Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development

Document to establish the Strategic Objectives

Image courtesy of the Malta Tourism Authority / Klive Vella

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Introduction

Background to the Plan

1 The Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands adopted in 1992 was developed in a context where development was largely undertaken without strategic guidance and with no serious consideration of its impacts, both on different uses and the environment. The Structure Plan was based on a resource oriented strategy that channels development into existing and committed urban areas, particularly through rehabilitation and upgrading of existing fabric and infrastructure, in order to constrain further inroads into undeveloped land whilst encouraging further social and economic development.

2 This containment strategy, which implied higher urban density development, was targeted to improve the quality of all aspects of the environment of both rural and urban areas whilst at the same time provide sufficient land and support infrastructure to accommodate the projected socio-economic growth. The Temporary Provisions Schemes of 1988 provided the delineation of urban development zones upon which planning policy and development control were to operate. Minor amendments were made following a partial Structure Plan Review and the corresponding completion of all seven Local Plans for Malta and Gozo in 2006.

3 The Structure Plan's strategy was translated into seven local plans and a number of supplementary planning policies. The implementation of these policies over the past two decades has essentially been effective to contain urban sprawl within the defined development boundaries, as is recorded in the recent State of the Environment Reports. Notwithstanding this performance the containment of urban sprawl still needs to be pursued as demand for development still persists.

4 The efficient use of available space zoned for development together with the regulation of design and operations of development to reduce conflicts between uses and promote sustainable use of natural resources to support socio-economic growth represent the context faced by strategic planning today.

Need for a Replacement Plan

From land use planning to spatial planning

5 The Development Planning Act of 1992 (as amended) required the monitoring and review of the Structure Plan, provided that it does not take place within five years of the Plan's approval (Art.18 (3)). Mid-way through the life-time of the 1990 Structure Plan, MEPA decided to review the Plan and prepare a replacement plan centred on sustainable development objectives, to take account of contemporary social and economic implications of land use planning decisions and to consolidate and update strategic land use planning policy

accordingly. For this purpose a series of Topic Papers were prepared to identify key land use issues that would need to be addressed in the replacement plan. An Issues Paper and a Strategic Growth Options Paper were also prepared.

6 With the enactment of the Environment and Development Planning Act of 2010 (EDPA) the approach to strategic planning has been broadened to encompass the concept of spatial planning where the focus is in translating economic, social, cultural and environmental policies in a geographical context. This legislation calls for the preparation of a Strategic Plan for Environment and Development (SPED) which shall regulate the sustainable management of land and sea resources.

7 The legislation also stipulates that the SPED:

- shall be based on an integrated planning system that ensures the sustainable management of land and sea resources together with the protection of the environment; and
- must set out policies in relation to the development and use of land and sea and shall be illustrated by diagrams as necessary and accompanied by an explanatory memorandum giving a reasoned justification for each of the policies and proposals contained in the plan.

8 The SPED must also ensure that:

- plans, policies and programmes issued under the EDPA are spatial, holistic and comprehensive so that all factors in relation to land and sea resources and related environment conservation are addressed and included and to balance demands for development with socio-economic considerations and the need to protect the environment;
- sectoral policies, activities and inputs are integrated and coordinated with each other, combining the inputs of all disciplines and groups;
- all actions are based on a clear understanding of the natural and legitimate objectives and needs of individual land users; and
- it follows other national policies and plans.

Meeting the challenges of today

9 The socio-economic development witnessed in the Maltese Islands since the preparation of the Structure Plan, coupled with increased regulatory measures and actions to improve environmental quality have introduced new challenges for various sectors.

10 Malta's Operational Programme for the period 2007-2013 has the overall objective of *Investing in Competitiveness for a Better Quality of Life which* aims to develop

and generate economic growth based on competitive economic activities, underpinned by adequate physical infrastructure, leading to a better quality of life for the Maltese citizens. This will necessitate improvements in the country's physical infrastructure, particularly in the areas of enterprise support, RTDi, tourism and culture promotion, transport networks, the energy and water sectors, environmental sustainability, risk prevention, as well as urban regeneration, E-society, education and social infrastructure, and health. These efforts are intended to sustain Malta's economic growth prospects and achieve competitiveness in the medium and the longer term.

