

Environmental Impact Assessment

Screening according to Schedule III of S.L. 549.46

ERA Reference no.: EA/00006/25
PA Reference no.: N/A
Project Title: Wied Dalam Park.
Location: Ghar Dalam - Triq Ghar Dalam, Birżebbuġa.
Screening date: July 2025

I. BACKGROUND

1. Outline of Proposal

- 1.1 The proposal aims to transform a 30,000 m² area of Wied Dalam, which includes a large number of disused underground British-era fuel storage reservoirs, into a family park focussed on green open space, biodiversity and social engagement (see Figure 1).
- 1.2 The existing fuel storage tanks embedded into the bedrock and their ventilation structures will be retained and integrated within the park, in view of their industrial heritage value. This will be supported by educational initiatives, tours, displays and signs to explain their historical context and importance.
- 1.3 The proposed park includes a network of footpaths, seating areas, open green zones and children's play areas.
- 1.4 Existing invasive species will be removed and rubble walls restored/constructed (where needed for soil retention, erosion protection). Existing garrigue and grassland communities in the lower part of the site will be preserved, and degraded ecological zones will be improved, aiming for the establishment of *Oleo-Ceratonion* habitat.

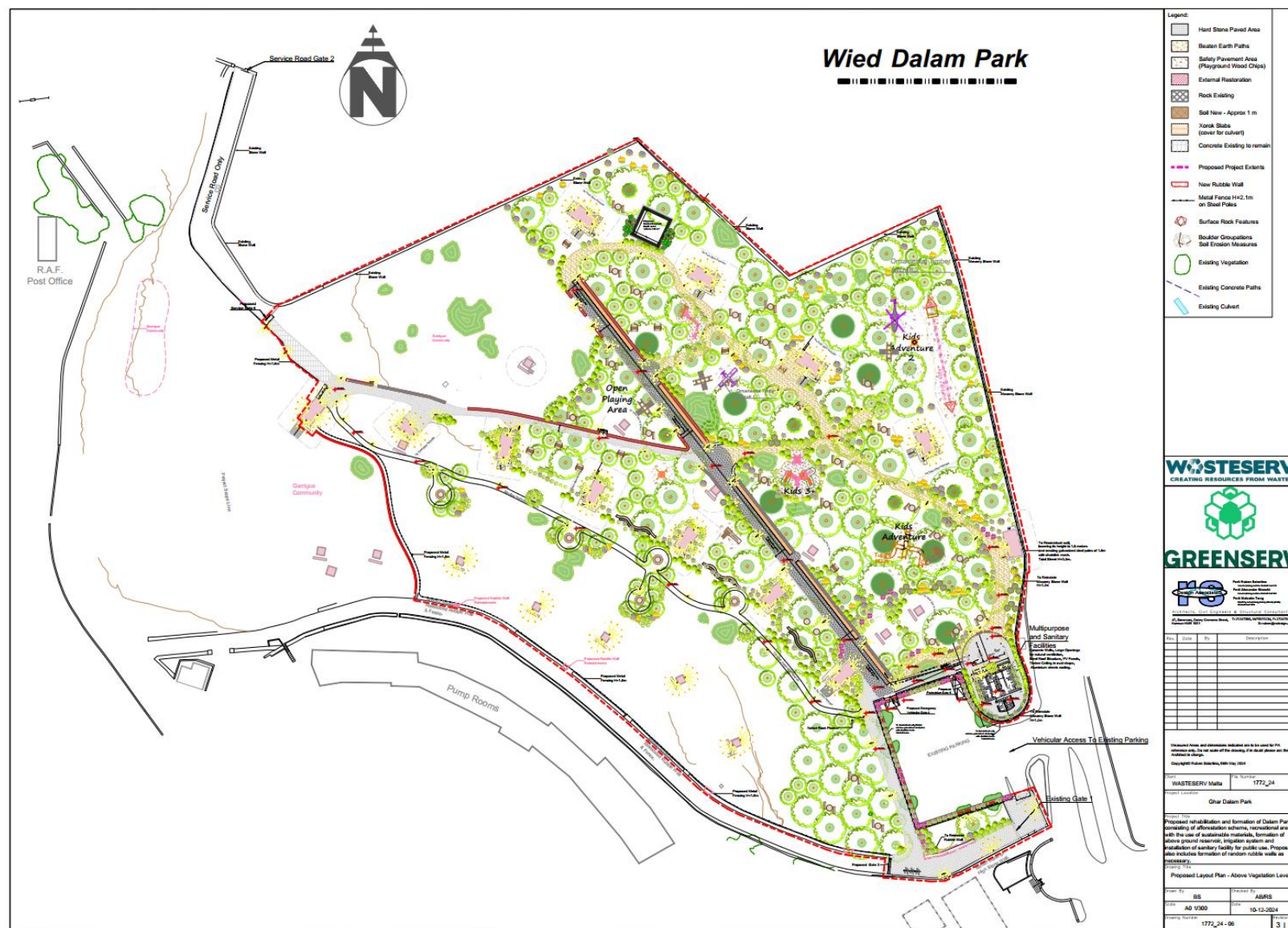
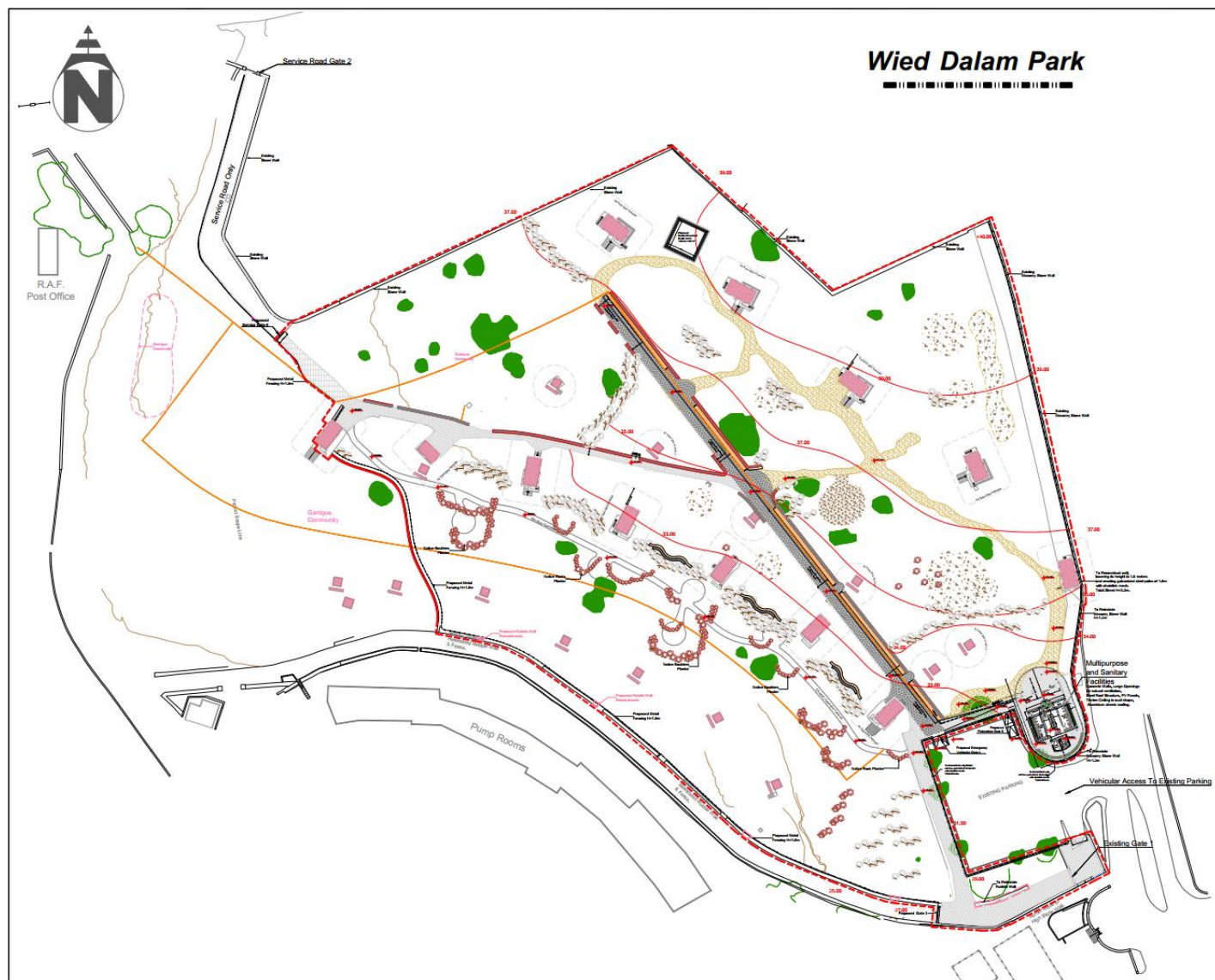


Figure 1 – Proposed plan (Source: PDS)



Environment & Resources Authority
Hexagon House, Spencer Hill, Marsa MRS 1441 T. (+356) 2292 3500 E. info@era.org.mt W. era.org.mt

2. Site context

- 2.1 The site is situated near Birżebbuġa in southeastern Malta. The site is part of the Dalam valley extending from Wied Dalam Cave entrance to the lower valley basin (see Figures 3-4).
- 2.2 The site encompasses a diverse landscape of terraced rock features, natural habitats and historic heritage features (fuel storage and ventilation structures).
- 2.3 The site is subject to the Ghar Dalam National Park Management Plan Brief, which has classified Wied Dalam as industrial heritage, and requires that efforts are made to integrate such heritage features carefully into the visitor experience.

