

Environmental Impact Assessment

Screening according to Schedule III of S.L. 549.46

Appropriate Assessment

Screening according to S.L. 549.44

ERA Reference no.:	EA 00004/24
PA Reference no.:	PA 07562/23
Project Title:	To demolish existing garages and stores, reclaim quarry to previous 1967 topographic levels, construct four residences and restore scheduled areas
Location:	Hardstone Quarry, No. 30, Triq Panoramika, Ta' Żuta, Siġġiewi.
Screening date:	14 February 2024

I. BACKGROUND

1. Outline of Proposal

- 1.1 The proposal is for the decommissioning of the quarry, its backfilling and restoration. Following this, four residences are being proposed.
- 1.2 The quarry decommissioning will be carried out in stages. The first phase will consist in the relocation of the offices, to allow for the full extraction of all potential mineral within the licensed quarry boundary. This is envisaged to be carried out over a period of approximately two to five years.
- 1.3 The decommissioning of the crushers will be carried out after the completion of the quarry infill with recycled/demolished material. The PDS states that the crushers might be required to crush some of the incoming material so as to ensure better compaction and an optimum infill volume. This second phase is anticipated to last between five and ten years.
- 1.4 Phases three and four include the decommissioning of mobile crushers, backfilling, construction of rubble walls and residences as well as landscaping works.
- 1.5 The construction of underground water catchment reservoirs is also being proposed. However, the location of these reservoirs will be identified once all infill works are complete, as the position and structure will depend upon the infill processes.
- 1.6 The existing access to the site will be retained.

2. Site context

2.1 The site lies within Siġġiewi (refer to **Figure 1**) and covers a total area of approximately 81,000 m². HM 30 forms part of a cluster of quarries for which boundaries are identified in the North West Local Plan 2006 as per Maps 5 and 8. The area (Ta' Żuta) is characterised by a group of hard stone quarries located within close proximity to the coastal cliffs. Some of these quarries are still in operation.

2.2 The site is bordered on the north and west side with agricultural land, natural *phrygana* habitat and low vegetation garrigue. Third party quarries dominate the eastern portion of the site.

2.3 The predominant land uses in the immediate vicinity of the development site are industrial, mineral extraction and agricultural. The industrial uses are primarily construction-related, concrete production, asphalt concrete production, mineral extraction and processing. The quarries bordering the site are hardstone quarries that extract Coralline Limestone. There are five quarries in all in this area: Iż-Żebbiegħ ta' Żuta, Siġġiewi (HM30), Ta' Dmejrek, Ta' Żuta, Siġġiewi (HM31), Misraħ il-Ħawt, Siġġiewi (HM4), Ta' Żuta, Siġġiewi (HM35), Ta' Żuta, Siġġiewi (HM 1), Ta' Ġebel Ciantar, Siġġiewi (HM 7) and Ta' Belula, Siġġiewi (HM 33).

2.4 In addition, the site is located:

- Within the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Rdumijiet ta' Malta: Ir-Ramla taç-Ċirkewwa sal-Ponta ta' Bengħisa (MT000024);
- Within a Level 3 Area of Ecological Importance (AEI) and an Area of High Landscape Value (AHLV) through Government Notice 400/96 for the protection of the coastal cliffs 'From Irdum Dikkiena to Ghar il-Hamieħ';
- Within a Level 1 Area of Archaeological Importance (AAI) 'Ix-Xagħra ta' Ghar il-Kbir' scheduled under Government Notice 277/98;
- Adjacent to the Special Protected Area (SPA) Rdumijiet ta' Malta: Ras il-Pellegrin sax-Xaqqa (MT000032); and
- In the vicinity (circa. 300 m South-west) of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protected Area (SPA) L-Inħawi tal-Buskett u tal-Girgenti (MT000018). This site is also designated as a Tree Protected Area (TPA) known as 'Gnien il-Kbir, Il-Buskett & Wied il-Girgenti'.



