WORKS PROPOSED TO BE EXECUTED ON THE BELFRIES OF THE SANNAT PARISH CHURCH

CONDITION REPORT & METHOD STATEMENT

A) Terms of Reference

The present report is being submitted as part of the application requisites for the processing of development application tracking No.168087 and in particular in reply to the correspondence dated 2nd March 2016 received by the project architect from the Malta Environment and Planning Authority.

It is mainly based on visual inspections carried out by the undersigned and focuses on the structural repair/ restoration works being proposed to be carried out on the two belfries of the Sannat Parish Church. The relatively good state of conservation of both belfries and the limited nature of the proposed works do not call for the draughting of deterioration mapping drawings; throughout the reading of this report reference is thus to be made to the drawings already submitted by the project architect and to the photographic documentation being submitted as part of this report.

B) Historical Note

It is known that a medieval chapel originally occupied the site on which the present parish church rises. The said chapel is in fact documented in the 1575 report of the Mgr. Pietro Dusina's pastoral visit to Gozo. As from 1688 the said chapel, dedicated to St.Margaret, started functioning as the parish church of the then small, rural settlement of Sannat.

Soon, however, the aforementioned chapel became too small to accomodate its parishioners and works on its extension were undertaken in the early 18th century. Major works aimed at once again enlarging the new parish church were taken in hand in 1867. Amongst others, these works saw the erection of a new facade including the erection of the

two present belfries. It is known that the said belfries were inaugurated on the 27th May 1883, when the three bells originally housed within the single bell tower of the older church were transferred to the new belfries. Eventually a new, larger bell was also commissioned and erected in the eastward belfry in 1891.

C) Architectural Appraisal

The two identical belfries adopt a square plan with four practically identical facades (please refer to Drwg. No. 816 already submitted to MEPA). The overall architectural treatment of the facades follows the same baroque architectural vein adopted in the church façade. (Plate 1).

Ionic pilasters define the lateral extents and support a pronounced moulded entablature in turn surmounted by finials and a central polygonal pinacle. Semicircular arches span across the aforementioned Ionic pilasters to house the church bells, the latter being mounted on RSJ beams. Balustrades also span across the belfry at its floor level in such a way as to join the lower level of the pilasters. The original stone balustrades were at some point replaced with reinforced concrete equivalents. (Plates 2-3).

D) Condition Report

As evidenced by the photographs being reproduced hereunder both belfries are in an overall good condition (Plates 1-3). The stone fabric appears in fact to be in a stable state of conservation, concern being raised only by the fracture of individual stone blocks located right beneath one of the RSJ beams supporting the bell of the eastward belfry (Plates 4-7). The said cracking in turn attests to progressive rusting of the beam sections embedded within the stone fabric of the belfry's lateral pilasters. Both extremities of the beam are affected by this deterioration mechanism.

A similar mechanism, whereby pressure from rusting of metal inserts is causing cracking in the surrounding fabric, is also being exhibited practically along all the balustrades of the two belfries. Progressive corrosion of the reinforcement bars has in fact led to spalling of the concrete of several balusters. (Plates 8, 9).

E) Proposed Intervention Methodology

The intervention methodology being proposed seeks solely to address the structural damage being exhibited, with the intent of removing any possible structural stability or safety hazards, and in particular to replace the existing corroded RSJ beams and underlying, fractured stone blocks and to replace the fractured balustrades. The proposed interventions can be summarized as follows:

i) *Dismantling of bell and supporting beam structure* – The bell located within the eastward belfry will be temporarily lowered to allow dismantling and eventual replacement of its supporting beam.

ii) *Erection of suitable scaffolding* – The nature of the required works entails the erection of a small stretch of scaffolding to allow the dismantling of the beam requiring replacement as well as to allow the chiseling away and replacement of the underlying fractured stone supports. The scaffolding shall be retained for the duration of these works and shall be adequately lined with a suitable tarpaulin and/ or netting to limit as much as possible the dispersion of dust and assist in screening of the mortar works during the necessary curing phase.

iii) *Replacement of highly deteriorated stone blocks* – As already stated above, the individual stone blocks exhibiting structural failure through fracture, as identified in the photographs being reproduced hereunder (Plates 4-7), shall be dismantled or chiseled away paying particular attention not to damage surrounding sound stone in the process. Throughout the stone replacement exercise, best quality stone having the same dimensions and configuration as the stone it is replacing shall be used. To this end, full size templates, showing the exact configuration and all details of stereotomy of each stone necessitating replacement, shall be prepared prior to dismantling. A lime-based mortar shall be used both during the laying of the individual stone blocks and their subsequent pointing.

iv) *Replacement of corroded RSJ beam* – An RSJ beam of the same dimensions as the one it is replacing shall be used. Prior to its insertion onto the lateral supporting pilasters, the beam shall be treated against corrosion through the application of

an adequate paint system. Following the erection of the beam the bell shall once again be raised and hung in its original position.

v) *Re-pointing works* – Open joints resulting from the beam and stone replacement exercise, and any other open joints present in the immediate vicinity, shall then be pointed with a lime based mortar.

vi) *Replacement of reinforced concrete balustrade* - It is believed that the extent of damage being exhibited by the belfries' balustrades calls for their complete replacement. Their proposed replacement also takes into consideration the fact that the exercise concerns a relatively recent structure of minor artistic relevance, since, as already stated above, the present reinforced concrete balustrade replaces the original stone balustrades. The applicant is presently considering two possibilities vis-à-vis the material to be used for the new balustrade: limestone (*tal-qawwi*) or fibre-reinforced concrete. Since the use of limestone entails a greater cost, the choice between the two greatly depends on the availability of funds. The applicant is in fact presently looking into the possibility of obtaining the required funds through an EU funding programme. It is thus being proposed that the material to be used be at this point retained as a reserved matter to be decided upon, in collaboration with MEPA monitoring officers, during the execution of works subject to the availability or otherwise of funds. In both cases the new balustrades shall re-propose the same dimensions and configuration as the balustrades they are replacing. Moreover, should glass fibre reinforced concrete elements be eventually used, these shall be finished in a light yellow-ochre colour recalling the colour of local building stone.

Plate 1 – Sannat Parish Church

Plate 2 – Detail of the eastward belfry

Plate 3 – Detail of the westward belfry

Plate 4 – Detail of fractured stones requiring replacement

Plate 5 – Detail of fractured stones requiring replacement

Plate 6 – Detail of fractured stones requiring replacement

Plate 7 – Detail of fractured stones requiring replacement

Plate 8 – Detail of fractured baluster

Plate 9 – Detail of fractured balusters