

More than 1,000 objections to Piano plans - FAA

More than 1,000 objections were submitted to the planning authority on the Renzo Piano City Gate project, environmental campaigner Astrid Vella said this morning.

Speaking during a forum on the environment, Ms Vella, spokesman for the environmental group Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar, said her organisation was not against the regeneration of Valletta but it did not believe that matters were being handled in the correct manner.

The Structure Plan for Valletta, she said, had indicated that all ministries were to be housed in the various palaces around the city. Parliament should also be housed in a vacant palace and money should not be spent on building something from scratch.

She also criticised the €15 million being spend on a roofless theatre.

On Fort St Angelo, Ms Vella noted that this was owned jointly by the Waterfront Consortium, the knights and Heritage Malta. She complained about the lack of funds allocated towards its regeneration.

€2.5 million were needed for its basic restoration, she said, and this was more urgent than the breakwater bridge to nowhere, which was to cost €1.8 million.

She criticised the demolishing of the knights armoury in Qormi, the application for which included the manipulation of the local plan.

While the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage had ordered its protection, the Development Control Commission ordered it to be demolished.

She referred to this as a fraudulent application saying the original building features had not been declared.

Ramblers Association secretary Alex Vella spoke about the controversial Bahrija development saying it was full of false declarations.

He criticised the continuation of works saying that although the original permit, which was to reconstruct original structures with very minor changes, had not been withdrawn, it had expired.

Church Environment Commission president Victor Asciak described the Malta Environment and Planning Authority as a “toothless old dog” since it was not living up to its role of being a regulator.

He declared that the biggest mistake that was ever committed was to give the authority responsibility for the environment, besides planning.

Prof. Asciak called for more accountability, saying that people who made mistakes should be accountable and held responsible.

Mepa auditor Joseph Falzon said that DCC meetings with applicants had stopped and minutes were now being taken of other informal meetings held.

He questioned the professional ethics of professionals within the authority and insisted that Mepa was not receiving good professional input.

The duty of an architect, he said, was not to find loopholes in the law because according to the oath taken, an architect's allegiance was not to his clients but to the state.

Moral and human skills, he said, were as important as professional ones.

Mepa chairman Austin Walker said that the authority was in favour of having someone like Dr Falzon as its auditor. This did not mean, however, that there had to be agreement on everything.

The authority was also in favour of non-governmental organisations and their contribution.

However, everyone should use their energy to work together rather than to attack each other.

Also taking part in the forum were Friends of the Earth, Nature Trust and Birdlife.

Comments

Anthony Pace Gouder (1 week ago)

@ Christian Sciberras

One thing is definitely clear , and i'm very glad about you .

Your preference is not the PIANO (GONZI) Project . Thank God !

As for your doubts , regarding ' technical aspects' .

It's true , hardly anyone , CARED to dwell about the Project and the ONLY person you mentioned , possibly POSSESSING the technical know how (?) resorted in a WAR OF WORDS , (more interested in his TV show - gurnalizmu fuq KOLLOX) insinuating ,arguing and attackin AV .

Again as for the Technical aspect , Professor R. Piano also has to consult and work with Structural Engineers , as the Plans ,as yet , are only a representation of the General Concept . The details i.e Aesthetics , Finishes , Structural Elements ,Services Installations , Materials etc .,are also a big question , probably THE MASTER himself doesn't know !

The Parliament Building , the only real BUILDING in the whole project , is very abstract .

The most important piece of information given ,is the cost . At least Euro 80 m.!

Christian Sciberras (1 week ago)

The problem in Malta is not the environment but the way the Maltese engage in building.

Interestingly, any Maltase building requires double its area to be/while built up.

My thought on this project? The money spent could be more useful such as rebuilding roads or maybe rediscover that tiny island in the north called Gozo.

As to the rest of the arguments, they're just personal c**p thrown in for good measure.

I very much doubt anyone below knows anything about the technical aspects of this project especially (and not surprisingly) Mr Bondi.

There's time at being a jack-of-all-trades, but for the details, I suggest you [people] shut the f*** up or at least cite reputable sources.

Anthony Pace Gouder (1 week, 1 day ago)

@A.Pace Gouder

Reference to my photos of KANSAI AIRPORT and SAN GIOVANNI ROTONDO , which as revised are :

KANSAI

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/9072295> <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/3443218>

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/12416557>

SanGIOVANNI ROTONDO

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/27659524> <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/6310335>

To be frank this interior is quite satisfactory as a modern church.

Anthony Pace Gouder (1 week, 1 day ago)

Why don't we try and stick to the subject ,Mr. Bondi . The impression that the Piano Plans , being the creation of a World Renowned Architect , with SOME even hailing him a Genius, are to be accepted without objection is FALSE and MISLEADING . WHY ? The great majority of his Projects are STRUCTURES built in STRUCTURAL STEEL & GLASS, in a number of which he was in PARTNERSHIP with Structural Engineers . The first time I heard of Renzo Piano was on the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris (1974) Immediately, I was not impressed at all ! vide :- http://www.greatbuildings.com/buildings/Centre_Pompidou.html

His style is not compatible for a kind of Project that befits Valletta City Entrance . And these are other SAMPLES of his Projects :- Popidou Centre - Paris

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/110804> <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/23604060>

Kansai Airport - JAPAN <http://static.panoramio.com/photos/original/12416557> San Giovanni

Rotondo - Foggia ITALY <http://static.panoramio.com/photos/original/963675> BIGO -

Genova Italy <http://www.panoramio.com/photo/11134189> La Cipolla - Genova

<http://www.panoramio.com/photo/25617047> Sorry ,that I could not find any Pia-NO Baroque Projects ! Kif tista ma t' OGGEZJONAX !

George Debono (1 week, 2 days ago)

Hello_____?_____ anybody there ?

@Joe Micallef

Re - "I...appreciate...it...is...becoming...tedious...for...you

Thanks-yes----quite___you lot keep asking the same queastions over-and-over again....---tediouser and tediouser,---as Alice in wonderland would say.

So I'll cut and paste..answers--again

RE....."flak....was....directed....at....the...PN...using the ODZ vehicle, with Victor Scerri as the sacrificial victim".

Oh---not again! All this PL/PL talk is so irrelevant. We've been all over this already(so-more-cut-and-paste:

Paste1)can't you snap out of this idiotic, primitive mind-set where everybody (or every initiative) is categorized as blue or red? It's worse than football...

Paste2)whether or not FAA is in cahoots with PL is totally and utterly beside the point - Paste3)the point is this: the development was to take place on a Natura 2000 site - a site of ecological importance. This was unacceptable. And all kinds of people protested - No politics OK?.

RE - ".....would not let the PL join you activities given they have within their ranks an MP that....."(Paste4) - everybody was welcome at the meeting. It was attended by people of all political persuasions and walks of life. Surely it is not customary to turn people away from a demonstration because of their apparent political allegiance. (and again I refer you to(1)above.)

Please,let's stop going-round-in circles...

G

Joe Agius (1 week, 2 days ago)

@ Joe Micallef

No, on the contrary we thank LP supporters for joining us in our protests, as well as the PN ones. In fact we do ask why there are not more PN supporters who join our public protests. We know for sure there are many of these who have a strong environmental conscience; only, they would not like to be seen participating in any event which could be remotely interpreted as against their party. But our protests are never anti party. We protest against projects that Mepa should never have approved.

Mr Micallef mentions two labour MPs whom we should be chasing. But why we? Why does not the PN do it? Or why does not Mr Micallef himself do something about it? Or why doesn't he attack Mepa instead for not doing its work well? Could it be that no one moves against these LP members because there's more dirty linen to wash at home?

I really don't understand what you mean by the last sentence; if you make yourself clear you will receive a clear answer.

Joe Portelli (1 week, 2 days ago)

WELL DONE to Ms Vella and her friends.

It looks like a long and turbulent road - fighting indoctrination and those that should know better. Please keep it up.

Dont give other a platform to speak from - ignore the muck spreaders who hide behind discussions. They can't spell the word discussion.

Joe Fenech (1 week, 2 days ago)

Astrid Vella:

It's true, Lorry Sant cannot be considered anymore the Maltese icon of environmental disaster. We've had worse since!

Joe Micallef (1 week, 3 days ago)

George Debono I appreciate it is becoming tedious for you! Contrary to the other political fora your organisation chooses to attend, The Times allows counter arguments!

Satisfied? – Certainly yes and now more than ever convinced that the flak was directed at the PN using the ODZ vehicle, with Victor Scerri as the sacrificial victim.

