Following the public outcry that occurred after MEPA’s approval of the Mistra development and due to mounting concern over major policy changes being introduced by government without adequate studies in particular in the absence of a new SPED, NGOs organised a pro-environment rally on 7 December in the streets of Valletta. The rally demanded that politicians live up to their political promises to protect the environment. DLM featured prominently with five DLM executive presidents, the Secretary General, Treasurer and Vice President at its lead, council members and volunteers holding placards and a streamer demanding ‘Politicians: Protect our Environment’.

On the issue of public access at Ta’ Kantra in the bay of Mġarr ix-Xini, Gozo, DLM stood solid square behind council member Stanley Farrugia Randon and issued public statements following an exchange with the developer’s representatives during a MEPA board hearing on 22 November, which resulted in the permit being refused. An appeal on this decision has since been lodged by the developer.

We attended several private and public consultations on the proposed gas-fired power station at Delimara and have objected to this proposal being carried out without having presented any studies on alternative locations. Din I-Art Helwa is insisting that the risk analysis for this project must be completed before the permit determining location is granted, and that the environmental (IPPC) permit and the development permission should be considered together by the board.

Prof Hans Pasman, risk analysis expert, acted as consultant to DLM and attended the public consultation on 27 January 2014 with George Camilleri on the application for the construction of the new LNG gas terminal at Delimara. Prof Pasman expressed the view shared by DLM that there is insufficient data on the risk of mooring the LNG storage vessel inside the port of Marsaxlokk and studies of alternative locations with higher safety implications should be carried out.

A delegation from the Director General for the Environment of the European Commission held its annual meeting on 7/8 November with the Maltese authorities to discuss infringements and issues relating to implementation of EU environmental law. Simone Mizzi and George Camilleri attended and brought to the DG’s attention certain omissions in the procedures adopted by Government to expedite the deploying of the new gas-fired power station in Delimara.

DLM has written to the Standing Parliamentary Committee for Environment and Planning requesting that it reviews the procedures being followed by government in the launch of numerous new and revised development regulations. DLM presented its position at a meeting with the committee on 28 January 2014, stating that these policies are being rushed through in haste by government and MEPA without a new national Strategic Plan for Environment and Development (SPED) having first been concluded. DLM objects to new or revised development policies being absorbed by the SPED retroactively, without analysis and study on their cumulative environmental impact having been conducted and findings made public.

DLM has made numerous submissions on new and revised planning policies to MEPA this year, including a revision of the local plans and policies for areas outside the development zones, the floor area ratio policy determining tall buildings, fireworks factories, fuel stations, hotel heights and solar farms. At the conclusion of this eventful year, DLM remains more concerned than ever at the pro-development stance of our new government. A focused group of vigilant council members guided by Petra Caruana Dingli are on constant alert and we continue to campaign tirelessly on this front. We receive constant support from the public and our numerous submissions on environmental issues are to be found on the DLM website.

RESTORATION AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

We have concluded several restorations. The exterior walls of Torri Mamo, two facades of the Bir Miftuh church, the façade of San Roque chapel and St Roque’s statue, Zeppuq, and the roofs of Zopu and Dwejra’s Towers. The beautiful Serria Titular painting by Preti has been saved. The complex restoration of the canopy and cессpit at the Delimara Lighthouse has been concluded. Though the challenge for the restoration of the Our Lady of Victory Church continues unabated we have completed many works of art, another Erardi Vault segment, ‘The Presentation at the Temple’ by the Courtauld Conservators, treatment to the ground floor walls is underway, and a new lighting system and interactive unit has been installed. A hand made wrought iron grill cover now adds dignity to the first burial place of Grand Master de Valette. Audio guides are soon to be launched with translations in six languages coordinated ably by our PRO Pat Salomone. In summer a costly but necessary disinfection of the entire church and contents took place.

MEPA permits to upgrade the Msida Bastion Museum/Tea room have been obtained while that for restoring Wied Il-Żurrieq’s tower is being drawn up. We thank Council Members, Stanley Farrugia Randon, Josie Ellul Mercer, and Carolyn Clements in Gozo for overseeing the upkeep of the properties so diligently, and Eric Paris for chasing the Qala Local Council to finish their part of the work on St Anthony’s Battery.

PUBLICATIONS

The Victory Church Guide book was published with the support of Vodafone Malta Foundation and the ERDF fund for Sustainable Tourism, authored by Joe Azzopardi, and edited by Pat Salomone. The Gudja Walks booklet by Lt Col George Attard Manche, warden at Bir Miftuh has also been printed. The 2014 DLM Calendar produced by Victor Rizzo was launched earlier so that it could be available to summer tourists. A fully illustrated booklet on ‘Bir Miftuh’ has been published by Stanley Farrugia Randon for DLM.

EVENTS

March 4: H.E. Dr. George Abela, President of the Republic, hosted Council members at San Anton Palace. He expressed his appreciation for the dedicated work being done by DLM for Malta’s national heritage and showed us the splendid restorations carried out on the Russian Chapel, the Giuseppe Cali Paintings, and the Palace interiors. On April 24 we were honoured by the President’s visit to Victory Church where he viewed the restorations, met the Courtauld Conservators and MSc University Students. Dr Abela praised DLM’s voluntary efforts in his message in the ‘Victory Book’ which we shall always treasure.

To celebrate his many years’ service as DLM Vice President, Simone Mizzi together with Council Members presented Maestro Paul Axiak with a copy of the Europa Nostra publication, ‘The Power of Example’. Mar 17: The Feast of the Annunciation at the medieval chapel of Hal Millieri was held. Two guided tours were given by historians Stanley Farrugia Randon and Salvatore Mousa. April: Stanley Farrugia Randon organized a fundraising tour to the Red Tower, Wignacourt Tower, the Msida Bastion Garden, Bir Miftuh Chapel and Mamo Tower.

The Spring Plant Sale at Msida Historic Garden took place followed by a splendid Fete on 29 April. Our thanks go to Mary Aldred and Albert Calleja for this work.

On an invitation by Jasper de Trafford, council members enjoyed seeing restoration in progress at Villa Bologna’s gardens. Mr de Trafford kindly offered their use for DLM events.

DLM embarked on a series of fund raising Lunchtime Concerts at Our Lady of Victory by the Kalypso Ensemble. We thank Pat Salomone and Philip Mericiela for this initiative.

The 17th Bir Miftuh International Music Festival featuring artists from France, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Malta, held through May and June, was a resounding success again due to the high quality of the musicians and the organization of Cettina Caruana Curran very ably assisted by Anne Marie Navarro, Charles Gatt and the DLM team. Ininitely Xara generously sponsored the catering for the festival. We thank the Embassy of France and the Alliance Francaise, the Embassy of Germany, the Italian Embassy and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, for their support and the Embassy of Ireland for the special edition concert celebrating Ireland’s EU presidency brought about through the Culture Ireland and EU Cultural Programme.

May 19: The European Maritime Day at Delimara Lighthouse was very well attended. Hundreds of people visited and the doors were finally closed by at 19.00 hours, 3 hours later than planned.

June 21: HSBC Cares volunteer staff held a family event at the Msida Bastion Garden with a barbecue, face painting and martial art