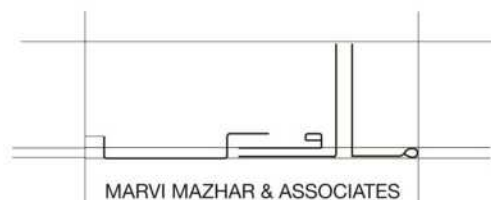




Residential Scale of Karachi



How the dynamics of power and politics are changing the face of the Historical Neighborhood Old Clifton of Karachi?



MARVI MAZHAR & ASSOCIATES



PAKISTAN
CHOWK
COMMUNITY
CENTRE

Preface

In many South Asian cities, urban skylines have risen at faster rates and to higher heights than ever before over the past two decades. These isolated icons, embodies power and disconnects its relation to land and its needs. Real estate elites host these power structures inwards and gives aspiration to middle class to invest and progress. While one thinks of development as a form of way forward, it is critical to include 'gentle' and 'care' in urban planning to cater to growing density and unfair displacement.

The architectural scale and proportion in Karachi need serious bylaws and protecting policies towards low density and ecological important zones such as coastal edge, backwaters, nalas, riverine, historically important zones which hold extraordinary valuable structures like art deco, stone craftsmanship, artisans' woodwork, and historical material is witnessed. Such neighborhoods also hold ecological and socially important cultural context where which benefits city's archives and wellbeing.

Scale and proportion can be defined and understood in many ways, but here we will focus on two, invasive high-rises in low density areas and proportions of open spaces versus built up zones. Today mega cities are in dire need of care projects- which are heavily dependent on maintenance and preservation ideology.

Preservation of existing built environment means a cohesive urban planning which incorporates various trajectories like social housing, neighborhood parks, town hall, existing structures, walkable zones, and celebrating landmarks. Within this zone, if development of new infrastructures takes place it is critical to incorporate the existing context which comes through understanding and respecting scale, learning through research, and including public through interval notifications and town hall hearings where the people of the area are included in future development. Karachi lacks a zonal master plan; implementation of any new development feels aggressive and invasive.

Mixed used high-rise phenomena backed urban privatization accords with a deepening urban neoliberalism, and it majorly reflects and produces gentrification. Rather than safeguarding historically important neighborhoods, converting them into quiet zones, real estate agents push for commercial infrastructures on the sake of shining skyline. In growing cities like Karachi where urban governance is a huge matter of concern, the vertical infrastructure has witnessed more decay and maintenance issues and faulty construction values. Theorist Mike Davis writes that 'we are dealing with a fundamental reorganization of metropolitan space, involving a drastic diminution of the intersections of the lives of the rich and the poor, which transcends traditional social segregation and urban fragmentation' (Davis 2007: 119).

Here, organizations like SBCA, KDA with legal framework and developers like DHA, Bahria, private investors and many other stakeholders are armed with limited social knowledge, develop projects in isolation selling political economies and outcomes in the name of development. Most high-rises phenomena have been built in introverted gated position rather than socio-spatial understanding which involves the lower income households or low-density areas creating contested peripheries which neglects low density areas from ecological rights of air and view resulting geographic isolation and intimidating scale.



A view of the Bahria Icon tower from the Formal garden.
| Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar and Associates (MMA)

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Old Clifton Map

- Residential
- Colonial Houses
- Art Deco Houses
- Residential buildings
- Commercial
- Education
- Landmarks
- Religious
- Empty plots
- Unknown
- Parks
- Private Lawns
- Mohatta palace
- Police station
- Petrol pump



Fig 1- Map of the neighbourhood of Old Clifton. | Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar & associates. (MMA)



Image 1- A date plam tree in the neighborhood of Old clifton. | Credits: Sara Jamil

How the dynamics of power and politics are changing the face of the Historical Neighborhood Old Clifton of Karachi?

“It is our last day on this site, but we have to show you this Khajoor ka darakth which is in our compound; it is believed to have supernatural powers. My children have played under the shade of these indigenous trees and I always felt an element of protection. The new developers have displaced our memories, our inheritance but let's see what happens after the site is demolished and the family living in this khajoor ka darakth which we coexisted with displaces.” The resident of old clifton shared this anecdote more like a curse towards the forced eviction than a development dream for the future.

Karachi has been a rather dynamic city, not only in terms of its political and cultural nature but also in terms of its visual landscape. At the hands of developers and builders many neighborhoods with rich histories and ample heritage have taken new faces, developments have come at the expense of losing narratives and histories. Old neighborhoods such as Old Clifton, PIB colony, PECHS, Lalazar, Oldtown Karachi, Garden East, Bahadrabad, Aisha Manzil, Ancholi, Nanak Para, Ghanchi Para, KDA and Nazimabad no 5 and many more which are still breathing in the city are looking forward to an unpredictable future

While the building of these high rises are seen as developments, it is critical to include 'gentle' and 'care' in urban planning to cater to growing density and unfair displacement. Displacement is ubiquitous as it is found all over the world. Wherever economic development is taking place, displacement is emerging as something that is adversely affecting the lives of affected people. At times this raises questions regarding the futility of economic development projects. These include the dismantling of production systems, desecration of ancestral sacred zones or graves and temples, family inherited properties, scattering of kinship groups and family systems, disorganization of informal social networks that provide mutual support. Development and displacement are essentially political processes as they are the outcome of political decision making. In South Asia most development and displacement reflect the relative power of various groups involved, particularly the power of politically, economically and socially strong groups to impose harsh sacrifices on the weak and unprivileged groups.

Focusing on the old neighborhoods of Karachi this article aims to explore the dynamic nature of these spaces which has been brought about due to the politics and power in play to implement the vision developers have had with regard to the city. With discussion of architectural and spatial capacities as well as emotional and communal capacities of these spaces this article wishes to address questions arising with the city being turned into a concrete jungle.

The question of scale plays a huge role in this, as per law of these organizations SBCA, KDA and DHA have given rights to residential zones, but through corruption and power bends the land use is changed in favor of the developer and investor. This is a huge issue in Karachi, where protection of residential zones is negated, and changing landscape and skyline have further deteriorated the ecosystem of a low scale environment.

This vertical population in aggressively changing old neighborhoods is giving a new face to the scale of the city, where once low lying bungalows were found, high rises have laid foundations. Most high-rises phenomena have been built in introverted gated position rather than socio-spatial understanding which involves the lower income households or low-density areas creating contested peripheries which neglects low density areas from ecological rights of air and view resulting geographic isolation and intimidating scale.

Scale and proportion can be defined and understood in many ways, but here we will focus on two, invasive high-rises in low density areas and proportions of open spaces versus built up zones. Today mega cities are in dire need of care projects- which are heavily dependent on maintenance and preservation ideology.



Image 2- Old Clifton House wrapped in foliage creating a green boundary and years of nurturing. | Credits: Sara Jamil.

