

Rewarding illegality



Ghar Ghasfur - The coastal stretch at Ghar Ghasfur is the only uncommitted site along the Xemxija-St Paul's Bay stretch. Pending applications threaten this ODZ site.

In her article entitled 'Speculators and Squatters rule, OK', in last Sunday's MaltaToday, Pamela Hansen hit the nail on the head.

Like all law-abiding citizens in this country who would never have the temerity to park on yellow lines, let alone appropriating a coastal stretch, Hansen expresses her bewilderment at plans to construct an electricity substation to the tune of €82,000 in the I-Aħrax area.

Enemalta has justified such a move by saying that the substation is intended to serve the area better and not specifically the boathouse people. It may be sheer coincidence but a fleeting look at a map shows that the only sizeable settlements in the area are the boathouse shanty towns, whose owners have repeatedly complained about an unreliable electricity supply on site, even claiming that a woman was recently electrocuted.

Condoning illegality by pretending to look elsewhere is one thing but to emulate 'Dear Philip', who in the 1980s was so moved by the 'plight' of the I-Aħrax squatters that he paved the way for provision of electricity and other services, is quite another.

We thought that the sordid, lurid days of the 1980s were over - wishful thinking! What kind of signal is this sending to boathouse squatters elsewhere? Isn't this setting a dangerous precedent for Ġnejna boathouse people, for example, who have been served with an enforcement notice, to start clamouring for a slice of legitimacy?

Wiping the slate clean for the I-Aħrax squatters could well lead to similar movements at Baħar iċ-Ċagħaq, Ġnejna, Delimara, Dahlet Qorrot in Gozo and so on.

Xemxija wrack misconceptions

In his letter entitled 'Xemxija Beach' of June 15 in The Sunday Times, Alfred Vella exposes a series of misconceptions which need to be addressed.

Vella claims that 'Xemxija beach is still in a deplorable state, despite all the embellishment that has been carried out around it. The seaweed that accumulated in winter is still left to rot on the beach, spoiling what is otherwise a natural beauty spot. Every year the cleaning-up of this beach is delayed.'

The 'seaweed' in question is actually an accumulation of dead *Posidonia oceanica*, which is a seagrass - such accumulations are common along Mediterranean coastlines and are known as

'banquettes.'

Local tourism authorities delayed the clearing of our beaches for various reasons, including the fact that the beached wrack traps sand particles, helping to protect against beach erosion. This is much less expensive than the numerous beach-reclamation schemes which are being undertaken in areas like Bugibba.

The fact that Xemxija is no longer a bathing zone (at least the innermost part) might explain why this beach was not groomed like all other beaches in April and May.

The real hazard to the bathing water quality at Xemxija is not the seagrass wrack, but the discharges and leaks from the numerous vessels anchored within the bay. Ongoing research on local banquettes has highlighted their conservation importance, as well as their role in buffering beaches from wave-induced erosion.

Blurring village distinctions

While driving through our urban monologue (some call it fabric), do you realise that you are entering a different town? Let's take Naxxar and Mosta, now so intricately entwined, or Fgura and Tarxien, or Birkirkara and Balzan. The green belts or buffers between adjacent villages have been encroached upon gradually by development, with the result that the identity of adjacent villages has merged, only vestiges of the once entrenched uniqueness remaining.

This sad story is set to prevail. PA 00638/08 proposes the construction of an industrial factory in an outside development zone area at the corner between Triq Pantar and Triq it-Torba in Lija.

Besides the fact that the area is outside the development zone, the site has been described by the Central Malta Local Plan as 'a very important strategic open gap that separates and defines Lija from Attard, Mosta and Naxxar.' The application is still under the scrutiny of the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

Further good news from Ta' Ċenċ

After the hasty removal of a wall which was hindering public access to Mġarr ix-Xini from Ta' Ċenċ, the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage has now driven what could be considered as the final nail in the coffin of proposed development in this area.

The superintendence has called on Mepa to schedule the entire Ta' Ċenċ area, by virtue of recent archaeological discoveries which spearhead a better understanding of the historical sensitivity of the site.

This eliminates plans to develop bungalows and villas at Ta' Gruwa and at Mġarr ix-Xini. Predictably, the area is still pot-holed with other archaeological assets and this would explain the owners' hesitation to allow archaeologists into the area.

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