



**שומרים על ליפתא**  
**عيوننا على لفتا**  
***Watching over Lifta***

The Israel Land Administration has begun marketing plots for building 212 housing units and commercial areas on the remains of Lifta – a village on outskirts of Jerusalem.

The planned construction in Lifta is expected to severely harm historical, environmental, cultural and social values. The tender process and the marketing of plots must be stopped immediately and alternatives that include the conservation and maintenance of Lifta should be examined.

---

**The Civic Coalition for Saving Lifta**

For more information, support, donations and volunteering:

**Facebook:** Save Lifta | **Tel:** 0545-69-20-89 | [ilan@makinghistory.co.il](mailto:ilan@makinghistory.co.il)

**To sign the petition:** <http://www.atzuma.co.il/lifta>

---

## Lifta – an Endangered Cultural, Historical and Environmental Asset

### Conserving the physical heritage of the Village

Lifta village remains are a unique example of a local cultural landscape and of the Palestinian vernacular built heritage that has almost disappeared in this country. According to a report by the Antiquities Authority, Lifta is a "Reservation for the architecture and rural construction technologies on the verge of extinction.... remaining evidence of a landscape that was common in the country throughout history until the turn of the Twentieth Century."

Lifta's traditional built heritage includes ruins of terraces and archaeological remains from the time of the First Temple (second Iron Age), building remains from the time of the Crusaders, ancient wine presses and olive presses, burial caves and rock-hewn burial facilities containing ancient coffins. However, Lifta is particularly known for the traditional construction of the Arab village that blends together the structure of the terraces and the landscape. Besides residential buildings, the village includes public buildings, silos, baking ovens, wells and a system of roads, squares,

courtyards, irrigation channels and agricultural areas. The construction plan that is currently being marketed for Lifta does not adhere to conservation norms. It transfers the responsibility for documenting and preserving the village from the government to private entrepreneurs, before either any documentation or a detailed conservation plan has been prepared. The new plans for the historic center of the village include construction of roads and high retaining walls, which will irreversibly harm this historical and cultural asset. Additionally, the plan and the tender contravene the guidance of the Antiquities Authority, which determined that: "Developing the area for residence will severely affect the delicate urban fabric and the rare archetypal houses that have been preserved in the site". In the words of Israel's senior conservation architects: "Lifta has a singular importance... that is at risk under the terms of the plan and its proposed implementation."

### Environment, landscape and ecology

Lifta embodies significant natural and scenic values. It spans steep wadi slopes where a sealed spring flows all year long, with a conduit that leads to a large storage pool. Ecologically, this area is characterized by a variety of wild annual plants, perennial plants and geophytes, and the remains of mountain terrace farming, as well as fruit orchards and a wealth of wild animals, owing to the abundance of spring water. Lifta is an important part of the ring of wilderness surrounding Jerusalem, and because of its prime location at the entrance to the city, it is a highly accessible Green Lung and a magnet for varied Jerusalem populations, as well as for many Israeli and foreign travelers.

From the landscape point of view, the beauty of Lifta is a trademark of the outskirts of Jerusalem, an inseparable part of the entrance to the city, its vista and its charm. The planned construction in Lifta will be an environmental hazard, severely and irreversibly harming the ecology and landscape. It would alter the open character of the area, will substantially change the landscape and character of the entry to the City, and prevent the residents of Jerusalem (particularly those who use public transportation) from enjoying nature, the plants, the spring and the pool. Conservation is of extreme importance for the Lifta area as an open space with limited development.

### Affordable housing

Construction in Lifta will not help meet the urgent housing needs of Jerusalem residents. The construction program and tender show that the Lifta project will consist of only expensive, large luxury apartments exclusively designated for the rich. This clearly contradicts the policy of affordable housing announced by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Government.

Under the plan, the maximum areas in the new buildings in Lifta will be from 189-300 m. per housing unit. The plan calls for very high construction standards, which will increase the cost of apartments. Also, according to the tender, the development costs alone (excluding the price of the land

and levies) will range between 491,000 - 932,000 shekels per housing unit. In light of the high price, apartment size and the "touristic" nature of the planned Lifta project, it can be assumed that most of those luxury apartment buyers will be foreign residents who will not even live in them most of the year and will not rent them out. Thus yet another ghost town will have been created in one of the more unique and fragile locations in the City. Diverting precious resources to a project that is meant only for a rich population, most likely consisting of foreign residents, violates important social and economical values and reflects impaired priorities rather than the public interest.

### Collaboration and dialogue

Marketing Lifta to real-estate developers and purposing it for luxury apartments raises the question of its heritage. Lifta was one of the more developed Arab villages in Israel prior to the 1948 war, both due to the characteristics of the village's inhabitants and its location on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The extensive lands of the village reached Ein Karem, the Mea Shearim quarter of Jerusalem and Sheikh Jarrah. In 1948 the population of Lifta numbered nearly 2,950. Lifta residents were forced to leave their village in January 1948 and became refugees. Many Lifta citizens live today in East Jerusalem. In spite of this, the original residents and their descendants, as well as the Jewish families that were housed at the edges of the village after the war and who live there to this day, were not made part of the planning process and did not participate in the discussion about the future of Lifta, and they oppose the current plan.

There is now broad recognition that the preservation of a site should reflect its importance for communities which have an interest in it, and that these communities should take part in the planning and conservation process. Conserving the unique values of Lifta must be done with full cooperation of its past and present inhabitants.

A genuine dialogue and the participation of the Palestinian Lifta residents in planning the future of the village will most likely serve as a model path for searching together for a joint life of peace, reconciliation and justice, recognizing the pain and acknowledging the pain and the mutual responsibility for the situation. However, this unique opportunity will be missed if the construction plans for Lifta are realized and its heritage is erased.

**In light of all this, the Civic Coalition for Saving Lifta calls for an immediate halt to the marketing process of Lifta, and demands that the required surveys of the site are undertaken in a comprehensive manner and that a thorough public discussion is held in cooperation with experts in the field.**