Residential

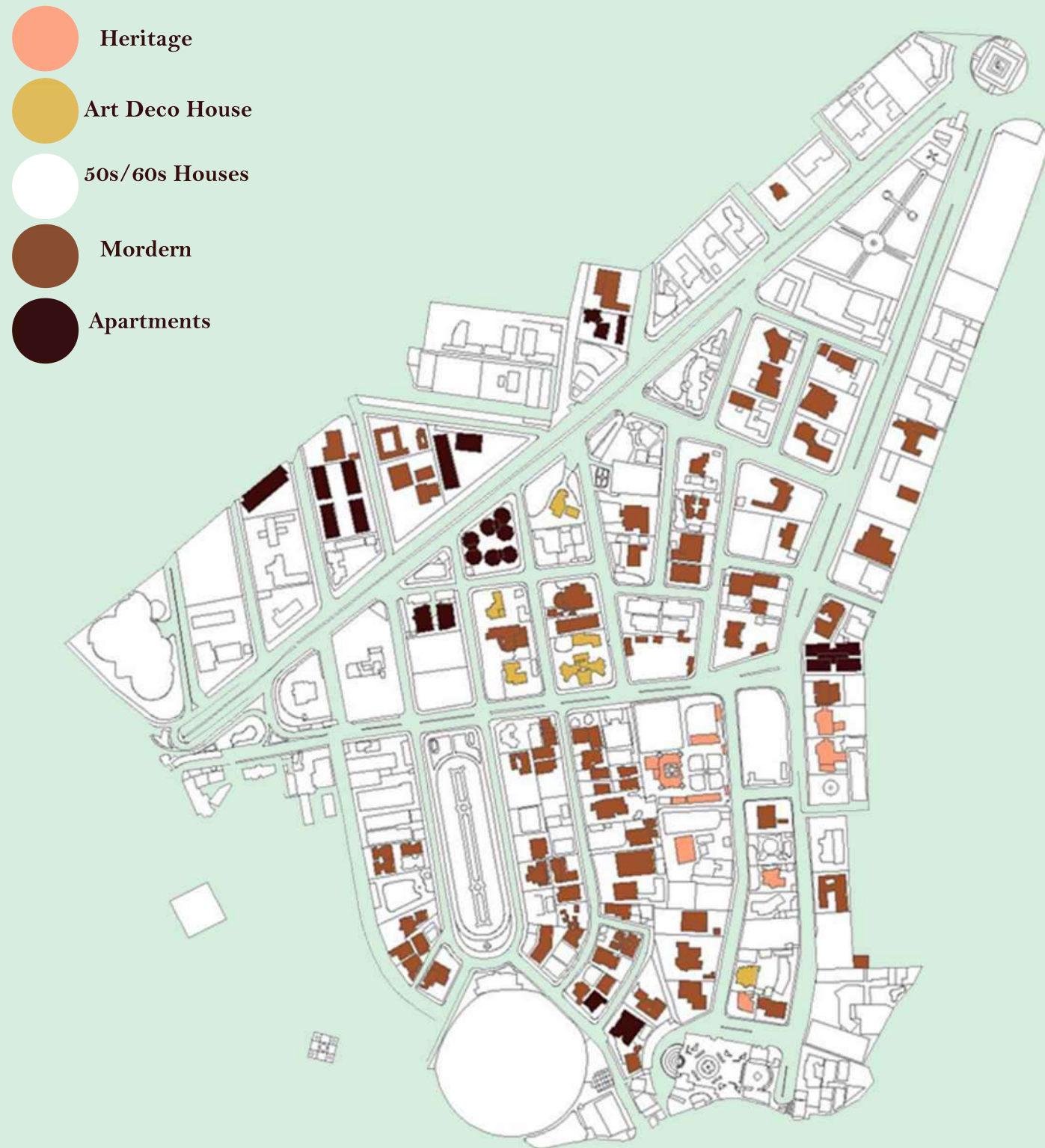


Fig 2.1- Overview of the residential structures in the neighborhood. Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar & Associates. (MMA)

Commercial



Fig 2.2- Overview of the educational and commercial structures in the neighborhood. Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar & Associates. (MMA)



Image 3 - Image of Bhopal House located in old clifton | Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)

Revisiting Old Neighborhoods History

Old Clifton, one of the areas with much historical significance of architectural and natural heritage. It was developed in mid 19th century when Henry Bartle Frere served as the commissioner of the Sindh, Old Clifton comprises of many heritage stories as we know about the very famous Bhopal House in Old Clifton Neelam Colony which was purchased by Hameedullah Khan, Nawab of Bhopal on 1st July 1947, later in 1948 the house was occupied by the Foreign office with the agreement between the government and the Nawab, the Nawab died in 1960 however his eldest daughter, Princess Abida, claimed for the House once it was handed over to Intelligence Bureau, the case did not go well and it was on going for few years till 2002. She passed away handing over the case to his son Sheharyar Khan, ex-chairman of cricket board Pakistan, who had moved to intra court appeal just after the suit's rejection, the division bench issued notifications to the respondents and imposed a temporary injunction preventing the secretary of works division and other relevant government agencies from interfering with the appellant's ownership of Bhopal House.

Furthermore other heritage houses like the Kazi house which is declared as heritage house is at its worst condition and is owned by Shabbir and is utilized as recreational space for the bohra community. Other historic areas include Lalazar, a lovely hometown with many vintage homes, many of which are old art deco homes. Lalazar is a self-contained neighborhood with a large elderly population, protected by mangroves trees around which can be classified as a good neighborhood.

Other areas such as KDA ,which was the first upscale neighborhood offers the ideal fusion of metropolitan life with small-town charm since it is remote compared to Karachi's other well-known suburbs while still being conveniently close to the city's highlights.

