

Carobs and the DCC

Many boats have been rightly rocked over the Ras il-Wied case in Marsaxlokk, with the photos of chain-sawed carob trees posted by Anne Zammit, leaving one at a loss for words. Away from the searing media glare, further down the same valley in Marsaxlokk (Wied Gilji), is a case with similar connotations - 7095/03 in a site at Triq Axtart, Marsaxlokk, where the applicant wants to demolish part of an existing store and tool room and reconstruct them with 3 m front garden and cistern underneath.

As part of this application, a carob tree has been extensively pruned into an almost leafless trunk. To date, MEPA Website has not been updated with the decision regarding this case (taken on June 25).

It seems that Ms Zammit's articles have raised many a hackle - notably those of architect Robert Musumeci, chairman of the BICC and Siggiewi mayor. His line of reasoning - i.e. "the reasons for overturning recommendations are public knowledge and the underlying rationale is at all times guided by objective merits and overriding sound planning justifications" does not convince me, especially when realising that he forms part of that cohort (architects) who are responsible for applying for planning permission on behalf of their clients and at the same time being part of boards and commissions that decide on planning cases.

Some of them, like Mr Musumeci, are even part of political parties - this is simple stating the facts and not any insinuation on my part.

One of the ways that MEPA can bolster its public image is to weed out such conflicts of interest at the source or even hints of such conflicts since the public perception is that such conflicts are rife.

He also claims that much planning legislation is generic and open to interpretation. In fact, such different interpretations have been used by many an architect to apply successfully for sanctioning their clients' developments.

There should be a clear distinction between architects on decision-making boards and those applying for permits (i.e., practising architects should not be nominated on legislative boards).