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

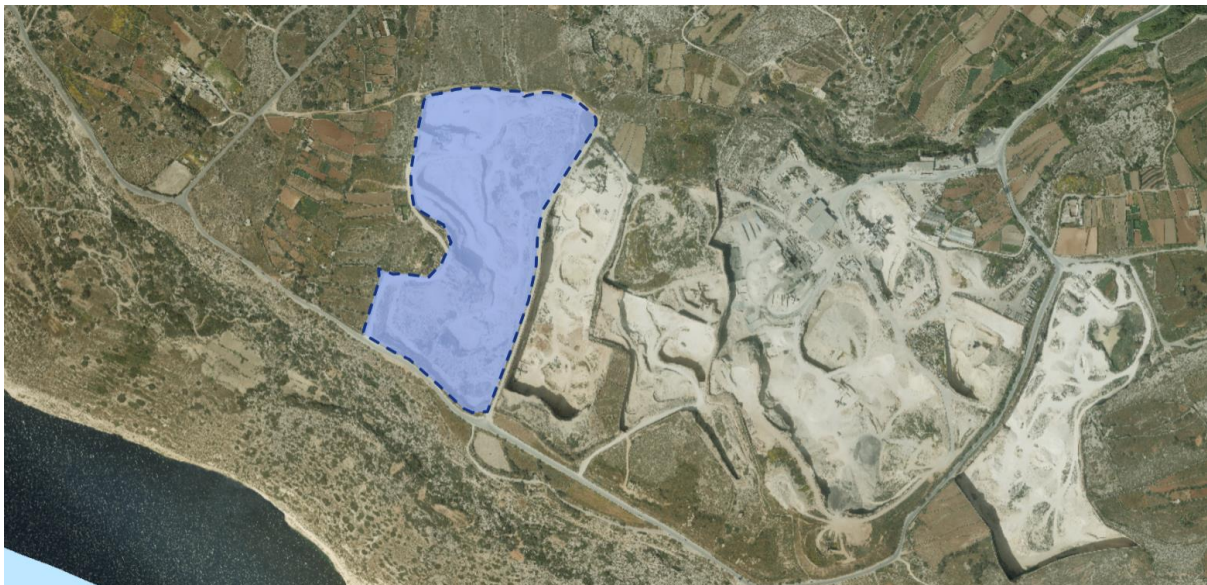


Figure 2: Close-up aerial ortho-photo (2018) showing the location of the site in blue. Source: *PA Geoserver*.