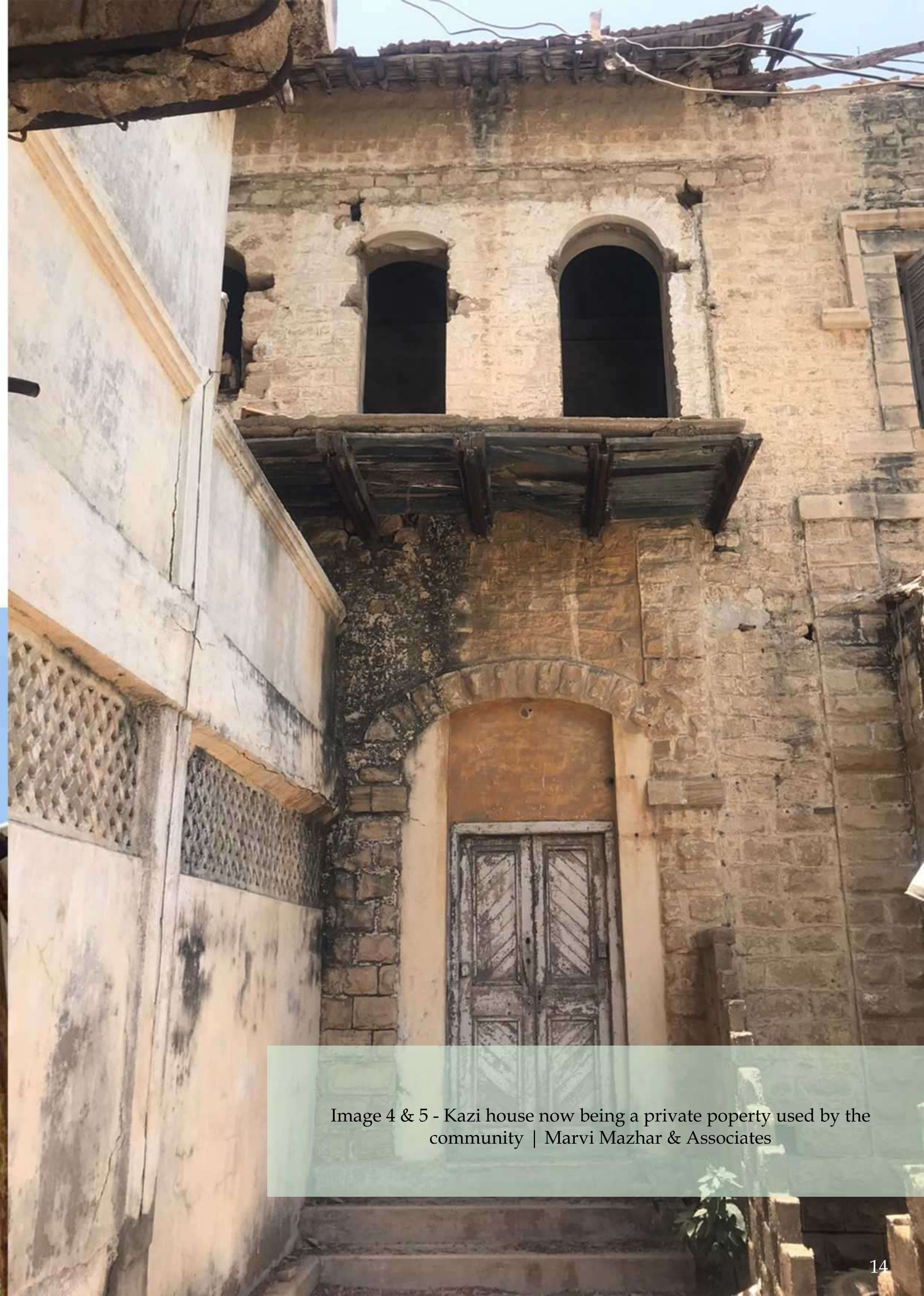


Image 4 & 5 - Kazi house now being a private property used by the community | Marvi Mazhar & Associates



PRIVATE PROPERTY
OWNED BY
DAWAT-E-HADIYAH

Image 6- Kazi House, 2023 | Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)

Amenities

Mohatta Gardens

Public Parks



Are we doing enough to protect our natural heritage?

Karachi's natural heritage consists of coastal shoreline to historic gardens, parks, private lawns and most importantly historic indigenous trees around the city, especially banyan trees, neem and peepal located mostly in old neighborhoods, which preserve memories of this old city. Trees that need to be kept and maintained. Along with other activists, Natural Heritage Association of Karachi (NHAK) lobbied for the designation of the centuries-old banyan trees as "protected heritage" by the local government.

Fig 3- Map of Old Clifton highlighting the green areas in the neighborhood. | Courtesy of Marvi Mazhar & Associates. (MMA)

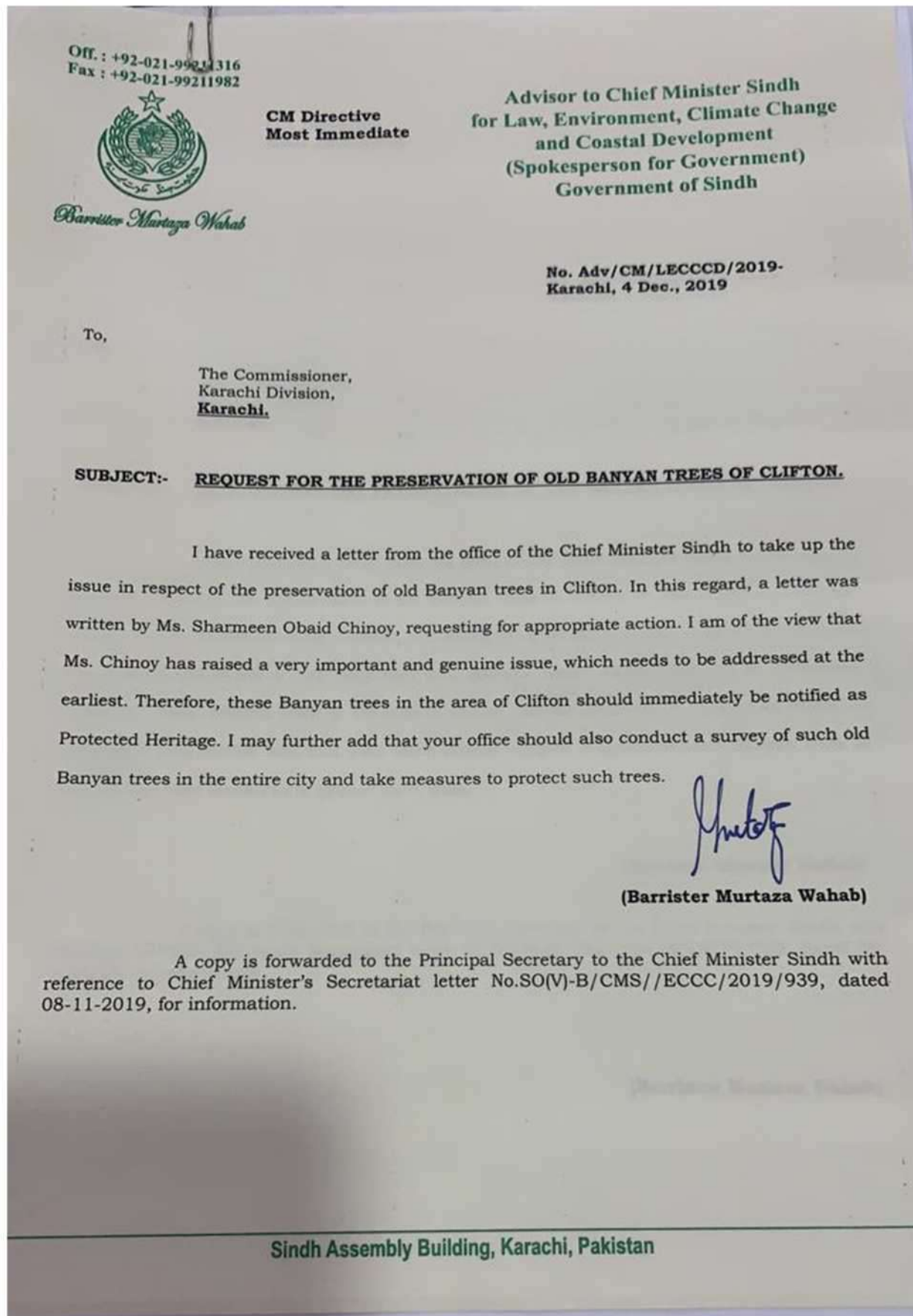


Image 7- Document shared by Mayor Murtaza Wahab on twitter upon request for preservation of Banyan trees.

