

Report on Case No CEP-25-5661

Allegations concerning damages in the Bartolott Crypt at St John's Co-Cathedral.

Case history

Following an online article published by The Shift News on 18 January 2025 titled "*New floor caves in as St John's Co-Cathedral project in collapse*" describing damage done to St John's Co-Cathedral in the Bartolott Crypt, complainant asked for an investigation in order to establish whether the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation, the Planning Authority and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage contributed to the damage as a result of a lack of adequate regulation and monitoring of the works currently in hand. Complainant added that the damage apparently occurred some time ago but has been kept secret.

The article in question alleges that:

1. A new floor caved in causing severe damage to the historic resting place of approximately 600 Knights of the Order of St John.
2. The raised flooring structure is too heavy for the underground chamber.
3. The situation has yet to be fully resolved.

Observations

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation is governed by three members appointed by the Archbishop of Malta and another three appointed by the Office of the Prime Minister. The Government has no controlling interest in the Foundation and the Foundation was thus not subject to this investigation in line with sub-article 12(1b) of the Ombudsman Act. Nevertheless, the Foundation fully co-operated in this investigation.

Since the complaint did not involve any allegations of non-compliance with the Development Planning Act, the investigation focused on allegations of mismanagement by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage and not on any maladministration by the Planning Authority.

An image accompanying The Shift report shows a number of flagstones uplifted from the floor and resting against the raised floor steel frame structure. Another image shows three cracked flagstones in place under the steel frame. Heaps of gravel can also be seen on the sides adjoining the walls of the crypt.

This investigation included a site inspection in the Bartolott Crypt where representatives of the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, of the St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation, Project Architects and Project Managers were present. During this inspection, the raised floor steel

structure and all the flagstones were in place and the sides were clean of any gravel.



Photograph taken by the Commissioner during the site inspection.

Neither the images in the news article, nor the investigation reveals any concerns that the new floor caved in, that any damage was caused to the underground chambers or that interventions are required to restore any damage. The installation of the raised floor followed surveys of the foundations and work methods specifically intended to prevent any damage.

The removal and reinstatement of the flagstones that had subsided was carried out in line with the approved Works Method Statement and all the flagstones that were reinstated were adequately recorded on plan for future reference.

The Superintendence of Cultural Heritage is properly and regularly monitoring the works in line with the permit conditions and there is no reason to doubt that the works that were carried out in the Bartolott Crypt at the St John's Co-Cathedral did in some way or another not follow proper administrative procedures.

Conclusions

The complaint alleging damages to the Bartolott Crypt and contributions to the same by the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage are found not to be sustained.



Perit Alan Saliba
Commissioner for Environment and Planning
Office of the Ombudsman

14 February 2025