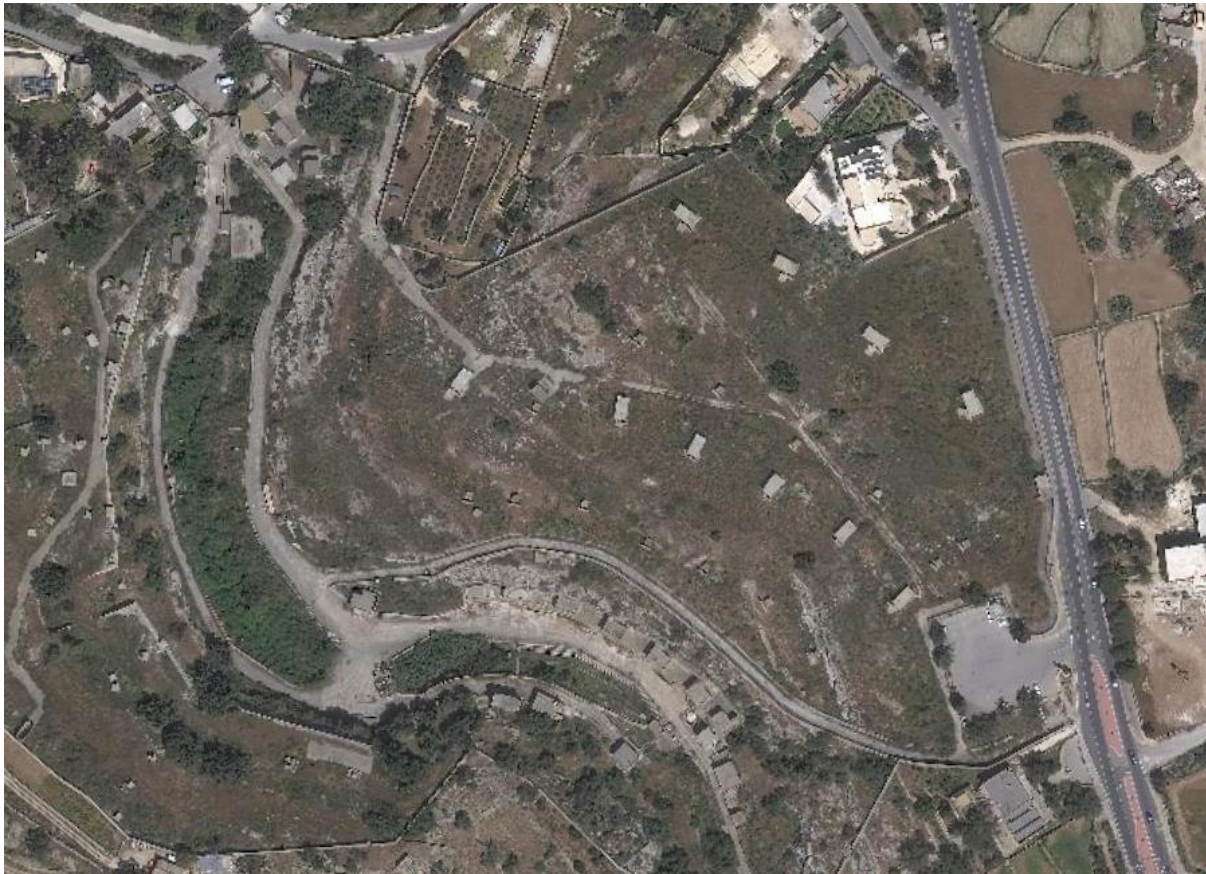


Figure 3 – Site of the proposal (*Source: PA Geoserver*)