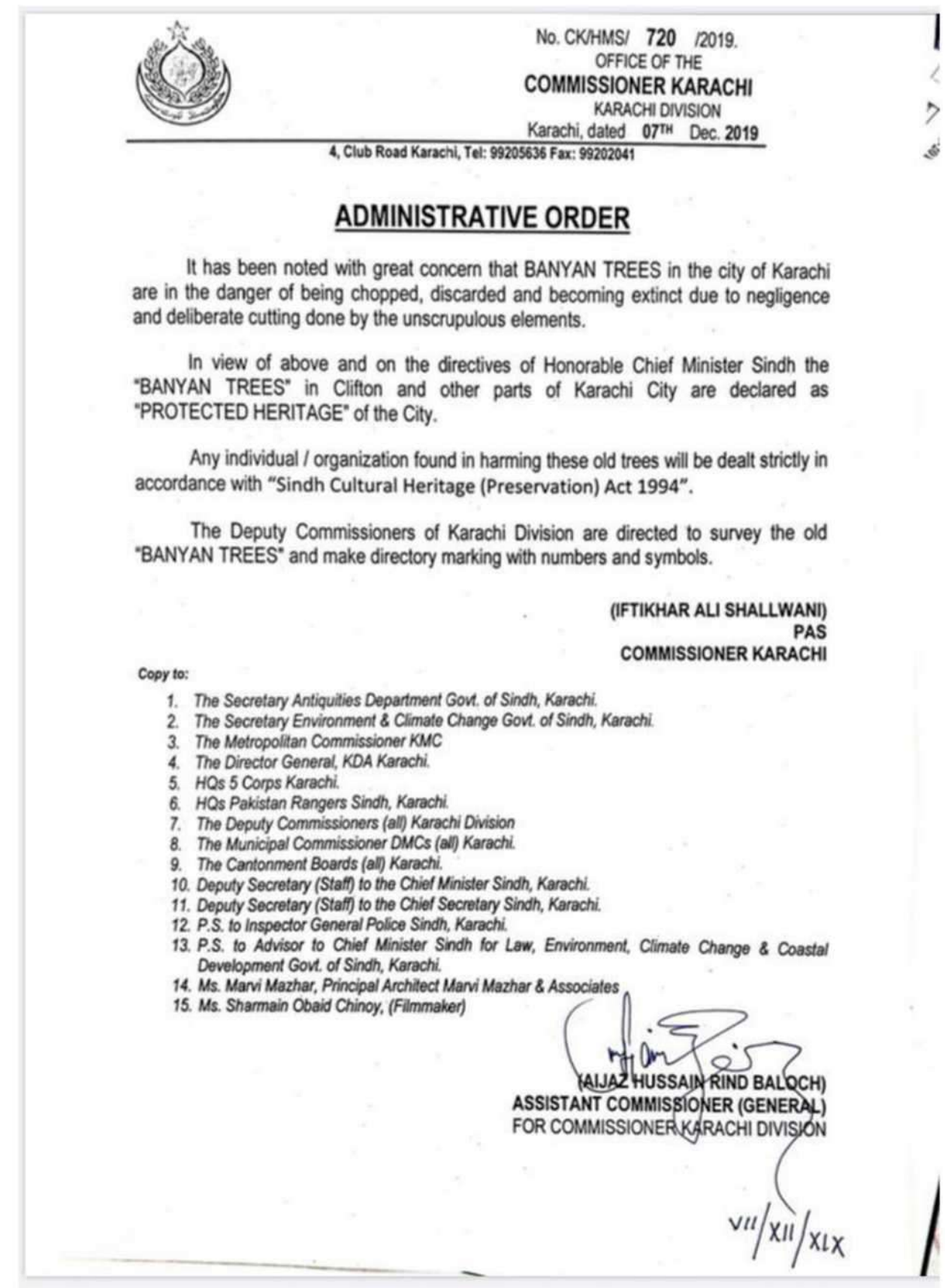


Image 8- Documents shared by Mayor Murtaza Wahab on twitter in 2019 after NHAK restored 30 Banyan Trees in partnership with the Sindh Government. 40 and more banyan trees in Old Clifton are still waiting for their preservation plan.