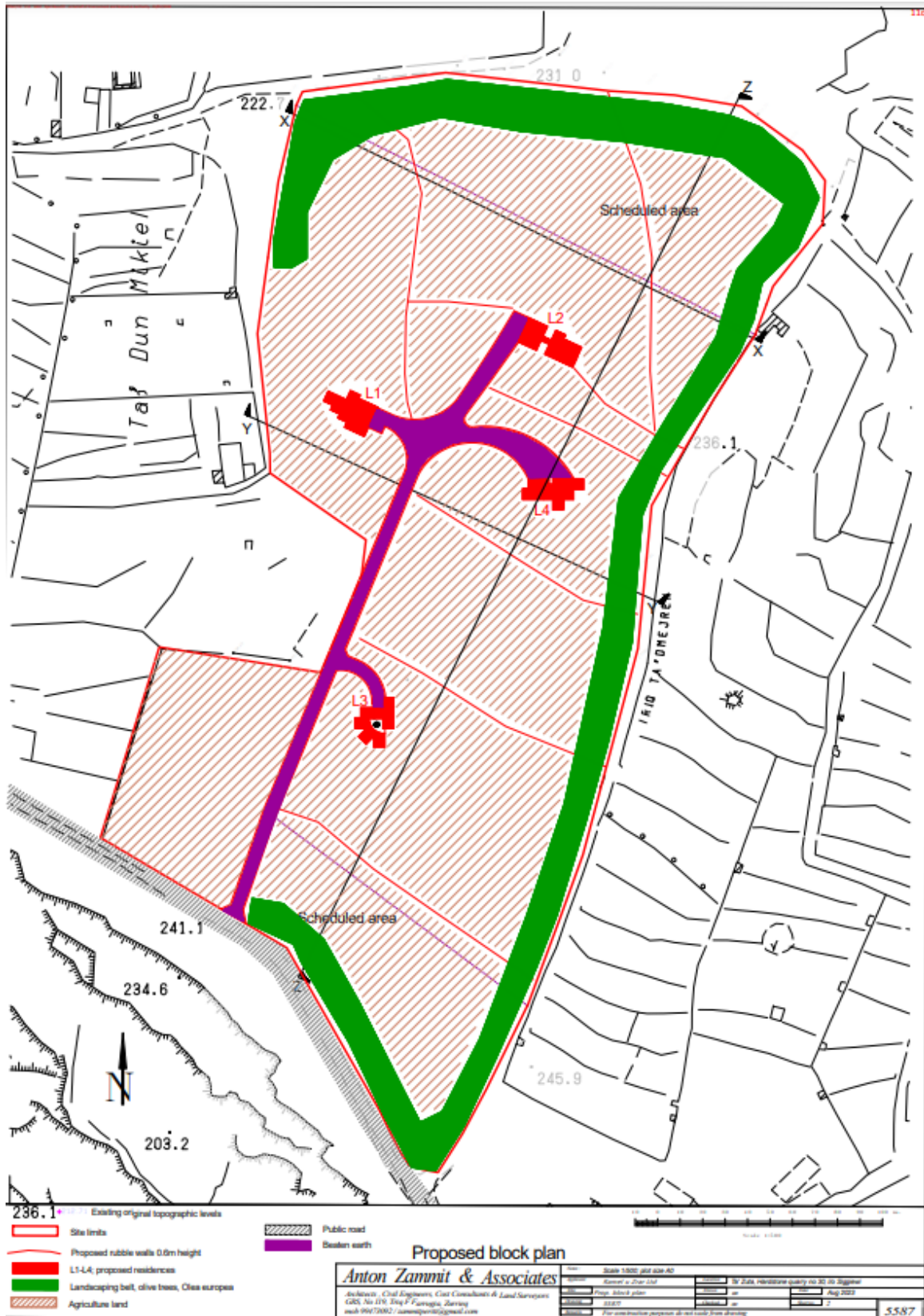


Figure 3: Proposed block plan. Source: E-Apps PA 07562/23 Doc 11d.

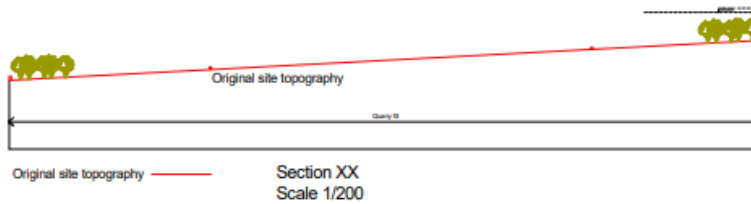
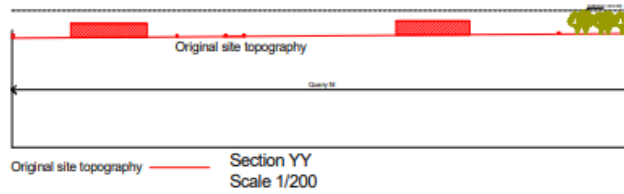
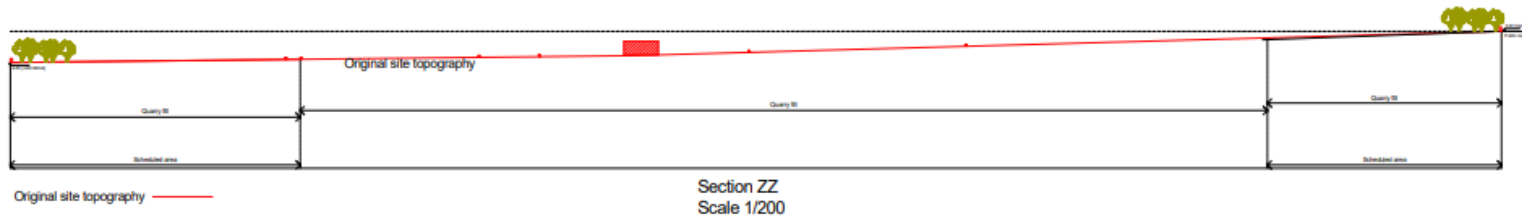


Figure 4: Proposed sections. Source: *E-Apps PA 07562/23 Doc 11e*.

3. Case history

3.1 The site was previously subject to the following Enforcement Notices and Planning Applications, which are relevant to the proposal:

- EC/00149/95 – Excavations/Quarrying outside the permitted boundaries - HM 30 – pending direct action. For which appeal PAB 00123/95 was filed and dismissed.
- EC/00274/98 – Excavations/Quarrying outside the permitted boundaries - HM 30 – pending direct action.
- PA/07213/04 – To extend quarry depth to 190m msl - refused. For which appeal PAB 000174/11 was filed and is still pending decision.
- PA/00366/18 – To restore hardstone quarry 30 including fringe areas subject to enforcement notices, infill inert material, and construction of solar farm, open yard formation, reconstruction of existing garages and ancillary garages to open yard - withdrawn.
- PA/09408/18 - To restore hardstone quarry 30 including fringe areas subject to enforcement notices, infill inert material, demolition of existing garages/stores and offices and construction of garages/ stores/ office space – withdrawn.
- PA/07860/20 - To demolish existing ground floor offices, workshops, garages and quarry crushers and equipment and infill existing quarry as per original land contours, construct class 3A, with underlying car-park, and external ground floor open car parking and ancillary swimming pool and deck and landscape whole site – withdrawn.

