

Scaremongering by speculators



A room with a view... deckchairs, TV antennas and water tank adorn one of the fully-fitted rooms along the Dwejra section of the Victoria Lines.

In his piece 'Oh dear, prices are falling', carried in The Times, Prof. Henry Frenco rightly spoke about the scaremongering campaign by local speculators.

Speculators are feeling the pinch of the slowdown following the surge in property prices, and have made a series of proposals which are preposterous and indecent to say the least.

In fact, through their spokesman Sandro Chetcuti, the property developers have proposed that the government essentially subsidises them by encouraging banks to be more lenient with loans given to speculators. They also asked to use part of the current surplus of housing stock as a complement to the Housing Authority's schemes and to allow mixed zoning - i.e. an interspersing of commercial activity with residential units.

Chetcuti and Co. should get real and realise that they are to blame for the current surplus of dwelling units, with all the hankering by speculators with the Malta Environment and Planning Authority to be granted permits. Mr Citizen is only interested in securing a decent quality of life for himself and his family and not in subsidising, through his taxes, some property tycoon and his glamorous sports car and in having some retail outlet next door. Well done to Frenco - finally, we see an academic who speaks his mind, without fear of retribution.

Landmark programme

TVM's Dissett has broken the mould of stereotyped TV programmes which just scrape the surface of contentious issues.

Last Tuesday's programme, which focused on the government's pledge to free all public land of squatters, hit the nail on the head with its footage and interviews. For example, it was interesting to see former minister Michael Falzon's pledge to the Baħar iċ-Ċaġħaq caravan owners way back in 1990 that the area would be subject to a facelift. The pledge evidently smacks of some form of rubber stamping from the government of the day.

Also intriguing is the footage of Tarcisio Barbara in the 1990s and in recent times calling for the boathouse impasse to be regulated and pledging that boathouse owners would adhere to any guidelines set - as if this could condone the brazen occupation of public land.

While Parliamentary Secretary Jason Azzopardi is to be commended, the fact that the lion's share of the illegal boathouses at L-Aħrax tal-Mellieħa will not be demolished is disappointing.

Political consensus on such an issue is needed to avoid a situation where the squatters involved latch on to any opportunistic political figure.

A mockery of justice at Xlendi

Despite the fact that the La Grotta saga in the midst of the valley at Xlendi has been dragging on for over 10 years, we were once again treated to the umpteenth postponement.

The most recent hearing due for October 24 has been pushed back. Even the courts seems to be clueless about the case, with no date being established for the hearing.

When will Mepa ever deal with this saga?

Hotel conversions

Application number PA 03087/06 calls for the proposed demolishing of the existing Mġarr Hotel and adjacent apartments, to erect two-level basement garages, two-level basement apartments (taken from Triq iż-Żewwieqa) overlying three floors and penthouses.

The promontory over which the Mġarr Hotel is perched enjoys the most beautiful views of the harbour.

One may concede, with some reservations, that the concession of such land in the past to private individuals for touristic reasons was in the public interest.

Now that the tourism, and the 'national interest' lure of the project has fizzled away, isn't it time to return the site to the public? The proposed development, if given the green light, could be detrimental to the cliff floral communities on site, characterised by species such as the tree spurge. Will the Mġarr Harbour site 'redevelopment' set a precedent for further similar scourges, such as the site of the former Jerma Palace Hotel in Marsascala?

No place is too sacred

Despite all the protests a few years ago in connection with the high-rise development at Tal-Virtù and Verdala Hotel and the tasteless molithic apartment blocks which chime with the rural surroundings, two separate planning applications - PA 04342/08, 04343/08 and 04545/08 - have been submitted.

These applications propose the construction of a housing and a residential unit, constituting a further spreading out from the ridge to the cultivated hillsides below, therefore further blemishing the Rabat-Mdina skyline.

In view of their non-rural nature, the proposals run counter to the SET 11 Structure Plan policies which prohibit urban development outside the development zone with the exception of those categories of development listed in paragraph 7.6 (normal and legitimate inclusions of development outside the development zone are farmhouses and other genuine agricultural buildings, reservoirs, picnic area toilets and car parks, and control buildings and walls/fences at archaeological and ecological sites).

Moreover, AHF 4 states that soil conservation and soil saving measures will continue to be mandatory on all occasions; AHF 5 only permits buildings and structures in the countryside which are essential to the needs of agriculture, and RCO 2 prohibits urban development in Rural Conservation Areas.

In accordance with the current pro-environmental disposition of the authorities, these three deplorable planning applications should be thrown out of the window, and it should be ensured that there are no loopholes.

alan.deidun@gmail.com