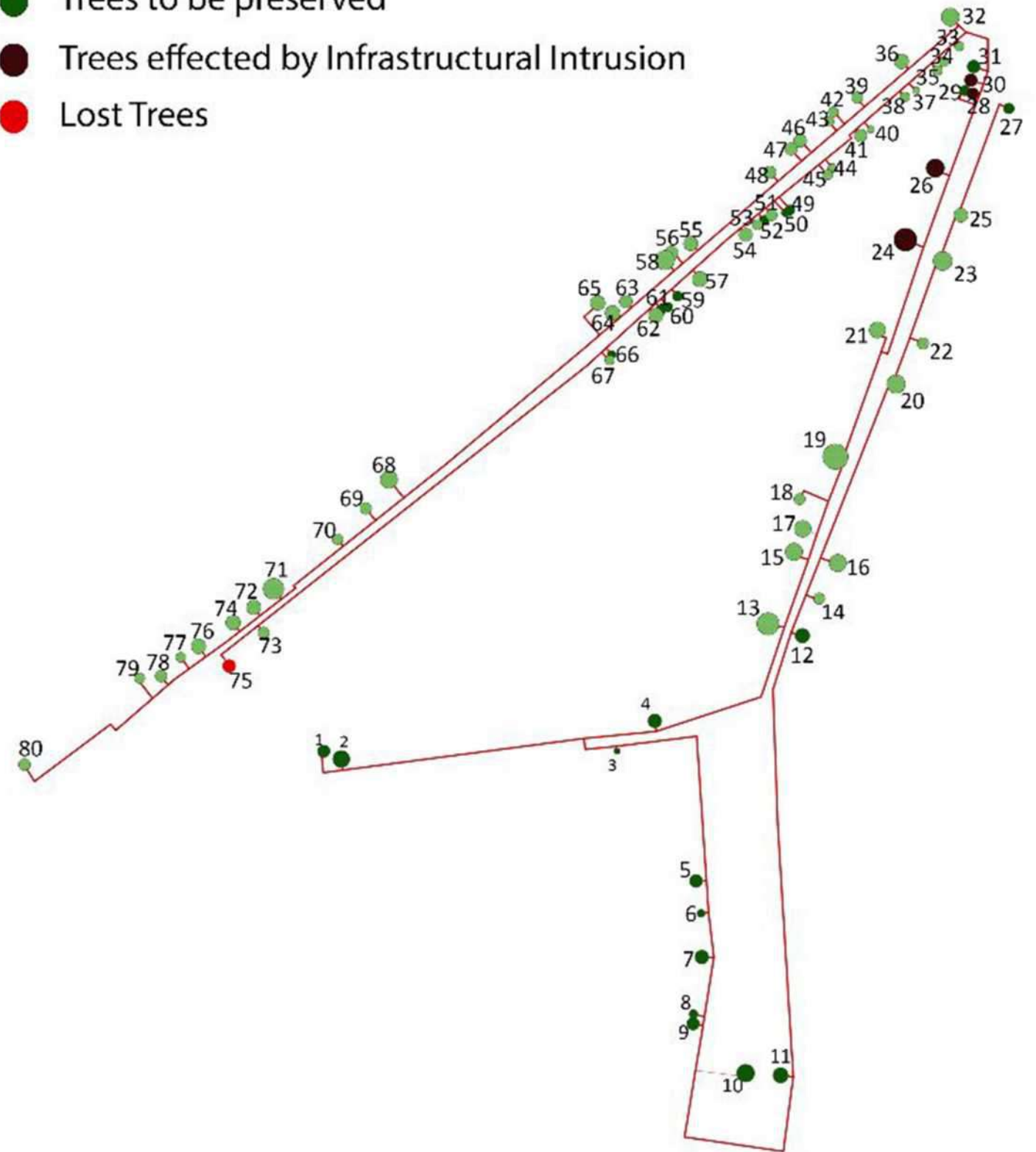
- Trees
- Route



80 Marked Banyan Trees located in Shahrah- Iran and Hatim Alvi Road | Courtesy Marvi Mazhar Associates (MMA)

Throughout the years, the banyan trees have also witnessed moments of transformation and resilience. These trees have also been home to a variety of birds. But in recent times, these numbers have lessened due to the worsening air quality of the city and the increasing amount of invasive and predatory birds nesting in the area. It is required that we protect this natural heritage even while expanding the City as we see some of these trees being cut or neglected in order to construct buildings which is leading to destroying the natural environment and habitat, these upcoming new building constructions have disturbed not only the habitat of the migratory birds but also the heritage trees located in the area.

- Trees declared Heritage by NHAK in 2019
- Trees to be preserved
- Trees effected by Infrastructural Intrusion
- Lost Trees



In 2021, NHAK identified 60 Banyan trees (represented in light green on the map). We marked an additional 20 Banyan trees in the Old Clifton extension area (represented in dark green on the map). However, the condition of some of these newly marked trees is less than optimal compared to previously identified trees. | Courtesy Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)



Image 9.1- Formal Garden 2020
| google image



Image 9.2- Formal Garden 2023
| Marvi Mazhar & Associates
(MMA)

The communal green spaces in Old Clifton have undergone considerable transformations over time. One such unique space is the 'Formal Garden' in Old Clifton, which, contrary to its name, consists more of hard concrete ground than soft, verdant areas. Although surrounded by a low-income neighborhood, a school, and a church, the garden lacks an inviting ambiance and remains inaccessible to most. Its restrictive operating hours, from 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm, and the fencing that segregates it from the katchi abadi behind it, have further exacerbated this issue, preventing people nearby from utilizing this space. A fleeting glimpse of the adjacent Stella Maris Catholic Church is all that can be seen from the garden.

This space, managed by PVT Ltd, with most of its pavers sourced from Envicrete, is a stark example of a public area failing to establish a harmonious relationship with its surrounding context.

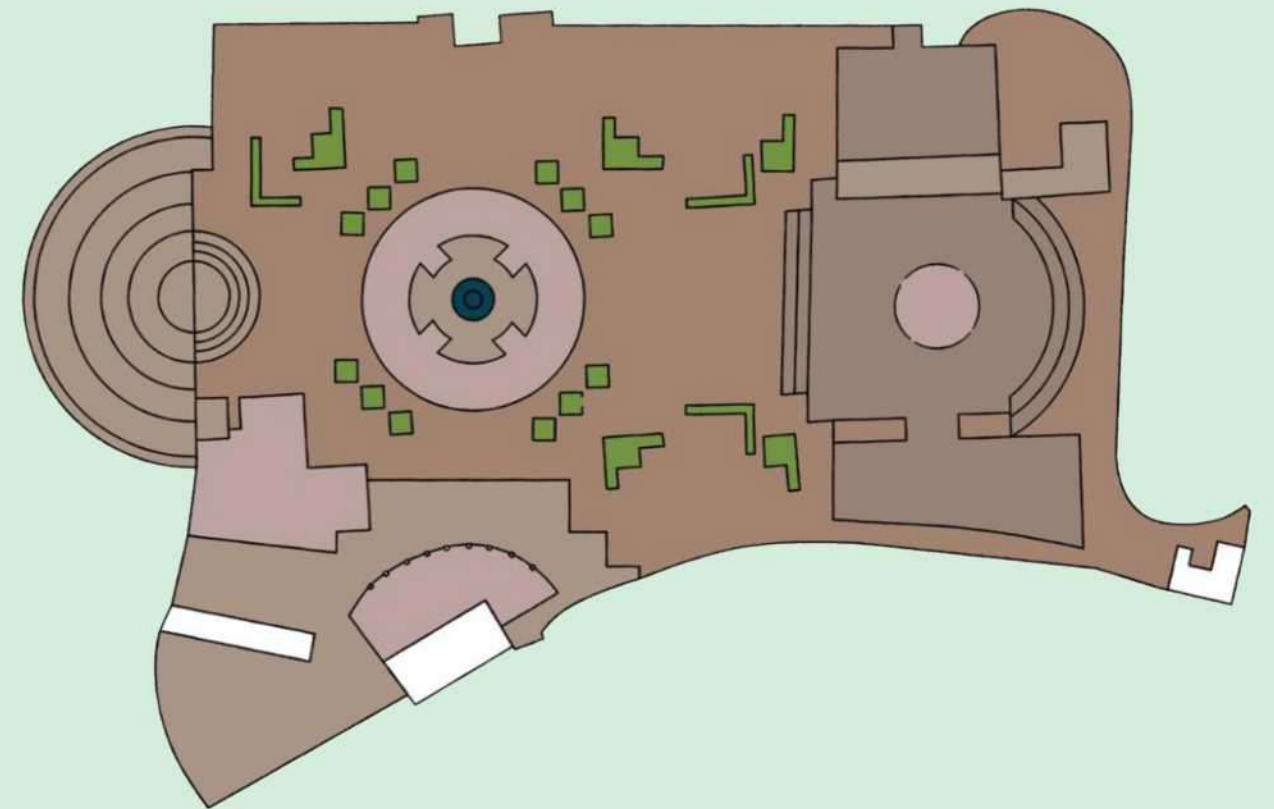


Figure 5-
Plan of Formal Garden | Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)

It is clear from these photos that this garden suffered some significant alterations and losses. This kind of paved development adds to heat and increases carbon footprint. The garden and the areas surrounding it are now characterized by complete concreteness and what appears to be poor upkeep. The process of gentrification within this area is limiting social opportunities for the residents, leading to the compartmentalization of the neighborhood, and resulting in the marginalization of specific groups, such as the katchi abadi behind it that has been completely shut off, with boundary walls blocking off any access to the 'Formal Garden.'