If your organisation had a trace of consistency, you

- would not let the PL join you activities given they have within their ranks an MP that has illegally developed on an ODZ and another MP who is known to be amongst the ones that is able (legally so) to get ODZ developments approved. But as they say the enemy of my enemy is my friend!

- You would not have in your organisation people who, independently of extent, make

applications for developments in ODZ.

I guess It is a question of the more the merrier! I will not bother you anymore and thanks for answers!

Astrid Vella (1 week, 3 days ago)

Lou, read at the small print. I never claimed you "said" that I am a Labour agent, I said you and your colleagues try to PAINT me as a closet Labour agent. Not an invention, I can prove what I say, even in court if necessary.

Lou Bondi (1 week, 3 days ago)

Astrid, your capacity to invent things is staggering. I NEVER said that you are an agent of the PL. Makes you wonder about everything else you say. As for the rest of your cheap shots, they are beneath contempt.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 3 days ago)

Lou, I have been silent about these incidents for years and am only bringing them out now that you and your colleagues are doing your best to paint me as a closet Labour agent. Of course you don't like the fact that when its counted, we've always been there, unlike you. I remind you that all your achievements serve your personal financial gain, unlike that of thousands of NGO volunteers who contribute their time freely. Talk on Lou, talk on.

Lou Bondi (1 week, 3 days ago)

Astrid, once again no personal attacks and the use of foul language is not going to cover up the limpidly clear fact that you are now chickening out of any programme which dares to ask you simple questions. Rather than engage in nauseating self-praise as you do everytime you speak, I let my work speak for itself. The last Media Warehouse Survey showed that 119,00 watch Bondiplus. That's 118,000 more than the signatures you and your movement gathered to oppose Piano's plans.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 4 days ago)

You know Lou,one of the few advantages of my position is that I don't have to take c**p from anyone.I don't give it and I don't take it,and that's what drives you crazy, that you can't control me on your programmes.By the way I've faced Musumeci on TV often enough before my court case but if you think I'm going to give him material to use against me in court,just to suit you,you've got another thing coming.I don't need to prove that I'm not chicken,I have shown I have b***s not only in facing developers and MEPA Chairmen, but in facing the Labour thugs on the famous University Graduation day when they beat up Paul Xuereb and only two girls, Ingrid German and myself stood our ground.But you'll have to ask RCC about that,since you were no-where to be seen.

Sadly,the true blues who love Malta are realising that they made all those sacrifices,got beaten up,missed promotions and lost jobs for nothing.For make no mistake, the treatment being meted out to me is no better than what my father received at Lorry Sant's hands.So yes,I have faced down enough cowardly bullies in my life without having to bother with you.

George Debono (1 week, 4 days ago)

@ Lou Bondi AHA You wrote to Astrid below in this blog "So much for your ethics. For someone who claims to speak in the name of the "people" you certainly have a long way to go before your behaviour and ethics match your high-flying words" Now that's what I call an insult. And "Give you a megaphone and a crowd and you're in heaven. Give you a

microphone and a question and you run like hell." and that's a fine example of mudslinging Prosit. G G .

George Debono (1 week, 4 days ago)

@Lou Bondi My Dear, Dear Lou ! You are doing it again - you are putting words in my mouth. I criticize harshly and even employ a touch of sarcasm occasionally but I NEVER, NEVER, NEVER insult . @ "...called (you) "idiotic" and that (you) have a "primitive mind set". Sorry, you are wrong I did not call YOU "idiotic" or say that you have a "primitive mind set". Please read again what I wrote and confirm that the predicates of "idiotic and primitive" referred to " mind-set" . The word did not apply to you but the typically idiotic (blue or red) mindset so prevalent in Malta . . @ And wrong again when you say "... resorts to personal attacks and mudslinging.." I admit to slinging lots of mud at WHAT YOU SAY but NOT at you. Ditto personal attacks: I attacked what you said but not you personally. Please don't distort. If I ever were to accidentally insult you I would be the first to apologise. G

Lou Bondi (1 week, 4 days ago)

Astrid, Let me see if I get this straight. First you chicken out of facing Victor Scerri on Xarabank with the lame excuse that it was going to be political. Then you chicken out of facing Robert Musumeci on the same issue on the One TV programme Realta with the lame excuse that you're in court with him. Now you are chickening out of any Bondiplus programme on any topic. Do I detect a pattern here? Give you a megaphone and a crowd and you're in heaven. Give you a microphone and a question and you run like hell.

Lou Bondi (1 week, 4 days ago)

Astrid, Unfortunately for you, I have been around the block enough times not to be intimidated by cheap and infantile tactics. The simple truth about your no-show on Bondiplus on the Ramla l-Hamra issue is as follows. First, your claim that you would not be able to participate in Bondiplus because you were going to be abroad turned out to be completely false. In separate conversations, you told Rachel and then me that you were going to be abroad. No insults are going to change this pure and simple truth. Secondly, having taken your word, I had announced (twice) during Bondiplus that you were abroad. I did this so that no one would say that you refused to come on the programme. That was the ethical thing to do. What happened is that a fellow journalist who heard my announcement and then saw you having dinner at the Waterfront texted to say that it was not true you were abroad. So much for your ethics. For someone who claims to speak in the name of the "people" you certainly have a long way to go before your behaviour and ethics match your high-flying words.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 4 days ago)

Lou-You have now revealed your true colours.I remind you that when 'invited' on your programme I told you and your assistant that I had one day between the Ramla protest and going abroad and I intended to spend it with my family.I even agreed to take part while I thought it was in Malta but declined when Rachel told me that it would be filmed in Gozo which would have wasted most of the day I had available.

I also explained that I had my aunt and uncle's 90th birthday party which I would not miss and had to drive my son to as he was on crutches.Let me warn you that I have a witness to those phonecalls who is ready to come forward and testify.As we left we saw your friends watching us and joked that they might be stalking me,but I did not think even you would stoop so low. Infact you messaged me at midnight to show that big brother was watching me,and kept on with your unprintable phonecalls and messages until I boarded the plane next

morning.

Apparently you did the same to others, and that is one more reason not to attend your programmes.

Joe Borg (1 week, 4 days ago)

Looks like Lou is showing off his journalistic skills! Can't he simply accept the fact that everyone has the right to express his opinion! When we are all old and grey, we NGOs (not WE!) can proudly say to our children that we fought to preserve this pristine locality for them @Marinelli It's Winter time in Canada, better start thinking of hibernating!!

jimi Xerri (1 week, 4 days ago)

@Astrid Vella Firstly, I did not say that FAA suggested the Tigullio area as a car park, but that associations from the Sliema / St Julians area did - (please quote correctly!!!!) Secondly, I am assuming you are politically knowledgeable, as you yourself stated that it would be "political suicide" for the government in power to remove the housing at Freedom Square in Valletta. Thirdly, how dare you tell me "highly unprofessional or sadly politically blinkered" when you do not even know me and what my profession is! Do you think you have reached heaven on earth because you went through a degree course in Baroque Architecture?!

Lou Bondi (1 week, 4 days ago)

George, Debono, one of the leading lights of Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar, calls me "idiotic" and that I have a "primitive mind set". My crime? I listed a number of FACTS about the Victor Scerri case which are not music to his ears. Embodying the worst and the lowest trait in the Maltese character, rather than engage in balanced arguments based on facts he resorts to personal attacks and mudslinging. If these are the new saviours of the nation, God help us.

George Debono (1 week, 4 days ago)

continuedHere are more answers:

RE Did...VictorScerri have a legal right to apply as you otherwise so graphically implied in strategically "timed" association with Ramblers and PL.

ANSWER 1: Yes. Absolutely. He had every legal right to apply. Exactly as I have the legal right to build a garage in the middle of St George's (or is it now Palace?) Square in Valletta. Of course such a thing is a n-no - just as a development in a Special Area of Conservation and Natura 2000 site is also a no-no...

The crux is that MEPA should not have (ultimately) given a permit for a development in an ecologically sensitive area (this was fully covered in an earlier blog) - the protest was against the granting of a permit. Even if the applicant had the king of Siam (or a part-time freelance Russian pall bearer - or whatever) it was inevitable that the applicant would get some flak - but the flak was directed at MEPA.

The bit about "timing".....is incomprehensible..

RE.....The issue of.... whether he should have applied or not is irrelevant -

ANSWER 2: Yes....Agree; see above -(the protest was against the granting of a permit) Satisfied?

