

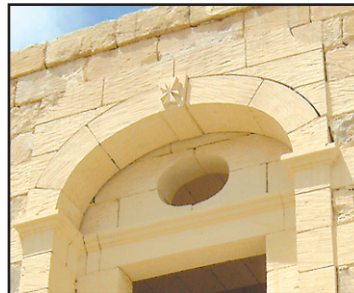
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MEPA turns up the heat on Astrid Vella



THE spokesperson for the environmental organisation Flimkien Ghal Ambjent Ahjar is the target of an enforcement order by one of the FAA's own targets – the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

The outspoken Astrid Vella, who mobilised hundreds in protesting against the government's extension of building development zones and MEPA's decision to allow the development of 23 villas in Gozo's Ramla l-Hamra, had infuriated the authority's chairman Andrew Calleja after alleging irregularities in the planning process over the Ramla development.

MEPA board chairman Andrew Calleja reacted by declaring he would "boycott" Astrid Vella, a hazy claim after the FAA spokesperson called for MEPA's board members to resign.



MEPA turns its guns on Astrid Vella: an enforcement order is issued against the woman at the forefront of protests against the proposed development of 23 villas at Ramla l-Hamra

The subject of the enforcement order concerns an unauthorised window and keyhole window in her second home, which is situated in an urban conservation area.

The window had not appeared in the architect's plans for Vella's summer residence in Xewkija, Gozo.

When contacted, Vella said her

architect had inadvertently left out the window and the keyhole window from the plans. "This balcony is different to that in the permit drawings as our contractor decided to create one that would enhance the street corner and be more in keeping with the UCA, so he added a traditional 'locc' or keyhole window above the balcony door, measuring approximately 24 x 18 in.

"The bedroom window that the architect forgot to include in the original plans is on the main road but MEPA contended that there 'might be issues of privacy'. My architect assures me that in all his long years of practice as an architect he has never been told that a window overlooking a road, let alone a main road, poses issues of privacy."

She said that everything was

now regularised with MEPA and that there was nothing irregular with her second home, which will also house a swimming pool.

Vella has been at the forefront of a campaign to sensitise public opinion about the destruction of the national heritage at the hands of encroaching construction and mega-development projects.

Managing to mobilise hundreds of mainly middle-class protestors, Vella has come to symbolise the new face of civil society in Malta.

An anonymous letter sent to newspaper editors gave details of her Gozo house infringement which was noted by MEPA on the 30 March, 2007. Vella's MEPA permit was granted in November 2002.

(see Saviour Balzan page 11)

'It's back to Lorry Sant's days' - Carmel Cacopardo

JAMES DEBONO

THE former PN candidate Carmel Cacopardo, who is embroiled in a row over the Malta Environment and Planning Authority's refusal to re-appoint him as an investigator of its planning decisions, has stated that the authority's objection to his participation in a Green Party meeting was "a throwback to (former Labour minister) Lorry Sant's time".

Cacopardo's participation in a discussion organised by Alternattiva Demokratika with NGOs on the topic of MEPA

reform has been cited as one the reasons by MEPA chairman Andrew Calleja for Cacopardo's ineligibility for re-appointment as investigating officer in the Audit Office.

"There was only one person who treated me like this in the past: Lorry Sant", Cacopardo said, who in 1984 was fired from the Works Department and physically evicted by the police from his office after writing articles criticising the Works Minister in the Nationalist party organ In-Nazzjon.

In a landmark judgement in 1986, the Constitutional

Court decreed his dismissal as tantamount to political discrimination.

Following his participation in the AD meeting, Andrew Calleja declared that Cacopardo is too "pre-conceived" in his ideas to be trusted in his post. He also criticised Cacopardo for writing an article calling for an overhaul of MEPA structures. According to Calleja "the audit office's function can never be associated with the kind of bias and pre-conceived ideas," he wrote in the Times article.

▶ page 5

MUT stops Church from firing gay teachers

JAMES DEBONO

THE Malta Union of Teachers has had to intervene to stop the termination of four gay teachers from their employment in Church schools over the past five years, president John Bencini has told MaltaToday.

Refraining from mentioning the schools involved, Bencini said the Church schools were subjected to pressures from parents of children attending these schools.

In one particular case the teacher involved was also subjected to insults written on the blackboard by his students.

No cases of discrimination against gay teachers were ever

reported in state schools, Bencini said.

MaltaToday asked the Curia to comment on these cases and to state the Church's policy regarding gay and lesbian teachers employed in its schools. A spokesperson for the Curia said the matter was being followed up and a reply would be given "as soon as circumstances permit."

▶ page 4

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