

3 The Site and Surrounding Area

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3 The Site & Surrounding Area

3.1 *Introduction*

This chapter provides an overview of the baseline environment associated with the application site and its surrounding area. It should be read in conjunction with Figures ES.1, ES.2 and ES.3 which can be found in the Figures section of this Environmental Statement (ES).

Further details on the baseline conditions are provided within each of the technical assessments contained within this ES.

3.2 *Site Location & Surrounding Area*

Gibraltar has a unique Earth Heritage importance and currently is seeking United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) World Heritage Site Status for individual sites. The current situation had not been verified by the Government of Gibraltar (GoG) at the time of writing this ES but a GoG press release dated 8 March 2006 (source: GoG Press Office http://www.gibraltar.gov.gi/latest_news/press_releases/2006/68-2006.htmsta) states:

“The Government’s position is that World Heritage Status can be sought for individual sites in Gibraltar, but that taking all relevant factors into account (including factors that some current commentators have not considered) it is not and has never been, in Gibraltar’s wider long-term interests to seek the designation of the whole of Gibraltar... The Government will therefore continue to sponsor an application for individual sites in Gibraltar, but not Gibraltar as a whole.”

It is therefore important for Gibraltar to protect and conserve its sites of geomorphological and archaeological importance.

The Rock of Gibraltar, situated at the southern end of the Iberian Peninsula (see Figure ES.1) is an impressive landmark and is visible from a wide area, particularly from the sea.

The top of the Rock is a sharp ridge extending for 2.5 kilometres from north to south.

The existing site, which comprises an area of approximately 8 hectares, is situated on the north-eastern edge of Gibraltar on the Mediterranean coast, south of the airport and runway and just below the eastern face of the Rock (see Figure ES.2). The eastern side of Gibraltar is characterised by the steep, and in places near-vertical, rock faces that rise out of the sea and which have discouraged development on this side due to the inherent physical constraints; most of Gibraltar’s habitation is confined to the western side of the Rock.

Access to the site is via Devil’s Tower Road which skirts the northern side of the Rock then turns south to follow the coastline (Catalan Bay Road / Sir Herbert Miles Road). Further south, the road passes through the Dudley Ward Tunnel half way along the east side and loops back to the town centre via the southernmost point of the Rock (although the tunnel is currently closed, following a rock fall in 2002).

The northern edge of the site begins at the junction of Devil’s Tower Road and Eastern Beach Road and its southern boundary is at the northern edge of Catalan Bay.

The proposed development site boundary is shown on Figure ES.2. The development will be located partly on land that previously has been reclaimed from the sea and partly on newly reclaimed land. Catalan Bay Road forms the western edge of the site. The north, east and south boundaries will extend into the sea to form an area of approximately 800 metres north to south and 200 metres west to east. The northern part of the land is currently an active landfill site and the southern part is a car park. The landfill material, surveyed in December 2005, was approximately 22.5 metres above ground level. The current height is unknown

but it is not expected to increase in height. It currently stretches approximately 150 metres eastwards into the sea, and is devoid of vegetation. The car park lies approximately 8 metres below Catalan Bay Road and is reached via a steep access road. It serves visitors to the beach and can reach full capacity during the busy summer months.

The southern end of the site abuts the small, curving beach at Catalan Bay and the tight, linear cluster of houses and villas, some at the higher road level and others on the water front below; to the south, the distinctive white form of the Caleta Hotel sits on a rocky promontory. Above, the Rock rises sharply, the bare rock and scree interspersed with the distinctive sloping flanks of the abandoned water catchment area half way down the slope, scattered vegetation, pipelines, bunkers and old walls. Lower down the slopes, evidence of recent quarrying is visible.

The northern end of the site is adjacent to the Rock, which here rises vertically and is almost devoid of vegetation cover. Eastern Beach begins at the site's northern boundary and stretches northwards along the coast east of La Linea as Playa de la Atunara. There are several industrial or commercial buildings and sheds near the beach as well as the airport zone.

3.3 *History of the Site*

The existing land area has been the subject of ongoing reclamation since 1988. The reclamation has taken the form of a landfill site designed to receive inert building and demolition rubble (see Figure 4.5). During its evolution, bunds were constructed in the sea and the internal area was filled by progressively tipping rubble within it. Once the bunded area was filled, tipping continued on the reclaimed land to the extent that can be observed at present and which is set out in more detail in Chapter 4.