G

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George Debono (1 week, 4 days ago)

@ Joe Micallef

This is getting tedious.....

RE " you have been moving goal posts for so long"

EH? Meeee ?? Me moving goal posts???

Sorry, Joe - On the contrary I have been chasing Lou's rapidly moving goal-posts!!! I have not raised one single argument (which "holds no water") but kept on answering (admittedly a bit playfully every now and then) Lou's rapidly swerving and dodging questions.

Here are more ANSWERS:

Continues

Joe Micallef (1 week, 4 days ago)

George Debono you have been moving goal posts for so long that by now you have turned the proverbial field to a colander which like your arguments holds no water.

All you say does not answer the basic of all questions. Did Victor Scerri have a legal right to apply as you otherwise so graphically implied in strategically "timed" association with Ramblers and PL. A yes or no is the only answer expected....and that should take you less time then circling around the world trying to convince many that you were not politically motivated. Many people are sure you were but that is subjective!

The issue of whether he should have applied or not is irrelevant and beyond your and my business, that is if you respect the rule of law and the rights of fellow citizens!

George Debono (1 week, 4 days ago)

Dear Lou

You really are wasting our time.

You say " When you and FAA members organised a protest on his site....bla bla bla..."

This was answered in an earlier blog. I wrote: WHERE in heaven's name would you expect an NGO to protest - in the smelly public convenience at Msida?and I queried your delusion that Times readers are stupid.

You say "with the PL in tow" - ABSOLUTE RUBBISH - everybody was welcome at the meeting and it was attended by people of all political persuasions and walks of like.

At a more fundamental level - Please Lou can't you snap out of this idiotic, primitive mindset where everybody (or every initiative) is categorized as blue or red? It's worse than football... by the same token, whether or not FAA is in cahoots with PL is totally and utterly beside the point - the point is this: the development was to take place on a Natura 2000 site - a site of ecological importance. This was unacceptable. And all kinds of people protested - No politics OK?

Now please let me get on with my Christmas shopping...

G

Joe Micallef (1 week, 4 days ago)

James! See I told you did not get the point.

I defend no one least Victor Scerri – In fact I think given his political profile he shouldn't have applied for the extension, but unlike you I accept that is only my opinion and Scerri had every legal right to apply.

I just think it is immoral and unfair to prosecute someone in public, stating factually wrong data! Again judging by your superficiality I reckon you consider that normal! Like praising the beauty of an opera house whilst many struggle to put food on the plate!

Defence of ODZ should be done otherwise.

You are so politically motivated that you cannot understand that the index (which lacks statistical confidence) does not damage the government but Malta. But maybe some basic math will help you - Malta is politically divided. When one party is in government the opposition claims corruption. The PL is doing that (well to be honest only that) - So when a

survey is run what do you expect will happen. What is interesting though is that Malta scored above the mean of the scale which is 5. Given PL effort I would have expected below 5.

Lou Bondi (1 week, 5 days ago)

Re Astrid Vella (4) Going back to the Victor Scerri case, the issue now is quite simple.

Anyone with a bit of grey matter has come around to admitting that for all your campaigning and protests and villification he did not do anything which any other citizen had a right to do.

(6) Today you say, and I quote, "We have never said that Dr. Victor Scerri broke the law"

How utterly disgusting. When you and FAA members organised a protest on his site, with the PL in tow, all the speeches and placards left one central impression: Victor Scerri is a corrupt politician who got his permits because he was the President of the Nationalist Party. Now this turns out to be complete and utter lie. No wonder you are chickening out of every TV that dares to question what you do and say.

Lou Bondi (1 week, 5 days ago)

To Astrid Vella: (1) You claim that we don't do programmes on environmental issues. Two years ago we did a Bondiplus on the Ramla l-Hamra issue. You were invited but declined saying that you were going to be abroad. After the programme, in which I announced that you were abroad, a fellow journalist sent me a picture of you eating at the Waterfront. So much for your integrity. (2) Contrary to your claim, I did not quote the Auditor General selectively. I merely reported what he said on Xarabank, another programme which you chickened out of. (3) I was wrong in my previous post. The current MEPA Auditor General did not issue 1000 permits for development in ODZ when he ran the DCC. He issued 1500! Contrary to what you say, he occupied that post until fairly recently. Your pathetic attempt to intimidate me went so far as to accuse of doing something wrong in getting this information. How ridiculous! What journalist would I be if I did not find ways of getting such information?

Joe Fenech (1 week, 5 days ago)

Who needs a new parliament at the entrance of a city? This is not Ciucescu's Romania!!!

James A. Tyrrell (1 week, 5 days ago)

@Joe Micallef. Are you Victor Scerri's personal minder or is it just a case of following your beloved Government's orders to protect anyone connected to them? You talk of personal attacks on Victor Scerri but I don't remember you complaining about personal attacks on Astrid Vella or Lino Bugeja. Sorry I forgot you were behind most of those personal attacks, sorry blatant attacks.

And perhaps you could tell us what exactly is immoral about doing anything possible within the law to protect ODZ's?

The fact that Malta has slipped to 45th place in Transparency International's 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index from 36 last year and 33 the year before is mainly down to people like you Joe and of course you're beloved Government.

Joe Micallef (1 week, 5 days ago)

James I am sorry but with respect I cannot say that you are getting the idea! Reconstruction or construction of the theatre we had or one replacing it, is a white elephant...we do not have the numbers to sustain a theatre. I regularly visit our jewel that is the Manoel Theatre and I can easily say that 75% of the performances I have been to, were poorly attended. If any money is to be spent it should be on improving those facilities.

On the other hand I think that an open air theatre is an innovative idea that is suitable for Malta's climate. I feel that this will be a special venue!

James A. Tyrrell (1 week, 5 days ago)

@Joe Micallef. Hey Joe, now you're getting the idea. You are exactly right to say that the theatre in question was built at a time when money was no object so to speak. I suppose if they were building it now they wouldn't be able to afford to put a roof on it either. Still, if Malta had restored their opera house years ago, when money was no object so to speak, at least you would have one now instead of a ruin shortly to be replaced with a shell. You know perhaps that was Piano's thinking all along, why give them a fully finished opera house when I can make it fit in with all the other shell form buildings in Malta.

Joe Micallef (1 week, 5 days ago)

Astrid you are as incredible as you are evasive.....You have directly contributed to the personal attack on Victor Scerri and his family. If you were aware or not that is another issue.....to many it was blatant! The issue here is not what you believe should happen of ODZs but the immoral actions to sustain that believe. A case of the end justifies any means.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 4: As regards Perit Falzon's granting of ODZ applications when on a DCC board. I presume that this dates back some years and remind you that regulations change every few years and that awareness of the need to protect of the countryside is only relatively recent. I am very surprised that you have information on the number of applications that were passed by any board as this is classified, inside information not available to the public.

I know that I have wasted my time in writing all the above as, rather than replying with reasoned arguments, I know that you will seek to dismiss, discredit and ignore the above points, which is why I did not bother to answer earlier.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 3: You are quoting the Auditor selectively, failing to report he stated that the Bahrija applications are: "unacceptable, as the safeguards that seek to protect the environment against urban sprawl are being bypassed through a succession of piecemeal applications, resulting in a development that is by far in excess of the originally envisaged 'reconstruction of existing structures with very minor alteration to facilitate use'"

Austin Walker has revoked the permits on the grounds of MEPA's mistakes in processing this application, but fails to mention the architect's failure to indicate the incline of the ground in his applications, a very important point.

Robert Musumeci is free to challenge the revocation of the permits, but I remind him of the Prime Minister's words: "the MEPA reform should include a review of policies to plug loopholes which some people had exploited to the extent that developments went against the spirit of the policies themselves"

Astrid Vella (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 2: Now for your answers: We have never said that Dr. Victor Scerri broke the law, for which reason we never called for spurious police investigations, unlike Musumeci did to me in a move that fell flat on its face.

However applying four times for ever-increasing projects in a Special Area of Conservation and Natura 2000 site is wrong, especially for a person in his position. Now, if the ex-president of the party that has held power for the last 20 years, the journalists that run most programmes on our national broadcaster and a leading PN architect cannot recognise the

difference between right, wrong and illegal, that is very worrying. As Robert Musumeci would have known, the only development that can take place on a Natura 2000 site is one essential to the management of the site, or a project "carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature" – EU Habitats Directive ratified by Malta in 2003.

