

The Council of the Kamra tal-Periti, together with very concerned NGOs, including Fondazzjoni għal Ambjent Ahjar and the Sliema Heritage Society, are once again calling for the authorities to be more resolute and effective in the protection of our historic built heritage. We add our concern to that of Din I-Art Helwa who have also expressed their dismay. As in the case of the Sea Malta building, it seems that the demolition of part of Villa Ignatius, Balluta, was sanctioned by an approval issued under LN 258 of 2002, Development (Removal of Danger) Order. It is not clear whether the approval covers all the parts of the building which have been or are being demolished, because the relative drawings are not available on-line.

In any case, the Planning Authority is reminded that: (a) Art.2 (b) (iv) of this LN does not allow any "remedial" works to affect the integrity of a historic building (even if not scheduled); (b) Art.4 (3) requires that any order under this LN can only be issued on the basis of a detailed site inspection, establishing the relative danger, by a perit "appointed by the Authority"; (c) finally, Art. 2 (b) (iii) limits any works approved under this LN only to the removal of the danger - and this could be in the form of emergency propping.

In addition to this, it is to be noted that the works which should have been carried out are subject to a decision by the Court, in relation to the ingress of water, and not about any dangerous structures that required intervention. The Planning Authority, in its decision, limited the works to be carried out to those ordered by the Court, which refers to "necessary remedial works". It is evident that the works being undertaken go well beyond the Court's order, and the Planning Authority is under a legal obligation to immediately halt such works.

The Planning Authority has the responsibility towards society to ensure that the Legal Notices it operates under are fully respected, and especially to ensure that on-going development does not imperil our diminishing built heritage. The Planning Authority has the duty and power to declare any approvals issued as null and void, when the qualifying conditions specified in the Legal Notice do not exist, or where the approved works are not carried out in "strict compliance with the terms of the authorisation".

It is also legitimate to ask where the other authorities are. Has the Building Regulation Office verified that the demolition process is in accordance with regulations? Has the Occupational Health and Safety Authority been alerted on the work practices of the workmen involved? Does the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage have any opinion on the destruction of this quality of built heritage?

This country has many rules and regulations on paper, often uncoordinated; it is therefore easy for such rules and regulations to be ignored with impunity. In other countries, when heritage buildings are destroyed in defiance of regulations, the Courts order a reconstruction!

This vandalism has to stop