Image 10.1 - Banyan trees not taken care of losing their beauty over time



Image 10.2 Banyan tree which was declared as Natural Heritage and has been taken care of.



■ RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS

1. ABDULLAH SHAH GHAZI
2. MASJID FATIMA
3. JAMA MASJID DEWAN MUSHTAQ
4. STELLA MARIS CHURCH
5. MADINA MASJID
6. SAMADHA DHAM

What's happening today?

Old Clifton has been transformed from a mangrove swamp and has gradually turned into a significant metropolitan area. Over the years, it became the foundation for many important architectural structures. However, in recent times, transformations in the surrounding terrain have been so drastic that if any of the original owners of the buildings were to be reincarnated, they would fail to locate these structures in the new landscape. Among these structures, the shrine of Abdullah Shah Ghazi has endured the most radical change. Following the construction of the Bahria Icon tower next to the shrine, the developers deemed that the shrine's appearance did not align with their envisioned landscape, and decided to redesign the shrine entirely. Developers, resolute in their mission to mold Karachi into a semblance of Dubai, are vigorously reshaping the landscape around their latest projects under the guise of urbanizing Karachi. High rises now overshadow the once dominant architecture of the shrine. Similarly, the Stella Maries Catholic Church now lies hidden behind the formal garden's fence. The old architecture of Karachi has been largely neglected in the wake of the construction of high rises.

At first glance, the neighborhood of Old Clifton appears relatively untouched by the neoliberal ideologies that have infiltrated many parts of the city. However, a closer inspection reveals the subtle encroachment of these ideologies through unnoticed fissures. The neighborhood has been a stage for political maneuverings for some time now, exemplified by the protracted ownership dispute over the Bhopal House that continues to this day.



Image 1.2- Satellite image from Google Earth showing Kazi house, 2019

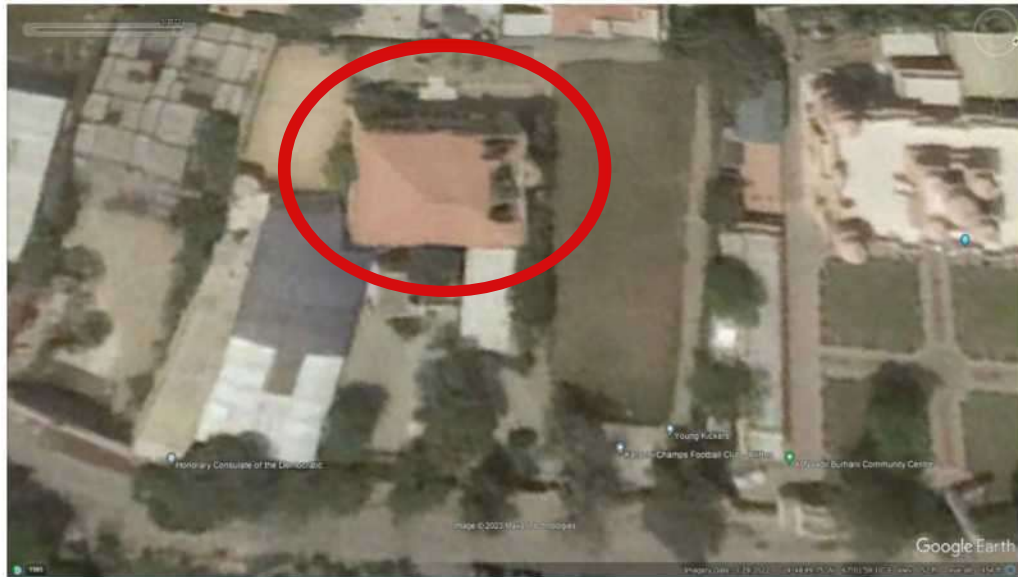


Image 1.2- Satellite image from Google Earth showing Kazi house, 2022



Image 1.3- Satellite image from Google Earth showing Kazi house, 2023

Images 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 show the deterioration and eventually the demolition of the Kazi house roof despite being declared a heritage house. Kazi House remains a private property today and is currently used as a space for meetings within the Bohra community. The space is in an even worse condition than it was when it had been researched in 2008 by NED Heritage Cell.



image 2.1



Image 2.2



Image 2.3

Image 2.1- A documentation of Kazi house. NED, Karachi Heritage Buildings Re- Survey project, Old Clifton Quarter. August 2008. | NED

Image 2.2 and 2.3- A view of the current state of the Kazi House, 5th June, 2023. | Marvi Mazhar Associates (MMA)



Image 13.1 - Khadija Mazil



Image 13.2- A view of Khatija Manzil. 2nd June, 2023. | Marvi Mazhar Associates (MMA)

The prevailing socio-political realm of the country is in a state of perpetual flux, constantly changing the fabric of preservation and repair for heritage structures. As demonstrated in Image 4.1, the boundary wall of Khatija Manzil exhibits filled cracks with cement of a contrasting color, and the wall is also marked by political graffiti. It is rather satirical to see the names of the groups who claim to be protectors of these spaces sprayed on these walls to cause vandalism. This contradiction – the government acting simultaneously as both the perpetrator and the protector of these spaces is apparent in just the visual landscape of this area.

The future of this neighborhood remains uncertain, with developers preying on this space, eager to invade it with their visions of urbanism.



Landmarks

1. Do Talwar Monument
2. Old Clifton Park
3. Big Tree House
4. The Indus Academy
5. Maison Elan
6. Mohatta Palace Museum
7. Ufone Clifton
8. Amir Khusro Park
9. Formal Garden
10. NBP Sports Club
11. Parklane Hospital
12. Orchid Builders & Developers
13. Police Station Clifton
14. Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran
15. Shrine Hazrat Syed Abdullah Shah Ghazi
16. Bahria Icon Tower

fig 7 - Map of Old Clifton marking all the landmarks | Courtesy Marvi Mazhar and Associates