Does that Dr Scerri's building works just metres from the protected freshwater crab whose habitat has already been impacted by the works, be described as a structure essential to the community? Hardly.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 1: Dear Lou, I'm so sorry I did not jump to your orders. The fact is that, unlike you it seems, I have other things to see to besides obsessing over Bahrija.

Deepest grovelling apologies that I did not mention Labour MP Anton Refalo by name re his enforcements; such petty nitpicking! If you are so obsessed by ODZ issues, how come your company, Where's Everybody, has never in three years held a serious programme on environmental issues where his infringements could be exposed?

Overdevelopment, air pollution, Rationalisation Plans, lack of water, black dust, there's no lack of real problems facing the Maltese public and undermining our health. Instead we've had an endless repetition of programmes on Satanism, ghosts, fortune tellers, superstition, more Satanism, festas, lying, gossip, supernatural events, and now even rude jokes to scrape the bottom of the barrel! All to deflect attention from the real issues that could reflect poorly on government. Do bread and circuses come to mind?

Joe Micallef (1 week, 5 days ago)

@James A. Tyrrell

Judging by your superficiality I feel perfectly suitable for this forum!

If you were slightly more informed you would know that the theatre you mention was built when the area had considerable money accruing from the rubber trade which eventually dried out. The project was a white elephant and continues to absorb substantial funds which could be better used to help improve the livelihood of those illiterate inhabitants! But to you the value of facts is limited to aesthetic and romanticism. Little impressed!!!!

George Debono (1 week, 5 days ago)

Dear Lou

RE".... your clumsy and inelegant attempts to come across as oh-so-clever....."

Please accept my profound apologies for responding to your refined and exquisite contributions to the blog in such a clumsy and inelegant way. But then I am a mere peasant whose appreciation of beautiful things of life does not go beyond Funiculi funicula.

Tum-di-dum, di-dum.

G

Alfred E Baldacchino (1 week, 5 days ago)

The True Colours of Bondi

So Lou Bondi has some doubts on what the motives of RAM and FAA are. Can I ask why Lou Bondi has such a biased stand on the development at Bahrija. Environment protection is the responsibility of one and all, even TV presenters. Lou Bondi has as weekly programme on the National TV Station. He is also morally bound to contribute to the Communication, Education and Public Awareness of Malta's international responsibilities. Malta acceded to the European Community on 01.05.2004. Malta recommended sites of Special EU Conservation Importance. These were approved by the European Union and now form part of

the Natura 2000 Net Work. Bahrija Valley is one of such sites - an SAC, Natura 2000 site. The Competent Authority to see that all obligations are honoured is MEPA, who incidentally issued the development permit in this Natura 2000 site.

So if Lou Bondi does not have any political bias in favour of such development, why does he not produce a programme on EU Natura 2000 sites? This would be of great importance to the viewers, though it might embarrass some. Does Adrian Borg Cardona's comment on the blog answer this question?.

Joe Agius (1 week, 5 days ago)

@ Lou Bondi.

You keep expecting answers to your questions and you yourself haven't answered even one of the several straightforward questions put to you. We don't feel we should answer your questions because to us separating the applicant from his project is specious. We look at the project.

Still, we have told you where to look for the answers: read the Case Officers' recommendations for refusal and the Auditor's comments on the case. Rebut what is said there; you can even quote to us the reasons given by the DCC for overturning the Case Officers' recommendations. When you do that, readers will understand that the 'Yes' you are expecting to your answers will need several qualifications.

Sorry if I pontificated again; but with a person of your stature I have to pose as if I were someone who counts.

Joe Agius (Ramblers – not the Joseph Agius below)

Adrian Borg Cardona (1 week, 5 days ago)

So Lou Bondi is determined to prove FAA and RAM as "political" organisations. Let's say we agree. Well yesterday the Chairman of MePA attended the conference organised by FAA and RAM. So this was a political meeting. Bondi answer this: do you agree that the chairman of MePA should attend political meetings? Answer yes or no -no fudging of issues as you like to do! After all, the whole issue is the destruction of the valley of Bahrija- about which you have not said one word. All you seem obsessed about is defending the exPresident of NP. He is no victim - the Maltese people are the victims of a system orient on pleasing the few and to hell with the rest.

Lou Bondi (1 week, 5 days ago)

George Debono of FAA: your clumsy and inelegant attempts to come across as oh-so-clever cannot mask the simple truth that neither you nor your leader, Astrid Vella responded to a single comma of the FACTS I listed below. Allow me to add another FACT. The MEPA Auditor General, when he was in the DCC, issued about 1,000 permits for development of ODZ sites. Given that FAA canonises this gentleman, can you for heaven's sake tell me what Victor Scerri did wrong by applying to dismantle and rebuild an existing dwelling according to the laws and regulations that exist? This is my final appeal: be a gentleman and respond to the FACTS I have listed. Unless you or Astrid Vella do so, it is obvious what your motivations are.

Joseph Ellis (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 3

One notes that the Opposition was happy to go along with the dishing out of more land for development when there was no objective need.

Another major problem is the lack of consistency in the processing of planning applications. The success or otherwise of an application may well depend on who the case-officer is or in

front of which DCC board it goes. Hardly satisfactory.

Finally, the Development Planning Act is being ignored by the government on several important counts. MEPA chairman should be chosen from the independent members. The incumbent can hardly be termed independent when he is in receipt of a Lm 40,000 annual salary (more than twice that of the Chief Justice or the Attorney-General !).

MEPA board should be made up of from 13 to 15 members : it is instead made up of 9 members.

The Board of Appeal should be appointed for 3 years. It has now been appointed for 1 year. What's the point of having a law if it is so blatantly ignored. No wonder few are confident that MEPA can be effectively reformed.

James A. Tyrrell (1 week, 5 days ago)

@Joe Micallef . Don't you think Joe that if you don't have anything intelligent to say it might be a better idea to keep quiet?

Joseph Ellis (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 2.

Shouldn't the criticism be instead levelled at MEPA for its inertia ? On the other hand, in one case, a permit was issued which has since been revoked whereas in the other, my understanding is that no permit has been issued. So, where is the analogy ?

The real point at issue is a diagnosis of MEPA's real problems. To indulge in partisan bickering is hopelessly sterile and will get us nowhere.

MEPA was conceived as an institution that would remove arbitrariness and politicization in the planning process. It has hardly been an unqualified success and it may well be the case, that things are turning a turn for the worse.

In my view, the first major problem is the inadequate manner local plans have been drawn up. Many of the major controversies are triggered by shortcomings (to put it mildly) in the relative local plans.

Government itself recognized this when it triggered an eleventh hour "rationalization process" which made a sham of all our planning legislation and which subverted the whole planning process.

Joseph Ellis (1 week, 5 days ago)

Part 1

Way back in 2003, just before the referendum on E.U. accession, the Maltese people were led to believe that E.U. membership would usher in a new era where civil society would have a major role in decision-making. The way environmental N.G.O.'s - and especially, FAA - are being constantly reviled by P.N. propagandists just shows that this was all idle talk and that the powers that be never had any intention of relinquishing any of their power.

The siege mentality that these same propagandists are giving away reminds me of the way the M.L.P. used to react against criticism prior to 1987. The "erba' qtates" syndrome is also still very much evident.

I do not understand the logic of attacking an N.G.O. for rightly or wrongly, highlighting a development by a politician whose permit was eventually revoked while allegedly failing to protest against a development by another politician which has been slapped with stop notices. This development must have been the same one that made it to the front pages of In-Nazzjon some years ago and it has since slid in obscurity.

Joe Micallef (1 week, 6 days ago)

Eureka! Astrid is trying to emulate Garibaldi! Next claim will be that she is on a mission to unify these little islands.....never mind they already are. Facts are very subjective to the lady! She's been telling all and sundry she had the Maltese behind her and all she had is 1000 objections.

George Debono (1 week, 6 days ago)

CONTINUED

RE "Thirdly, you pooh pooh Anton Refalo's enforcement notices as just a small mistake." Mistake? What Mistake???----Lou don't twist my words.....what I said was that NGOs had reason to be pleased about this ENFORCEMENT but do you honestly expect NGOs also to take on the duty of the police)or powers-that-be to ENFORCE. Come on!

Whatever next.

Now as to your comment about Astrid Vella referring to "Labour MP" , Anton Refalo as "the Gozo case" and not mentioning the Labour politician's name. This fantastic deduction is really so, so clever. So clever that I am absolutely bemused (er sorry....amused) - and then comes the cherry on the cake- Now you want us to "wave placards in front of the Gozitan (name unmentionable, mind you!) gentleman's house if an enforcement notice has already been served. NGOs are not police.