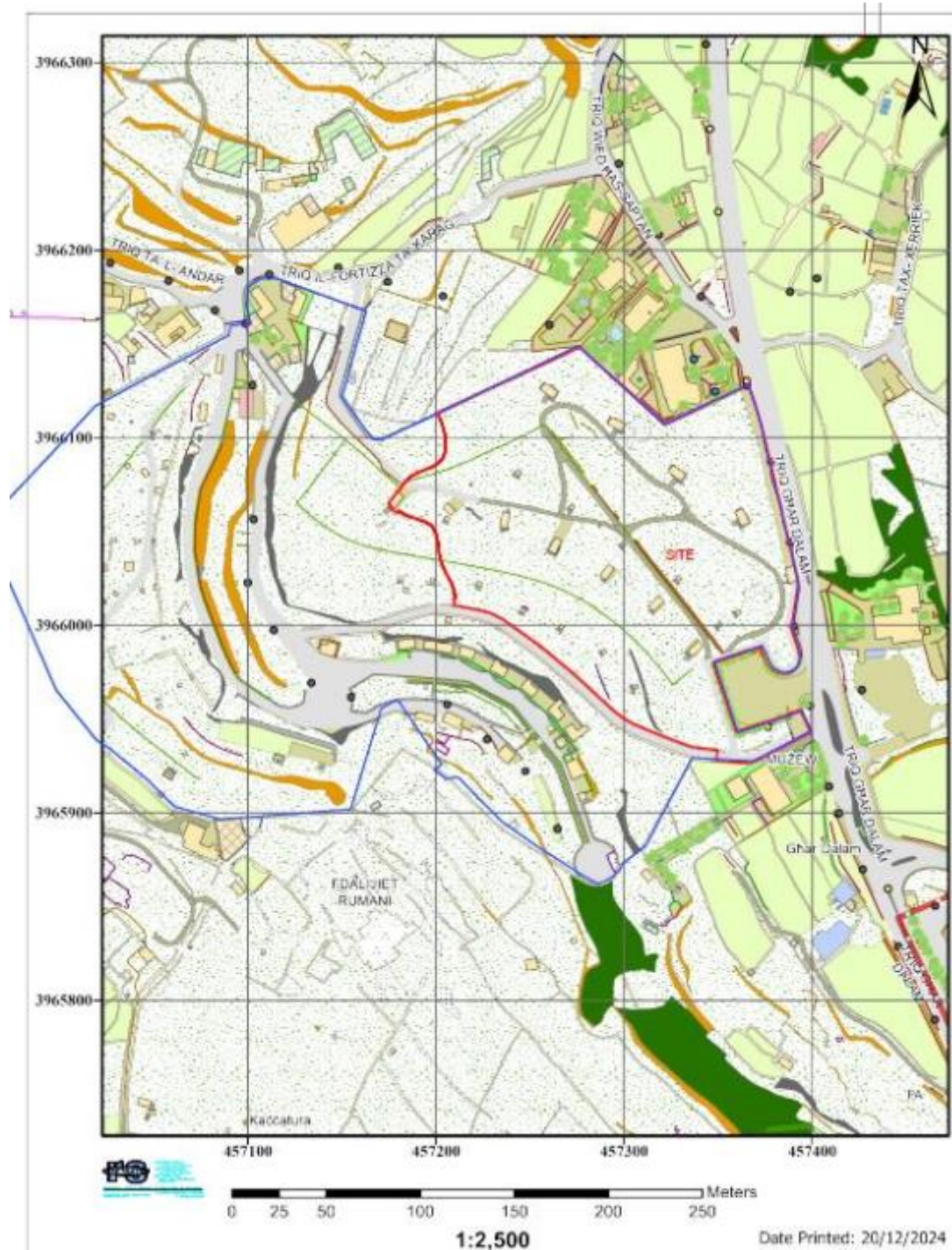


Figure 4 – Location of the project - area subject to the proposed family park marked in red (Source: PDS).

3. Case history

3.1 The site was not previously subject to any Planning Applications or Enforcement Notices.

3.2 Noting the historical use of the site for the storage of fuels and any associated ground contamination consideration; consultation with the relevant authorities responsible for such human health matters is recommended.

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 Schedule I of the EIA Regulations, notably in terms of Category II, Section 1.0.2.1 (*Development with a site area of 2ha or more*). Therefore, the proposal is screened in terms of the EIA Regulations.

4.2 **Appropriate Assessment** (*citations refer to S.L. 549.44, except where otherwise specified*):

The proposed site is immediately abutting the Dalam cave, which is protected as a Special Area of Conservation (MT0000011 – Għar Dalam). The cave opens at the foot of the slope of the valley flank and is used by bats which forage in the area. Therefore, the proposal is screening in terms of the Flora, Fauna, and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations.