Plots

- Vacant Plots
- Under Construction



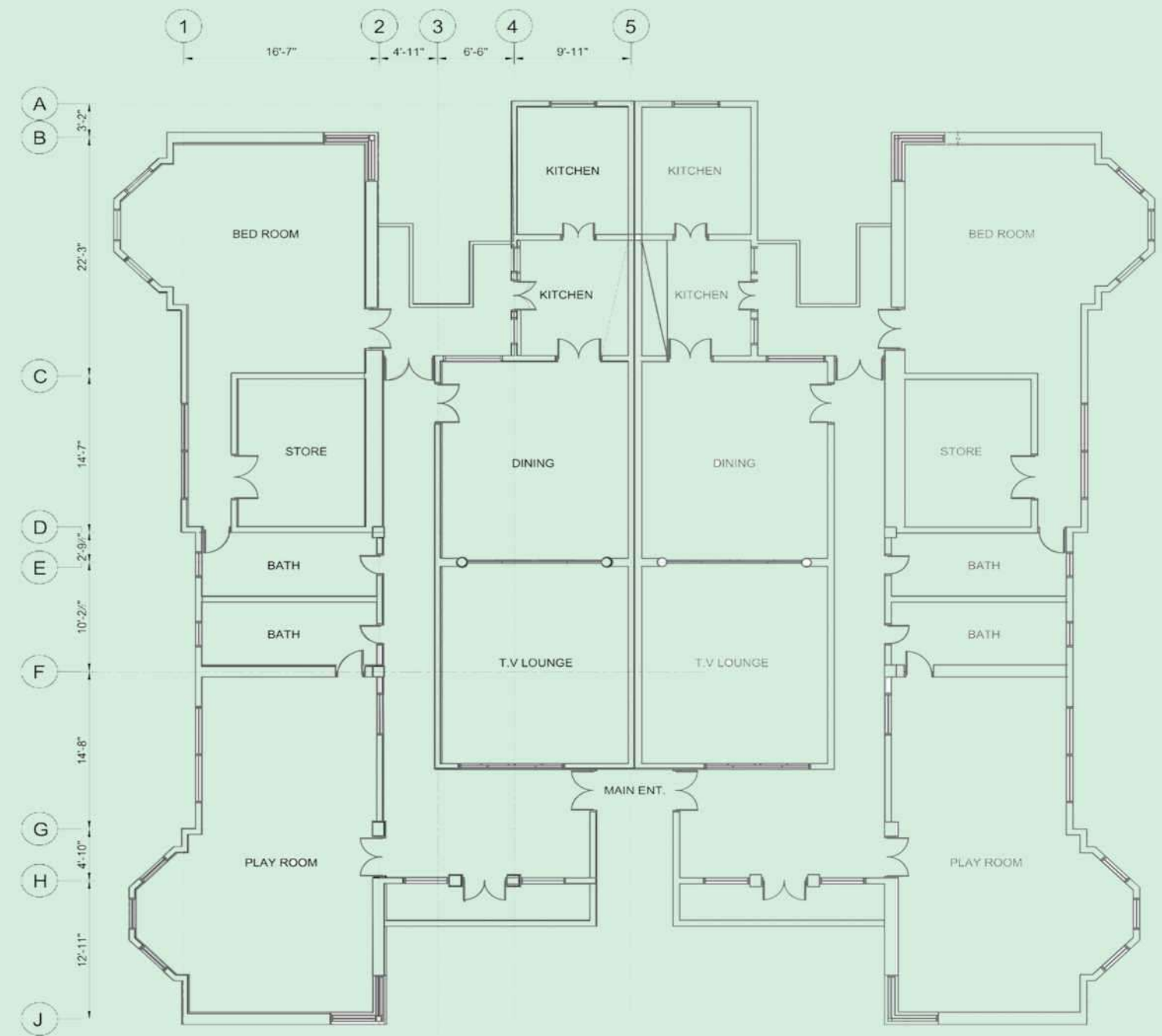
Map of vacant properties after displacing residential houses and under construction plots of high rises | Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)



Previously constructed high rises under litigation disrupt the landscape while more, like Skygarden, prepare to find their foundations in the neighborhood. | Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)

These maps shows vacant and under-construction plots that represent the potential of high rises finding foundations in the neighborhood, such as the ongoing construction for Skygarden, a high-rise building. These high rises have already begun to pollute the landscape of the neighborhood. While their futures remain unprecedented, it is probable that these constructions will lead to the formation of another concrete jungle which will invade the already existing infrastructure and planning of the area as the developers care less about the context and the surrounding. Most new developments do not consider the surrounding environment, the residents, and neighboring structures in an area when forming developmen schemes. These individual projects are putting the consolidated ideology of the neighborhood at stake.





Old neighborhood turning into political playground

In conversation with the owner of a heritage house in Old Clifton, she recounted a deeply troubling incident, where she described how a group of men, introducing themselves as the 'Heritage Inspection Group of Old Clifton', forcefully intruded into her property. This group was associated with the Omni Group, a known collective of developers. They imposed an ultimatum on the owner - sell the heritage home immediately or vacate it. After the owner received menacing threats, she felt compelled to accept their deal. Without delay, the group dispatched a demolition machine to the site, accompanied by twelve police officers and their contractors. They declared the land as their own and commenced their takeover, starting with the demolition of the house. This sort of coercive behavior and forced displacement is not isolated, as suggested by Figure 3.2 which depicts the demolition of old architectural structures.



Image 15 - View of clifton 110 heritage house before being demolished
Credits: Sara Jameel



Image 15.1 - Another view of clifton 110 heritage house before being demolished
Credits: Sara Jameel



Image 16 - Image of the vacant plot after the demolition of the house | Courtesy Marvi Mazhar & Associates (MMA)



- Satellite images show the old construction on corner plot beside Anusha's residency till June 2021, after two months we can witness building demolition with crane bulldozer. The new construction finished within a year does not follow SBCA Byelaws and have construction beyond the required set backs and covered area



- Old construction can be visible in satellite images till Sept 2004, demolished in Jan 2006 and repeated same lawlessness construction.



- Old construction can be visible in satellite images till Sept 2004, demolished in Jan 2006 and repeated same lawlessness construction.



- As images show the plot remained vacant till June 2015, construction started in mid of 2015 and end up the next year. A G+2 apartment building named Anusha's Residency clearly does not follow CBC Byelaws and have constructed beyond the required set backs and covered area.



- Plot at the east of NBP Cricket ground remained vacant till 2001, construction started from mid of 2005.

 VACANT PLOT → NEW CONSTRUCTION
 OLD CONSTRUCTION → DEMOLISHED
 OLD CONSTRUCTION → DEMOLISHED → NEW CONSTRUCTION



- Satellite images show the condition of the marked plot the site was vacant till 2016 and is currently the property of Orchid Builders & Developers, who proposed a Highrise Orchid tower under construction with Ground + 38 towers soaring 500 ft.

The ongoing construction and a visualization of the projected outcome of this development project. Orchid builders and developers have envisioned a 500 ft tall building that will dramatically dominate the skyline. Construction projects such as these reinforce the increasing trend among developers that are continually constructing buildings to erect edifices without any regard for any consequences and effects on their surroundings, as they invade more and more space, pollute the landscape, and disrupt the urban scale.