Finally.....I repeat @ "Austin Walker, the MEPA chairman, said that the revoking of the last of Scerri's permits was to redress mistakes committed by MEPA and not Scerri " Je repete, mon cher Ami, EXACTEMENT - (kemm u sabih l-

ispanjol!)'.....Mistakes.....committed....by...MEPAand....not...Scerri

Come on Lou - Please keep your prejudices to yourself...and don't try to twist what others are saying.

G

George Debono (1 week, 6 days ago)

My dear Lou

Re yesterdays comments-

Maybe I was being modest (as usual :-))) when I said I didn't know much about the case.

Your comment (yesterday, too) missed the point. "... You say that Scerri is not being accused of breaking the law - "all he did wrong was to apply to MEPA". Why is he wrong?....."

The (subtle, he he) point here is that somebody who applies for a permit to destroy a site of ecological value for his personal benefit anyway deserves opprobrium. Somebody who loves the countryside (let alone his mother country) wouldn't do that. But the protests were against the DEVELOPMENT - that it was Scerri's was incidental. OK?

Re "If the land was yours,wouldn't you have applied?" HAND ON HEART - NO! NO! and that's the difference between you and me - and NGO's who want to preserve Malta and make it a better place. OK?

RE " You protested near his land. Are you now a member of the Opposition?" WHERE in heaven's name would you expect us to protest - in the smelly public convenience at Msida? How stupid do you think that Times readers are ?

CONTINUES

clare spiteri (1 week, 6 days ago)

I must congratulate Mrs vella and the other organisations who have had the guts to carry on fighting for what the majority want, and for what is obviously right.The slanderous, personal, comments made by gutter journalists against Astrid vella ,are beyond contempt.Dear Dr

Gonzi, please take note....we do not want money spent on modern gates to the entrance of Valletta,we do not want an open air theatre, nor a new parliment. WE want Valletta restored.All those empty, delapidated palaces are crying out to be put to good use.Have a look at Lombard bank .A prime example of what can be done.We are waiting sir, waiting for you to take the bull by the horns.

Karen Zammit Manduca (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ J. Tonna (Part 2) - May I also give you some food for thought.....Could it be that while a Nationalist Government is in power Nationalist supporters think they can get away with things, whereas opposing party supporters are resigned to the fact that they wouldn't manage? (- with the result that many projects necessitating objection to are, as you claim, of Nationalist partisans.) I know many Nationalists thought this way when Labour was in power for all those years in the 70s and 80s.

In reality, if you look at the complete list of issues FAA has tackled, you will realise that what you are claiming is not true but sheer coincidence.

Karen Zammit Manduca (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ J. Tonna (Part 1) - The first part of my comment was for you. Your first comment was, "...all they do is criticise all the present Government's plans". Obviously they are present Government's plans - if they were past Government or plans, it would be too late to criticise. As for your "concrete" facts, Lou Bondi is not necessarily correct. Also, I don't think you realise that these NGOs work to very tight schedules voluntarily, while also looking after families and perhaps bread-winning jobs, so they cannot pick up everything. When they don't speak up on something, very often it is because it has gone unnoticed for some reason or other. You also don't seem to realise that once a development has been applied for, there is only two weeks' time to send objections.

Conrad Borg Manché (1 week, 6 days ago)

I think the issue is the regeneration of our Capital City Gate and what the Maltese really want and not who gets criticized more than the other about their acts. The politicians have there responsibility towards who elects them and God to judge them. I don't know why everything has to fall in that in a politicised argument. Why everything is reduced to that level. Two wrongs don't make a right. This issue is much more important it will be a part of our identity.

J.Tonna (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Karen Zammit Manduca - The first part of your letter is probably a mix up with other contributors, not mine.

As for concrete facts all you have to do is to have a look at Lou Bondi's contribution down here or else, if you prefer, check the number of protests by FAA and other NGO's. Against whom were they? Reds or blues?

James A. Tyrrell (1 week, 6 days ago)

It's interesting to note that one of the most beautiful opera houses in the world is located in a place where half the population is illiterate and living on about 60 pounds a month.

This opera house is so popular that some of Eastern Europe's best musicians have been tempted from such orchestras as the Kirov to join it's Philharmonic orchestra

It is the location of an annual film festival and is also the location of the Festival Amazonas de Opera, which may give you a clue to its location. I'm talking about the Teatro Amazonas Opera House located in the heart of Manaus in the Amazon Rainforest in Brazil.

Yet from the comments here it would seem that a lot of Maltese are happy to accept a roofless theatre along with whatever other scraps their Government throws to them. Reading some of the comments here I have to say that if I was a member of an NGO giving my time and expertise free of charge for the good of the country, I would say to hell with it and let the country go to ruin. You people simply don't deserve help!

Karen Zammit Manduca (1 week, 6 days ago)
@Robert Caruana -You're wrong!

@Paul Fenech -Recently I was speaking to a prominent politician who gave me to understand that for him (and probably many others) having a piece of architecture designed by Renzo Piano on the Maltese islands is like the prestige of owning an Armani suit or a Rolex watch.....it's not even about liking the item, or the style but about the "designer" name - (pun intended).

@Joseph Cauchi -You say you are sick of NGOs. Does this mean that you are ready to accept anything and everything everywhere? Maybe you don't realise how many citizens turn to NGOs for help because they don't know how to tackle issues themselves, or need support. I'd like to see you campaign for something alone.

@J. Tonna -Very funny ha ha! What do you do AFTER damage has been done? - nothing. The authorities' reply would be that, "It's too late." (-and I am speaking from personal experience.) As for FAA having another agenda, I challenge you to prove it with CONCRETE facts not implications. And not something ridiculous like what one blogger wrote this week- that members of FAA are preparing to contest the next elections under the PL banner.

Marion Pace (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Ms Astrid vella I am sure there are thousands more against the Piano Project even when the times did a survey the percentage was more against then for. For those who are accusing the environmentalists that they are LP supporters I wish to remind you that there are political parties whose main agenda is that of the environment so please do not make hasty judgements. Ms Vella and all environmentalists thank you for fighting for our environment. I have warned of the impact on the environment and energy and sewage etc. when the first properties wer being demolished to be replaced by the concrete jungles, but I am a no-body so everyone igenous me.

Henry J Bonett (1 week, 6 days ago)

It is remarkable how those who are mentally crucified to their party keep ranting constipated inanities. FAA, RAM and others are simply doing the work that the government should be morally doing for us and that has been rendered necessary by the government's complete abdication of its responsibilities as well as of those of the poodle Authorities it establishes. I support a referendum on this Parliament business. In the meantime I am utterly against such an unnecessarily extravagant plan and in favour of restoration where heritage is being left to collapse on its own.

pat camilleri (1 week, 6 days ago)

I was the only one who actually sent in my objection for Piano,s plans. There are 5 adults in my family. The rest feel exactly like I do. Its bad enough that our life has been made a misery

with the constant demolition of perfectly decent period houses in Sliema to be replaced by more flats, which remain empty. The constant dust, noise, enormous concrete mixers which dash up dingli street wrecking the pavement, sheading their load, and causing traffic hold ups. Two pretty houses were demolished at the top of Natalie p. tabone street in Sliema. The wrought iron staircases ripped out. The gardens reduced to stone. Shame on everyone who continues to allow this to happen. Astrid thank you . You have given us a voice.

Karen Zammit Manduca (1 week, 6 days ago)

@Stephen Farrugia -Environment does not only concern emissions, birds and bees.....it relates to everything around us. FAA was set up to campaign particularly for issues that were not tackled by other groups such as the built environment, citizens' rights and loss of heritage.

@Vince Peresso -FAA issued a report on these issues almost three years ago in response to the consultation exercise related to the new Environment Management Building Regulations. A couple of the suggestions were incorporated into the regulations, but still nowhere near the basic necessities for comfort of neighbouring residents. With regard to noise levels at EU acceptable figures, these were included but no date has been given for implementation - meaning to me "probably never". These regulations are now in force, but unfortunately they are being flouted on a daily basis and the last few times I phoned to report infringements, the 24-hour telephone line was not answered.

@J.Martinelli -When estimating how many are in favour of or against, please don't forget the Maltese character of laissez-faire! I'm sure many thousands could not be bothered, are afraid or don't know how to go about speaking up. Apart from all those who simply don't care either way.