3.2 Following screening for PA 09408/18, a series of meetings were held between ERA, the applicant and the Perit to discuss a revised concept that supersedes the previously indicated industrial use with a more context-appropriate after-use of the spent quarry that ascertains the complete infilling and restoration of the quarry to the pre-existing topography. In its letter (E-apps at Doc PA/07860/20/32a), ERA expressed concerns on the underground parking and the increase in site formalisation which run counter to the recommendations made during ERA's discussions with the applicant to reduce the scale and footprint of the development. The recommended way forward was that the proposal can be considered further once the foregoing improvements are addressed.

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:

- Section 1.0.2.1 (Development with a site area of 2ha or more; and
- Section 9.0.2.3 (Restoration and after use of existing or disused quarries or mines, other than for restoration of the site back to its pristine state).

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

4.2 AA Screening (citations refer to S.L. 549.44, except where otherwise specified):

In view of the location of the proposal, the following Natura 2000 sites, as declared through the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (SL 549.44) are located within the vicinity of the site:

- MT0000032 (*Rdumijiet ta' Malta: Ras il-Pellegrin sax-Xaqqa*) SPA – *International Importance*;
- MT0000018 (*L-Inħawi tal-Buskett u tal-Girgenti*) SAC and SPA – *International Importance*;

In this regard, this proposal has also been screened in terms of Regulation 19 of the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L. 549.44).

5. Documents used for screening

- Project Description Statement (PDS) referred to ERA on 12 December 2023;
- ERA reply at E-Apps Doc PA/07860/20/32a.

II. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

6. Screening in terms of Schedule III of the EIA Regulations, S.L. 549.46

- 6.1 The ERA notes the improvements made following the discussions held on previous applications (refer to Section 3 above), particularly the elimination of industrial after-uses and underground parking. Whilst these are positive, the layout of the four residential units should be less scattered to limit the sprawl of the proposed development on site.
- 6.2 The proposed backfilling of the quarry void space with clean inert waste is beneficial from an environmental point of view. In this regard, a Restoration Method Statement (RMS) in line with ERA's Terms of Reference (TOR) as per Annex II is being requested.
- 6.3 Given the scale of the proposed underground reservoirs, septic tanks and foundations, it is unlikely that the impact on geology and geomorphology will be significant more so as the site is already excavated. The construction of reservoirs is deemed positive in environmental terms.
- 6.4 As long as mitigation vis-à-vis dust, noise and light pollution are adhered to i.e. the use of wheel-washing bays, site hoarding, use of well-maintained equipment and operations during daytime; no significant impacts are envisaged with regards to the construction phase.
- 6.5 Similarly, construction traffic impacts are likely to be minimal since it is expected that the majority of the inert material generated from the dismantling of the existing plant and excavated material will remain within quarry HS30 itself, and HGV traffic required for construction of the new works is unlikely to be significant when taking into account the existing baseline.

- 6.6 No significant impacts are envisaged during the operation phase given the scale and nature of the proposed after-use of the backfilled quarry i.e. four residences and agricultural land.
- 6.7 The landscape character and the visual amenity are not considered to be adversely affected by the proposal given that the majority of the works will be screened within the quarry depression itself. Nonetheless, in the long term, following the backfilling of the quarry, the situation vis-à-vis the landscape character and the visual amenity is envisaged to improve as long as the residences are low-lying and of a low intensity.
- 6.8 The inclusion of landscaping is considered beneficial however the current proposal envisages a relatively formal linear arrangement along the site boundary. A more 'organic' planting layout with trees clustered strategically within the site and particularly around the proposed structures is recommended. This will provide more effective integration into the surrounding natural landscape. The species used are to be representative of the natural ecosystems characterising the surrounding environment.

7. Screening in terms of the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations, S.L. 549.44

- 7.1 As mentioned in Section 4.2 above, the proposal lies in the vicinity of two Natura 2000 sites. Given the nature of the proposal i.e. backfilling and restoration and the proposed after-use i.e. four residential units, agriculture and landscaping/afforestation, there are no envisaged impacts on the Natura 2000 sites in the vicinity of the site.

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, in accordance with Regulation 15 of the EIA Regulations (S.L. 549.46). Similarly, no further assessment is required in terms of the Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations (S.L. 549.44).

With respect to the points mentioned in Section 6 above, the following submissions are being requested by ERA:

- i. Revised plans to limit sprawl of the proposed development on site;
- ii. A Restoration Method Statement for the backfilling phase. Refer to TORs in Annex II;
and
- iii. An updated Landscaping Plan.

ERA will be in a position to issue its conditions once the above requested submissions are submitted to and assessed accordingly by ERA.

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.