5. Documents used for screening

- Project Description Statement (PDS) referred to ERA via email on 25 February 2025; and
- Updated plans and PDS, referred to ERA via email on 19 May 2025.

II. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL

6. Screening in terms of Schedule III of the EIA Regulations

6.1 The site includes garrigue and grassland areas, which are important habitats. While the proposed conversion of the site into a green park would change parts of such habitat (notably in the upper part of the site) into more afforested area; the appropriate selection of species (especially focusing on those belonging to the *Oleo-Ceratonion* alliance) may further strengthen the ecological potential and diversity of this site, while maintaining sensitive grassland (and garrigue) habitat in the lower part of the site.

6.2 Ground works are not envisaged to be significant, as soil deposition would be limited to the filling of minor depressions in the rocky surface, for such to be used to host larger trees that require a sufficient soil pocket. Where needed, to prevent soil erosion on this sloping site, minor retention structures (boulders or rubble walls) would be constructed.

6.3 Any dust and noise generation from such construction-phase interventions is not expected to be significant, as long as all materials are properly contained to avoid spillages and

polluted runoff downstream onto the grassland and garrigue habitat and further into the valley. With respect to lighting, as long as works are undertaken during daytime hours only, no adverse effects from lighting on the surrounding environment are envisaged.

6.4 During operations, the proposal is not envisaged to generate significant amount of traffic hence; impacts related to air quality and noise are not expected to be significant. With respect to lighting, subject that illumination of pathways and playground installations is kept minimal and strictly limited to downlighters of a warm colour, which are switched off outside of the park's opening hours, no adverse effects on the valley are expected. The lighting plan at the San Klement Park in Żabbar is a good example of such approach.

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

7.1 The cave complex is situated in close proximity to the site, and its opening is situated close to the bottom of the valley, however, it does not face the site directly (Figure 5).

7.2 As mentioned above in section 6; the proposal does not include any significant ground interventions and noise/light disturbance are expected to be limited, hence, no particular construction-phase effects affecting the cave are envisaged. During operations, visitors will access the site from the existing car parking, and there would be no direct interaction with the cave entrance.

7.3 With specific reference to the bats inhabiting the cave and using the valley areas as foraging grounds, since the park will be closed at night, no operational lighting within the site is expected after opening hours, thus no disturbance to the bats' nocturnal activities is envisaged.

7.4 The project is considered unlikely to affect the integrity of the protected cave complex and its inhabiting species.

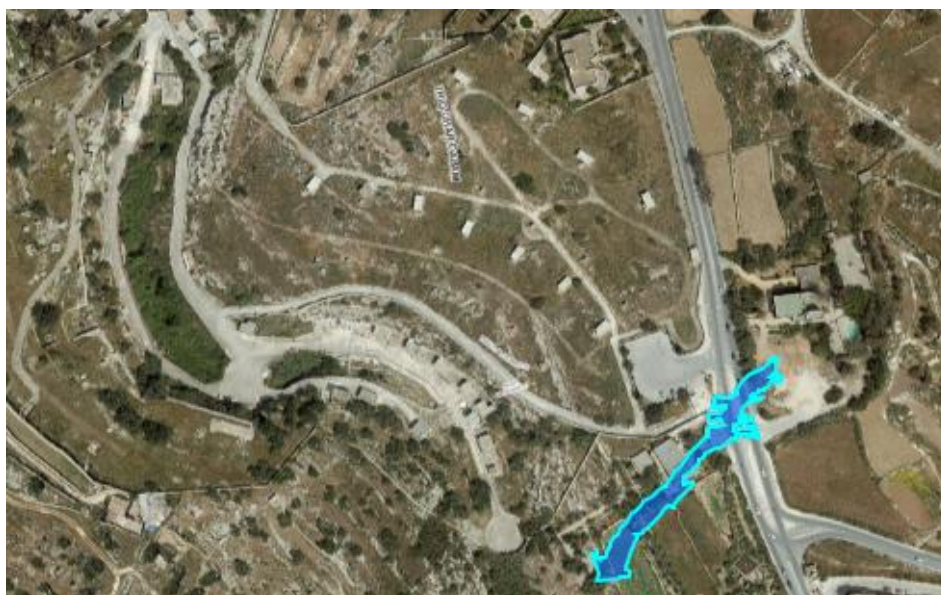


Figure 5 – Outline of cave complex in relation to the site of the proposal (Source: ERA MEPS Portal)

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. No further assessment in terms of the EIA Regulations and Flora, Fauna and Natural Habitats Protection Regulations is required. ERA does not object to the proposal from an environmental point of view, subject to the conditions in Annex II.