Michael Gatt (1 week, 6 days ago)

Yes agreed they were chosen by a few votes majority but not to govern with all this arrogant manner

Lou Bondi (1 week, 6 days ago)

Astrid Vella responds to the serious matter of a Labour MP, Anton Refalo, having not one but two enforcement notices stuck to his countryside villa as "the Gozo case". She does not even deign to mention the Labour politician's name, let alone wave placards in front of his house. Two weights, two measures, obviously. In the meantime, here I am 24 hours later still waiting for an answer from her about the FACTS regarding the Victor Scerri case: (a) Scerri did not break any law or MEPA rules (b) he has asked the Commissioner of Police to investigate him for any wrong-doing (c) Joe Falzon, the MEPA Auditor declared that there is no evidence that Scerri did anything wrong (d) Austin Walker, the MEPA chairman, said that the revoking of the last of Scerri's permits was to redress mistakes committed by MEPA and not Scerri (e) Robert Musumeci, who is Scerri's architect, declared that he is even contesting the withdrawal of this last permit at law. Astrid Vella's silence, 24 hours later, is deafening.

Conrad Borg Manché (1 week, 6 days ago)

Well said Astrid Vella but the people of this country gave up about everything, you can feel the apathy in the air. It would have been better if the people could choose between proposed plans not having only one whether they like it or not. I admire people like Astrid Vella that stands up and gives her views widely. Do you know when the people were consulted? In what colour they preferred the apertures of Auberge de Castille in the notte bianca :-).

Keep it up Astrid

@Joseph Agius and others

If you think that 401387 persons are not against this project I can assure you that you are utterly wrong. Not to tell you that the majority does' not agree with the plans, but this needs a referendum to be proven. I think if a letter was sent to the Maltese people and those interested gave their comments about this it would have been much better and make all the Maltese people feel part of this country not trying to ridicule people who are trying to express their opinions. I think that would have been a democratic act. We had the chance to do it but we preferred not.

Sergio Galea Vincenti (1 week, 6 days ago)

In this day and age, i believe that none of us can or should forget how much our democracy had had to pass through turmoils until anyone could express him or herself without the fear of some form of personal or psychological branding or, worse, retribution. The role of NGOs in various sectors has been instrumental to bridging citizens and the executive and the undisputed role of NGOs is recognised worldwide by the UN, EU and national governments. When one reads the various comments within this news item - of a civilised forum organised by a number of NGOs and which saw the participation of people with different perspectives of the administration of our national and urban environment - one cannot but question whether we have, in Malta, really grasped the fact that people have a right to criticise whoever may be in authority or raise issues of concerns on aspects of our environment or society.

Attacks being made against NGOs and their officials need to be considered rationally by those who are making them since I believe that these posters are doing harm only to their political cause particularly when one considers the general situation in our country.

Denis Catania (1 week, 6 days ago)

Astrid Vella wrote It is just so sad for this country that there still are people of the stone-age mentality who have not matured to accept that one can voice an opinion without aligning oneself with any political party.

Well said Astrid Vella. Will they ever learn ? I hope so, it will make a better Malta.

P Agius (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Astrid...

Agreed 100%...This nation's opinion is driven by the separate agendas set by the political parties...It is very sad to note from comments below that for the majority the Partit Nazzjonalista of Partit Laburista are more important than the country/Nation itself (with all that comes with it being its culture or environment etc etc) ...I

Frans Micallef (1 week, 6 days ago)

Auditor Falzon stated: an architect's allegiance is to the state – so if an architect penetrates through the law of the state, so much as he can go around it and win cases for his clients who form part of a state, he is prescribing his allegiance to the state. Thanks Mr Falzon for enlightening us. You are so bright

Astrid Vella (1 week, 6 days ago)

Those who are doing their best to portray us as secret agents of the PL are simply admitting publicly that there is no criticism as effective as that which comes from within. It is not possible to dismiss our highlighting environmental abuse as being driven by a political agenda to gain votes at the next election as by now the people know that we are not going to run for any elections. Similarly we are not doing it for any ulterior gain as all we get from this

work is loss of time, money and peace of mind.

It is just so sad for this country that there still are people of the stone-age mentality who have not matured to accept that one can voice an opinion without aligning oneself with any political party.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 6 days ago)

@Jimi Xerri, I assure you that if we could suggest the removal of the Government flats from their present site we would, but I have got bored of repeating in these columns that over the last few years, Government has deemed fit to sell some of those flats so even if it had the will to dismantle them (which would be political suicide) it can't.

Kindly note that FAA never suggested the use of the Tiguglio area for the car park; that was the residents' suggestion.

As for the number of objections, when you think that the last national election was won by a margin of about 1,500 votes, 1,000 objections does not seem so few any more. Remember that this was not a petition or a national vote but simply an email objection circulated to FAA supporters. It is therefore far from a proportionate benchmark of national opinion and anyone who is suggesting that only 1,000 people do not agree with the plans for the Opera House and Parliament is either highly unprofessional or sadly politically blinkered

Joseph Agius (1 week, 6 days ago)

Wow it seems that 401387 people do not object to Piano plans!....and I am not including the dead!! Keep on going with the plans please.....the majority insist....although we respect asty's criticism...anyway we are used to that!

p agius (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ most of you...

I just don't understand why most ppl in this blog are attacking FAA when it is one of the few organisations in Malta representing the voice of the majority of the Maltese Nation on such an issue. The fact that only 1,000 objected doesn't mean that these are the only dissatisfied citizens. Those are the ones that made their voice public.....What is sure is that the nation never requested a parliament and the government is giving us a parliament as soon as we step our feet in Valetta.. We always cried for a decent theatre and the government is giving us a roofless theatre (which is not even convenient for summer when one considers that there is the annual MTV concert, three summer feasts in Valletta (Tal karmnu, Santu Wistin and San duminku), three other summer feasts in the surrounding port area (St. Lawrence (bigu) St dominic (birgu c, Trinity (kalkara), at least two week long wine festivals (delikata and Marsovin) and occasional rock concerts)....etc etc And the list keeps on going.... Were proper considerations made by Piano on the massive parking problem in Valletta...? The answer is NO NO NO. Don't misunderstand me...

J Martinelli (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ r millam - Part 1

Good for you to point my mistake but yours is just as erroneous. In haste I divided 1 by 400,000 instead of 1000 by 400,000 so the percentage of objections is really 0.0025. I apologize for my error, nonetheless it is still insignificant and the 1000 seem to think they can wag the dog by its tail.

@ John Zammit & Lewis Ellul

First of all here in the part of Canada I live in are still waiting for a good snowfall and when it comes, we shovel it or have it shovelled for us and not 'scrap' it. We live in a million plus

square miles of a country while you live in a measly 122 square miles, so here we have no such problems because there is much room to expand and build whatever suits you. You have to choose, either build upwards (many object already) or infill the small spaces remaining (yet more objectors).

You are constantly wanting it both ways, politicize everything under the sun while you sit back like your favourite party and offer nothing in way of solutions.

Continued

J Martinelli (1 week, 6 days ago)

Part2

I comment from this distance because (1) I have no connection with ANY political party in Malta, (2) I am as Maltese as you are and always will be, hold the same passport and privileges as you (except vote) and (3) I have the luxury of seeing the vast chasm which separates reality from your distorted views about doing business.

And yes, we have local scandals including the unexplained loss of billions by a government (no longer in power) ministry, the broken promise that the GST(=VAT) will be scrapped, the payment of millions of dollars paid as penalty for the cancellation of a contract for helicopters twenty years ago while even after reinstatement by the present government the military still waits for delivery. These ARE real scandals. The LP's objection to moving a statue to a different location is puerile and stupid. If you want to go into the BWSC and the demand of a public inquiry because the LP says so, there's also a parallel here, but ten years after the 'perceived' scandal involving a former PM , the inquiry still goes in circles and may yet carry on for another year at great expense. Who wins?

Conrad Borg Manché (1 week, 6 days ago)

Why is everything politicised in this country? How sick. This project is going to cost millions of which each and every citizen pays his share right. Did any one of those paying (apart from a few government MPs) was consulted, of course not, not even the chamber of architects. Piano was brought here plans were designed and that is it. What Piano does we have to accept because he is Piano the god of Architecture according to some. The decision was taken even before the plans were made. I think that this project doesn't make sense in the first palce because as long as the structures on the left will remain there it's like we say in Maltese "Inraqqu il-Pannu bil qara ahmar" but as long as Piano is the architect all of this is fine. The knights of Malta left us with all these treasures and we are ruining or leaving them deteriorating. Poor country and poor Maltese people.

