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'Temple must submit papers'

Put a stop to extension work until approval is given, state rep tells MPS



Wong says any work conducted at the site must be scrutinised closely as the entire Batu Caves environmental complex is classified as an environmentally sensitive area. – filepic

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THE Selayang Municipal Council (MPS) has to step in and halt the extension works taking place at Batu Caves temple until the temple committee submits a proper application to the council.

State Tourism, Environment, Green Technology and Consumer Affairs Committee chairman Elizabeth Wong said any renovation or extension work carried out at the site must be scrutinised closely as the entire Batu Caves environmental complex is classified as an environmentally sensitive area (ESA).

Wong said any proposed development at an ESA needs the approval of the state-level Committee on Environmentally Sensitive Areas (JKSAS), before owners can start work.

"As far as we know, there is no such application to the state committee," she said adding that the temple committee has to put in an application in the proper manner, only then the authorities could decide if they are allowed to renovate or extend their buildings.

Even as of Sunday, work was still going on at the Batu Caves temple despite an October 6 notice served by MPS that the extension work taking place was illegal without consent from the council.

Batu Caves is also home to several rare endemic animal and plant species.

"This is not just in the Dark Cave, but over the whole area, where you have snakes, insects and plant species not seen anywhere else," she added.

In fact, the Selangor government has just commissioned the **Forest**

Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) last month to do a study of the Batu Caves flora and fauna, with a view towards long-term collaboration.

Previously, *StarMetro* had reported that the temple committee was attempting to legalise 20 major structures within the temple complex, including the iconic Lord Muruga statue, which had been built without council approval.

This was part of a list of conditions laid down by MPS in order to consider a now-aborted RM10mil cable car project mooted by the temple committee.

However, a geological report commissioned by the state government in 2013 showed that the limestone structure of the caves was unsafe for such an undertaking.

When asked about building plans supposedly submitted to the state Economic Action Council (MTES) for legalisation, Wong said no such documents were received.

While tourism was an important aspect, the temple, however, is still a place of worship first and foremost.

"Like it or not, whatever plans they have, before they even lay one brick or concrete, they have to go to MPS.

"Why do they think they can get away with this when everyone else has to apply through the council first?" she asked.