 4A offices, Class 4B retail outlets, ancillary facilities & landscaping – Withdrawn;
- PA/03374/20; Renewal of PA3178/14 for the installation of galvanised steel car park shading devices supporting photovoltaic panels – Approved.

### 4. Screening Criteria

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

The proposed development falls within the scope of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (S.L. 549.46), notably in terms of the following Category II criteria in Schedule I:

- 7.1.2.1 (iii) a gross floor area of 10,000 sq.m or more for commercial use, including shops, shopping centres, offices or other business;
- 7.1.2.3 Car-parks with a gross floor area of 15,000m<sup>2</sup> or more, or 600 parking spaces or more; and
- 13.0.2.1 Any change to, or extension of, projects (even if the project is already authorised, executed or in the process of being executed), particularly projects covered by Category I or Category II, where the change or extension itself does not fall under Category I but: (i) meets the thresholds or criteria set out in Category II.

Therefore, the proposal was screened in terms of the EIA Regulations.

## 5. Documents used for screening

- Version 3 of the Project Description Statement (PDS), referred to ERA on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2023 at E-Apps Doc 106a;
- ERA screening replies at E-Apps Docs 56a, 86a, 87a and 98a;
- Traffic Impact Assessment at E-Apps Docs 88a-e;
- Other information at E-Apps Docs 95a-f;
- South Malta Local Plan (SMLP), 2006;
- Gross Floor Area breakdown report at E-Apps Doc 97a;
- Waste Management Plan at E-Apps Doc 100a; and
- Version 2 of the Air Quality Study referred to ERA on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2023.

## II. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

### 6. Assessment of Impacts and Ancillary Considerations

*(Screening in terms of Schedule III of the EIA Regulations, S.L. 549.46)*

#### Land Use

- 6.1 The loss of the existing undeveloped land is not considered significant in environmental terms, since the site is mostly disturbed land which lies within an Area of Containment.
- 6.2 The PDS states that the said industrial activities shall be relocated to an alternative site to accommodate the proposal. In this regard, the displacement of such use would be subject to environmental assessment by the ERA on its own merits and should not be construed as an in principle commitment for any site.
- 6.3 The PDS stated that some of the trees present within the area which will be uprooted are protected. In this regard, this adverse impact is to be mitigated with compensatory planting. All the necessary permits are to be sought from ERA to uproot/transplant any protected species.
- 6.4 The adjacent agricultural fields are separated by rubble walls, some of which are in a degraded state. The PDS does not mention any loss of rubble walls however any damage and/or removal is considered a minor adverse impact in view of the nature of the site and its context.

#### Construction Phase Impacts

- 6.5 The proposal will generate inert material as a result of the excavation and the clearance of soil present on site. The impact is not considered significant as long the excavation waste is reused and recycled. As stated in the PDS, such practice would reduce the need for raw materials.

- 6.6 The site lies in the vicinity of an Aquifer Protection Zone as per SMCO 08 (SMLP, 2006). In this regard, a minor adverse impact on the geo-environment, particularly on the hydrology/hydrogeology of the site is envisaged. The necessary geo-technical investigations are to be carried out to assess the quality of the excavated rock and its suitability for re-use.
- 6.7 Moreover, any soil that will be cleared from site is to be reused in any landscaped areas within the same site of the proposal. Any surplus soil is to be reused offsite in accordance with the relevant legislation.
- 6.8 The proposal will generate dust, noise, vibration and light emissions during the construction phase. Such impacts are short-term and can be minimised at source in line with the Environmental Management Construction Site Regulations (S.L. 552.09). Additionally, mitigation measures including the use of a dust misting lance; power washing HGVs wheels; hoarding as a means to contain dust and debris, also serving as a noise barrier, should be implemented to further reduce the significance of said impacts.

#### Operation Phase Impacts

- 6.9 The municipal waste which will be generated during operations, is not considered significant as long as all the waste is managed in accordance with the Waste Management Regulations (S.L. 549.63), and efforts are done to recycle and reduce waste generation at source.
- 6.10 The proposal will generate an Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) of c. 6626 trips. In view of this, ERA requested an Air Quality Study, for which Terms of Reference were provided (refer to E-Apps Docs 86a and 87a). ERA has reviewed the submitted Air Quality Study reports and has referred feedback to the applicant and consultant directly. Discussions with the applicant, indicated an improvement of the junction at Triq tal-Barrani (refer to E-Apps Docs at 101b-h; plans showing proposed roundabout) is required. Such improvement was identified in the air quality study as being sufficient in mitigating the envisaged impacts on air quality during operations.
- 6.11 According to the Transport Impact Assessment (TIA) at E-apps Docs 88a-e, the proposed development will generate high traffic flow. However, with the proposed junction upgrade (identified in the TIA, refer to E-Apps Doc 88b), this junction will not exceed capacity with the development traffic by the year 2030. The TIA promotes sustainable modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport. The construction of the roundabout to improve junction flows is considered essential for the successful implementation of the project.



### Energy and Water Use (recommendations)

- 6.12 The ERA recommends that to mitigate impacts on resource use during operation, noting the scale of the proposal, the design of the development should take into consideration sustainable measures such as:
- Skylights and large apertures, to provide additional natural light;
  - Roof gardens and green walls, to provide additional shading as well as improving air quality by serving as a green area;
  - Double/Triple-glazed apertures and exterior facade/aperture shading; and
  - Ventilated cladding system and efficient air conditioning systems.
- 6.13 Sustainable or green architecture will also inevitably cut down costs relating mostly to reduced energy use which in principle should serve as an incentive for the developer to implement such measures. Moreover, the ‘*Malta’s Sustainable Development Vision for 2050*’ aims for low-carbon, carbon-neutral or carbon-positive, green, resilient and affordable construction solutions. In this regard, ERA recommends that landscaping is an integral part of the proposed development.
- 6.14 In general, ERA recommends the installation of energy-efficient luminaries/lighting systems as well as renewable energy. In this regard, plans to install Building Applied Photovoltaics (BAPVs) on roofs of the proposed building or any other renewable energy installations, are highly encouraged. Such measures are also in line with ‘*Malta’s Sustainable Development Vision for 2050*’ objective to transition towards low-carbon energy.
- 6.15 The ERA promotes the local application of EU projects such as the E2STORMED project which deals with the challenge of capturing and reusing storm-water runoff before it flows as surface water, by exploring Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS), with the end goal of increasing energy efficiency. The information document published by ERA, ‘*Investing in the Multi-Functionality of Green Infrastructure (GI)*’ lists many other sustainable measures and projects. In this regard, it is highly recommended to adopt any relevant sustainable measures to the project.

### Other

- 6.16 The ERA recommends that the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (SCH) is to be consulted.

### **III. ERA CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDED WAY FORWARD**

Following screening of this proposal, ERA concludes that the impacts of the development are unlikely to be significant to the point of warranting an EIA, as long as the proposed junction improvement is carried out.

It should also be ensured that all works covered by the development permission shall be restricted to the area and depth approved for development. No encroachment onto the surrounding lands shall be allowed to occur. All material and temporary installations, vehicles and machinery used for, or generated by, the works, are to be entirely confined within the perimeter of the site approved for development and within the footprint of the existing adjacent asphalted roads. All necessary measures are to be implemented to ensure that no damage to the surrounding environment including any rural/natural/cultural features, habitats and the topography.

A full set of conditions relevant to the proposal will be included as part of the full development application process.

#### ***Screening Disclaimer***

*The above screening results, the ensuing conclusions and recommendations are without prejudice to any required changes or updates should the development proposal be eventually modified 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 screening would need to be re-opened.*