James Grech (1 week, 6 days ago)

Mr PM, it would be better for Malta if gov takes the money intended for this project and tries to invest in the building of SmartCity. The Dubai group is in trouble due to a recent crises. Prioritise, Prioritise, Prioritise!!!!

J.Tonna (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Joseph Cauchi - I agree with you, these NGO have another agenda and not the interest of Malta and the Maltese. After all they only managed to gather 1000 signatures. It is quite clear that the others do not agree with them.

J.Tonna (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Galea L. There is no need for a referendum. The majority of the Maltese chose the PN and Prime Minister Gonzi to Govern Malta and that is what he is doing. When his term expires we will see.

Paul Barrett (1 week, 6 days ago)

From reading the article, my understanding is that there were 1000 official individual objections to the Piano plan. There is quite a difference between the amount of objections submitted verses the number of individuals in the whole population who may not agree with the plan.

In my own personal opinion I believe the new Parliament building would be a mistake - it does not fit in with the rest of the architecture of the City.

Another consideration should be that where MP's are proposing a major controversial enhancement for which they alone will benefit at tax payers expense, (i.e., a new Parliament building) then a referendum could well be in order.

jimi Xerri (1 week, 6 days ago)

@Joanne Pace

I know that area is already a car park, therefore the suggestion follows that it should be increased. Where!!! You cannot go below ground there, as it is very close to sea level, unless someone wants to spend a horrendous amount of money on building a structure which is tollerant to sea water, in such a tight space.

I once more suggest, REMOVE that parking, the Tigullio site and any other structure within the valley and make it green!!!

JOANNE PACE (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ jimi xerri, We Balluta residents assoc. suggested the TIGULLIO area for a car park because it already is used as a car park and it used to be the Spinola and St.Julians bus terminus a few years back, whether under or over its a car park anyway. I personally disagree with large car parks , they only attract more cars to an area already congested with cars, horrendous pollution and confusion. I suggest an immensely improved public transport system.

Galea. L (1 week, 6 days ago)

Ian Bugeja

It's the other way round Bugeja. Piano does NOT deserve our capital.

If you are so sure that the majority of Maltese citizens are not against the Gonzi-Piano vandalism of our capital city, why don't you persuade Gonzi to hold a referendum? After all, its our taxes that have to make good for this vandalism of a fortified city without a gate and breaches in its walls, a parliament on stilts as used by clowns, and a roofless theatre.

Lewis Ellul, John Zammit,

You are perfectly correct. He is the number 1 pn apologist in far-away Canada.

Robert Caruana Can you have an internal look at the PN?

Michael Seychell Simply referring to the past when the environment was never such a big deal to validate the present mass environmental rape and destruction wreaked by the PN administration is no excuse.

vince Peresso

Why is it inevitable that a large plot will be built? Are you so resigned to this environmental damage that you fell you cannot do anything aboutit? And did not the two rooms form part of the armoury and if so why were they not restored?

JTonna Prove it

Joseph Cauchi (1 week, 6 days ago)

I am sick and tired of these so-called NGOs who want to pontificate....

Could someone please explain to me why is it that every time the Government embarks on any new project, one always find some certain NGOs that come out on full attack against these projects?

Isn't it obvious that these NGOs' sole mission is to obstruct, hinder and deter any development that might be beneficial to our Nation as long as it is a PN project?

Since when have these NGOs become so important that they pretend to speak on behalf for the whole nation when they only managed to garner just a few hundred signatures against the Renzo Piano project?

If this is not a systematic plan, I don't know what is!

I do not expect Lino Bugeja, Alex Vella or Astrid Vella to answer!

Obviously they do not speak in my name.

Isn't perhaps that the media, including the Times, falling into the trap of giving these NGOs more exposure and importance than they actually merit and indirectly and unwittingly promoting a hidden agenda of a political party?

JC.

jimi Xerri (1 week, 6 days ago)

Oh Astrid!! You managed to collect 1000 signatures!!! WOW!

If you want to protest about something real in Valletta, then how about the housing estate at city gate. I think it would be best if the FAA spent its resources to get this project done with the addition of the removal and relocation of that horrendous facade, which has nothing in common with the surrounding area. Or is it, that whatever is Labour is good!!! This is like the suggestion made by pressure groups in Sliema / St Julians area not to use the Balluta square for an underground carpark, whilst they proposed the Tigullio area, which is the tip of a valley, as a substitute site. In my opinion, remove the Tigullio site altogether and any construction within the valley, and let it breath green to the area again.

marisa micallef (1 week, 6 days ago)

is mr seychell so blind as to have anyone believe that everyone who criticizes the government must be a labour supporter. what a ridiculous statement.who knows how anyone will ever vote!!! but that is gonzi pn. anyone who is against anything this govt does must be labour, people vote PRIVATELY every 5 years and in the meantime everyone has every right to oppose a govt project and not to be labelled. as supporting one or the other. this is meant to be a free country.in mr seychells case free to in his opinion to label anyone politically !!!dont insult the intelligence of faa and many others who support them mr seychell

JOANNE PACE (1 week, 6 days ago)

FAA are quite right and the Renzo Piano plan is not good just because its Renzo Piano, any way i suggest we call the new theatre when its built, THEATRE OF THE WINDS....

Martin Galea De Giovanni (1 week, 6 days ago)

Friends of the Earth Malta was also co-organising this event and was represented by Prof. Edward Mallia.

Astrid Vella (1 week, 6 days ago)

@Michael Seychell: in another blog Joe Agius of Ramblers has told Lou Bondi that they certainly back his initiative on the Gozo case and we will certainly press for action on this enforcement.As for organising demonstrations, God forbid we had to organise a demonstration for every ODZ infringement or we would be demonstrating every day. Since

you know so much about this case, could you tell us if it is in a Special Area of Conservation and Natura 2000 site like Dr. Scerri's? I highlight the fact that on such sites the only development permitted is structures essential to the management of the site and ecosystem within. Hardly the case at Bahrija.

As for the other issues you raised, they are hardly within the remit of an environment group. However, it is rather fatuous to say that you never saw Lino Bugeja or me at demonstrations of thousands, though I assure you that I was there. Similarly I can ask you where you were when I was being attacked and on another occasion, beaten up.

Ian Bugeja (1 week, 6 days ago)

1000 objections doesn't mean that the majority of Maltese is against this project. The theater although in ruins can still have its glory as an open air theater.

Our capital deserves Piano's plans, and listening to people who disagree is simply a waste of time.

Paul Fenech (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Jason Attard

Valletta was built under a baroque style, and the Royal theatre was built in a much different style which, beautiful as it was alone, stood out of place. So why build using a modern style you ask? I.M Pei used modern style to build the pyramid in the middle of the Louvre palace. Many criticised his works before construction but it was very much praised after being built. I believe Renzo Piano's style will be of similar effect.

I do not criticize the budget spent to build what is probably Malta's most important touristic attraction and although more funds are required for St. Elmo, I do believe that the budgets are allocated properly.

Conrad Borg Manché (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Mr Tonna.

I absolutely don't agree with you about this statement. I am sure that the majority of the Maltese people are indeed in favour of a drastic regeneration for our poor and unwelcome Capital City Gate but I am also sure that the majority would change Architect Piano's plans of moving the parliament into the entrance of Valletta and converting the Opera house to a Greek theatre. The Maltese people and our architecture deserve better respect. A lot of mistakes have been done in the past I am referring to the demolishing of the beautiful old houses to build profitable mass productive buildings all over the island especially Sliema and St Julian's. In my opinion the Piano capital city gate project would be a monument commemorating this shameful act.

I think better use money to upkeep the bastions before it's too late!!!

c. camilleri (1 week, 6 days ago)

Pity that we so much unknown talent in these island.

Emile Cassar (1 week, 6 days ago)

Prosit FAA... X'injoranza certu kummenti.

Lewis Ellul (1 week, 6 days ago)

Mr Martinelli should do everybody a favour and stick to matters Canadian. I'm sure he'll find scandals to write about in his adopted home. But apologising for Malta's PN government and party whatever the issue is fast becoming nauseating to the readers of this on-line newspaper.

Malta needs people like Astrid Vella of FAA, Alex Vella of RA, Profs Axiaq of the CEC and Auditor Joe Falzon - to safeguard our environmental interests. .