Reflecting on recent developments, Old Clifton might be on the path to mirror the transformation witnessed in the Garden East neighborhood of Karachi. This area has observed a surge in high-rise construction, particularly around a significant landmark of the Jamatkhana. A familiar narrative unfolds: developers identified a location, saw an opportunity to revitalize the area surrounding the Jamatkhana, and subsequently monopolized it. This pattern of urban renewal—gentrification under the guise of development—around essential landmarks is becoming all too common in Old Clifton.



- Satellite images show the condition of marked plots have old construction till Feb 2016, demolished to the ground within two months. The four plot once conceiving historical construction is now the property of Pakistan Air Force as per mentioned on the board.



- Satellite images show the condition of marked plot have old construction till Sept 2004, demolished to the ground before July 2005. This plot is vacant to date.



PROHIBITED AREA
علاقہ ممنوعہ
وزارت دفاع - حکومت پاکستان

PROPERTY
OF
PAKISTAN AIR FORCE

Vacant plot under Pakistan Air Force seeing an unpredictable future. | MMA



Property Mortgaged With
SINDH BANK Ltd.
یہ جائیداد سندھ بینک لمیٹڈ
کے رہن میں ہے۔

Residential plot named "Bella Vista" once owned by Noshir Sopariwala now mortgaged by Sindh Bank. | MMA



Vacant plot after demolition of residence. | MMA

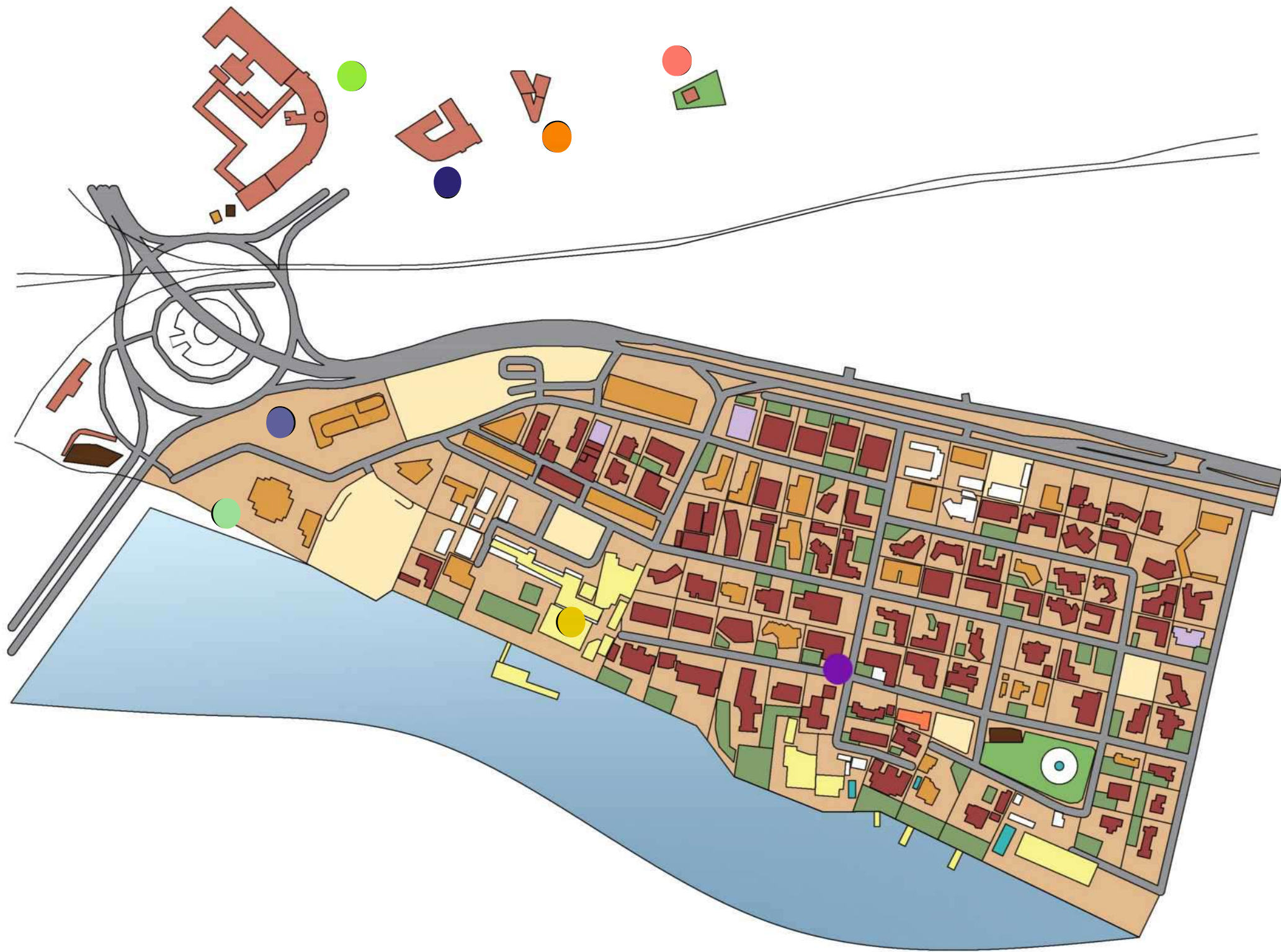


Image 17 - A view of Lalazar neighborhood

1. Lalazar Has Been Home to Karachi's Well-Heeled for Decades, n.d., photograph, n.d.

Lalazar - The Untouched Neighborhood

In the 1950s, a collection of low-rise houses was constructed in the mid-century modern architectural style. These houses boasted spacious rooms, lofty ceilings, expansive gardens, and majestic trees, creating an enclave of elegance, serenity, and charm. Surprisingly, this peaceful haven exists just a stone's throw away from the bustling financial hub of I.I. Chundrigar Road and the Keamari Port in Karachi. Lalazar where the land is closer to the backwater, coast or natural habitat have hosted many migratory birds and indigenous terrain. With changing landscape development of highrises and real estate boom have obstructed the migration pathways as well as wind, and view rights, being comprised with many old homes, the developers haven't touched this neighborhood however making an example for other neighborhoods to be conserved and protected.



Landmarks

- Port Grand Karachi
- KPT Head Office
- EFU House
- Katrak Mansions
- Merewether Clock Tower
- Karachi Boat Club
- Beach Luxury Hotel
- PNCS Building
- PRC Towers

REACHING FOR THE STARS, DIGGING A HOLE

Marvi Mazhar | Komal Rehman | Ayesha Jamal | Published July 29, 2023



The facades and terrain which once defined Old Clifton have now fallen under the unrelenting shadow of high-rises | All photos and maps courtesy of Marvi Mazhar and Associates (MMA)

The dynamics of power and politics are transforming the historical neighbourhoods of Karachi. This growing hunger, exhibited by 'development' and construction groups, to mutate such localities into homogenised areas populated by high-rise buildings, is emblematic of a wider problem facing the city — one which will result in a great environmental and social cost

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This project was Supported by

