

Letters to the editor – November 14, 2023

Today's letters sent by Times of Malta readers

Opinion

Letters

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Pencil development landmark ruling

A ruling (“Landmark” ruling against pencil development could ‘shape future decisions’ – March 21) has truly wiped out the development potential of existing air spaces on the subjective pretext to identify, protect and enhance the character and amenity of distinct urban areas. This is taken from the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED 2015), the urban objective 3.

Why am I saying subjective? Circa five years ago, I had found myself within a Żabbar government two-storey estate, as access via the Hompesch arch was cut off. My experience was a pleasant surprise as it had reminded me of the 1980/1990s’ constructions. However, on discussing it with various players, the reactions received varied, with many responding that, unfortunately, there is not much to preserve of works undertaken during that period.

Carrying on from here it is observed that besides being a planning issue, it is also an economic one. These properties belong almost entirely to the baby boomers who had invested wisely in purchasing their own residence. These baby boomers are now almost in their entirety pensionable and were all property rich.

This is the reason why present-day pensioners are carrying on with their good quality of life, not because of their €1,000+ monthly pension, or even less if they are on a lower tier, but due to having been property rich. Many pensioners have capitalised on their properties and have achieved a substantial amount of money on downsizing their residence.



A street that was saved from a so-called pencil development. Photo: Matthew Mirabelli

Now this ruling has, unfortunately, created a two-tiered baby boomers society, those that luckily are still property rich and those that, unfortunately, have to make do with their measly pension.

So, yes, if, previously, permits to develop air spaces were easily granted on the established storey height limitation procedure, nowadays, permits should not be easily refused on the pretext to protect and enhance the character and amenity of urban areas. This, as noted above, is more debatable than the storey height provision.

Applications which may fall short should not be lightly dismissed but sent back to the periti for updates to be provided that address the urban objective 3 – shortcoming. On approval, the Planning Authority should then issue guidance on how future developments ought to be undertaken in the street so, in time, the streetscape will again regain its holistic ambience.

Denis Camilleri – founding partner, dhi Periti, Floriana

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