John Zammit (1 week, 6 days ago)

To J. Martinelli: has the snow started to fall in Canada? Why don't you concentrate how you are going to scarp it from behind your front door and leave us in peace once and for all. If you want to comment why don't you comment on the stringent buliding regulations in your adoptive country. I am more than sure that most of what you have been defending would not be dreamedof being applied for in,yes again, your adoptive country, Canada.

r millam (1 week, 6 days ago)

J Martinelli

over 1000 out of 401,000 is aprox 0.25% not such a small number

Conrad Borg Manché (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ Mr Tonna.

I absolutely don't agree with you about this statement. I am sure that the Majority of the Maltese people are indeed in favour of a drastically regeneration for our poor and unwelcome Capital City Gate but I am also sure that the majority would change Architect Piano's plans of moving the parliament into the entrance of Valletta and converting the Opera house to a Greek theatre. The Maltese people and our architecture deserve a better respect. A lot of mistakes have been done in the past I am referring to the demolishing of the beautiful old houses to built profitable mass productive buildings all over the island especially Sliema and St Julian's. In my opinion the Piano capital city gate project would be a monument commemorating this shameful act.

I think better use money to upkeep the bastions before it's too late!!!

Robert Caruana (1 week, 6 days ago)

FAA's credibility is in shambles. They are now considered by many as Labour activists and nothing else.

Alan Pulis (1 week, 6 days ago)

And what about Malta's historical gem - the not-so-silent city of Mdina. The time will come when the medieval city will start experiencing some sort of economic renaissance and the beginnings of it are already evident. Nothing wrong with that as long as the whole thing is properly managed through adequate policy that is properly enforced.

But let's hope we are sensible and capable enough to strike the right balance between preserving Mdina's unique medieval character - which, in quite a number of cases, seriously requires restoration from an architectural viewpoint, costly as it may be - and perhaps allowing the place to develop a stronger but sustainable economy of its own.

Michael Seychell (1 week, 6 days ago)

Consequent to Lou Bondi's comments yesterday addressed at Ms Astrid Vella, I was looking forward to the announcement by Ms Vella and the Ramblers that they will be holding a demonstration in Gozo to protest on an MLP/MP who despite stop orders issued by MEPA continued the development of his villa .

Maybe today Ms Astrid & Mr Bugeja will confirm thier allegiance to JM/MLP, in which case we will not blame them for closing their eyes on Red Projects.

My last point I am awaiting such confirmation, as I have never seen Ms Astrid nor Mr Bugeja in any demonstration against the Grave Sins committed in the past, whether these

demonstrations were on the permits issued in GREEN AREAS - today's ODZ - or on other immoral actions by the regime and Party in Government, such as the ransacking/breaking artifacts of the Archbishop's Curia the closure of Church Schools, and attaching the MUT Headquarters, amongst others, albeit if I am not mistaken Mr Bugeja was a teacher at that time.

I look forward to Ms Astrid's and Mr Bugeja's comments, whilst I will ignore other comments such as those that I live in the Past.

Michael Seychell

Tal-Pieta

victor pulis (1 week, 6 days ago)

It means that the majority of Maltese do not care about their heritage rather than that the majority are in favour. See the article carried yesterday in this paper and you'll see how much the Maltese are conscious of their cultural legacy.

Concerning St. Angelo, lately, scaffolding has been set up against the cavalier and the bell giving the indication that some kind of work is being done but the 1.5 million voted in the last budget is not anywhere enough to restore this majestic fort. I only hope that my grand children who are not born yet will someday look across the harbour and see the fort in all its glory and not some heap of stones. Finally I stand to be corrected but I was under the impression that the bridge to nowhere is to cost 2.8 million not 1.8. perhaps we'll get another week of celebrations when it's finished.

M.Azzopardi (1 week, 6 days ago)

@J.Tonna - share exactly your same opinion

Oscar Cassar (1 week, 6 days ago)

The Church Environment Commission... every time I hear such a name I think it is a joke.

Oscar Cassar (1 week, 6 days ago)

What a pity having a knight's armoury in Qormi and now parts of it had been demolished. It seems that everything is progressing as normal, with the Local Council still having not even issued a public statement on such an issue. What a shame.

Jason Attard (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ M. Tonna

SPEAK FOR YOURSELF !!! I agreed whole heartedly with the FAA and I can assure I am no member of any of these groups.

Renzo Piano's plans for Valletta in my opinion are shamefully RUBBISH. A million euros spent to tell us what most did not want to hear. I keep insisting that the theater should be rebuilt in its former glory with the interior being the new parliament. We have some very capable architects in Malta who can design this without spending so much money.

Underneath the square build a car park and embellish the surface... (the gov did a great job with St. George's square).

As for the entrance I agree with Piano's plans. There is no other alternative in reality.

The REAL bottom line is that the gov has NO MONEY to rebuild the theater to its former glory allura "lets do it the maltese way" by letting a foreigner do something.

Carmelo Aquilina (1 week, 6 days ago)

@ J Tonna

No it means that most don't know or don't care.

Make your arguments on the facts rather than personally abuse or politicise.

Labour in the 1980s used to do the same and PN were happy to speak up in their favour as long as it was scoring political points. When PN were in Government the tune changed and environmentalists were made out to be Labour stooges. Elsewhere in the UK, US, Australia, etc active citizen's groups have been instrumental in keeping Governments on the straight and narrow.

More kudos and courage to FAA and RAM !

vince Peresso (1 week, 6 days ago)

The correspondent reports that Ms Vella "has criticised the demolishing of the knights armoury in Qormi"

Well the armoury is still standing and is currently used as the Qormi Police Station which was ably restored to its pristine state both outside and inside by a member of the police corps some years ago. What were demolished were two rooms which during the years had suffered a lot of damage to open garage doors. What needed to be salvaged has in fact been preserved. Of course I would have preferred to have a garden and more fresh air in front of my home, but it is inevitable that at some time a large plot of land would be built up. After all the area was always planned to be built.

The problem is now the noise pollution that such a development is creating in residential areas. I must say that heavy machinery should NEVER be used in heavily residential areas and work should be limited to decent times.

E. Vassallo (1 week, 6 days ago)

????????????????????

J Martinelli (1 week, 6 days ago)

Beautiful!

0.0000025% of the total population is against Renzo Piano's project and the spokesman for FAA expects that this negligible number of complaints should stop the project when 99.9999975% are for it!

If Astrid speaks on behalf of 0,0000025% of Malta's population, she should try another strategy or fold up FAA !

How many of the 1000 objections she claims came across FAA, were solicited by FAA ?

What tangible proof does she have to back up her statement?

Maybe we should scrap MEPA altogether and future applications should be sent to Ms. Vella for vetting and eventual approval/dismissal!

An alternative she has is to join (officially) the Partit tal-Le (PL) and call a spade a spade.

Stephen Farrugia (1 week, 6 days ago)

I can't understand why 'environmentalists' are being considered... it's an URBANISED city... there is no concern for the environment, unless there are toxic emissions which there isn't.

The issue is on an aesthetic value, where the first thing you'll see when you enter the city is a long, narrow road.... that's how we want to portray the majestic capital city? With all due respect... if that's the case, I think Birgu should become the new capital city.

marisa micalef (1 week, 6 days ago)

well done faa

to whom thinks the 1000 petition means the majority are in favour

do you think you would win a vote on the parliament building moving to freedom square if we had a referendum about it??

i doubt it

almost all civil society is against the parliament building there though yes in favour of some of the other positive aspects of the piano project of course

govt must reconsider the parliament building aspect as well as the unsuitability and

impracticality of the roofless theatre romantic as it appears

as with balluta car park popular will.. will prevail if enough people have the courage to speak out and not rely so heavily on faa

James A. Tyrrell (1 week, 6 days ago)

Austin Walker said that the authority was in favour of non-governmental organisations and their contribution but that everyone should use their energy to work together rather than to attack each other. What exactly is that supposed to mean? Is he saying that the NGO's should basically keep their mouths shut unless what they say is in agreement with MEPA and the Government?

I agree with Victor Ascjak when he said that MEPA should never have been given responsibility for the environment. The role of MEPA should be to deal with planning issues only. Once MEPA have verified that the planning side of things is legal and above board the application should pass to a separate environmental authority who will have the final say on whether an application is passed or not.

If this type of procedure was in place and personnel who had the full support of the public and the various NGO's operated the environmental authority then perhaps people could start to believe in the Governments commitment to environmental protection. As it stands at present they can't.

J.Tonna (1 week, 6 days ago)

IT MEANS THAT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE MALTESE ARE IN FAVOUR OF THE RENZO PIANO PLANS.

I have lost all confidence in these people who call themselves 'environmentalists' when all they do is criticise all the present Government's plans. What is exactly their agenda???