11 This over arching goal is providing the foundations for the future and in order to implement it a new policy framework to address land and sea use is required. It is also being taken forward through the National Reform Program prepared under the Europe 2020 Strategy. The role of strategic spatial planning within an economic climate that is demanding growth through innovation that also safeguards natural resources entails a significant challenge. Selecting the most suitable way forward to accommodate the country's needs within a small land territory is a daring task, when considering that we have a population density of 1,307 persons per square kilometre, compounded by over 1 million tourists per year and the increase in resident permit holders following EU accession. Significant steps have been taken with the formulation and implementation of the Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands of 1990 and its subsidiary plans and policies. The preparation of a new policy framework will build on the achievements and lessons learnt in applying land use policies over the past two decades.

Purpose of the Strategic Plan for Environment and Development

12 It is the intention of Government that the SPED shall not amend the Development Zone boundaries as approved by Parliament in 2006 and will cover the marine waters up to the 25 nautical mile limit of the Fisheries Management Conservation Zone (adopted by Council Regulation EC No. 1967/2006 under the EU Accession Treaty, 2003). The marine spatial extent defined for the purpose of the SPED is without prejudice to the management of the continental shelf by Malta under the Continental Shelf Act of 1966.

13 The SPED will replace the Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands which was published in 1990 and adopted in 1992 and will provide a strategic spatial policy framework for environment and development up to 2020 complementing Government's policy direction for the same period.

14 The SPED must make proposals for the future spatial distribution of development and the protection of the environment on land and sea. It must ensure that these proposals are consistent with national policies and integrate Government's social, economic and environmental objectives. The following key policy documents in particular should

guide the preparation of the SPED: the National Reform Programme (NRP) under the Europe 2020 Strategy (April 2011), the Consultation Draft of the National Environment Policy (2011) and the Government's Vision 2015 (2008).

15 The SPED shall be an enabling plan to increase the competitiveness of the Maltese Islands in a manner where socio-economic development assists the achievement of national environment objectives. As a national strategic document, the SPED is to guide the spatial aspect of Government sectoral policies, plans and programmes, including those emerging from the EDPA, as well as form the primary basis for decisions on all development and environmental permit applications.

16 The SPED will also ensure that the preparation of sectoral plans is in line with the thrust of the Territorial Agenda which has the aim of ensuring implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy according to territorial cohesion principles, where the internalisation of spatial influences is an integral part of sectoral plan formulation. In addition, the SPED is to provide the spatial framework that supports the development of an integrated maritime policy at a national level.

17 Current Subsidiary Plans will be reviewed to take on board the principles and policies of the SPED and to ensure consistency between Subsidiary Plans for neighbouring Plan areas. In the interim period to the adoption of the reviewed Subsidiary Plans, policies and proposals in approved Subsidiary Plans shall not prejudice the implementation of this Plan.

Preparing the Strategic Objectives

18 In February 2011, Government initiated the process to prepare the SPED as a replacement for the Structure Plan. The first step, which was led by Government, entailed a review of national policy documents, a consultation exercise with Ministries and Government entities and input from the Structure Plan Review process.

19 Article 51 (6) of the EDPA stipulates that the preparation of the SPED requires regard to the current economic, social and environmental policies affecting development and to Government policies on population, economic activities including employment patterns, leisure and recreation, social and community facilities, transport, utilities, conservation, the State of the Environment Report (SOER) and policy documents and decisions related to air, water, nitrates, waste and floods.

20 The formulation of the strategic objectives has been guided by the following list of National Programmes, Plans and Policies:

Policies

- Vision 2015 (2008)
- Pre-Budget Document 2012 (2011)
- Public Transport in Malta – A vision for public transport (2008)
- Grand Harbour Vision (2007)

- Vision for Fort St. Elmo and Marsamxett Harbour (2007)
- National Sustainable Development Strategy (2006)
- National Strategy for Cultural Heritage (2006)
- Draft Biodegradable Waste Strategy (2010)
- National Strategy for Policy and Abatement Measures relating to the reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions (2009)
- Draft National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, 2010
- Waste Management Strategy (2009)
- Culture Policy (2011)
- Tourism Policy for the Maltese Islands, 2007-2011 (2007)
- Renewable Energy Policy (2006)
- Non-communicable Disease Policy (2010)
- Draft Energy Policy (2008)
- Draft National Environment Policy (2011)

Plans

- Air Quality Plan (2010)
- Water Catchment Management Plan (2011)
- Eco-Gozo Action Plan 2010-2012 (2009)
- National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (2011)
- National Renewable Energy Action Plan (2011)
- National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion, 2008-2010
- National Environment and Health Action Plan, 2006-2010 (2006)
- National Cancer Plan, 2011-2015 (2011)
- Storm Water Master Plan (2008)
- Nitrates Action Plan (2011)
- Development of Yachting Facilities in Malta: Identification of Potential Sites for All-Weather Marinas and Temporary Marinas (2009)
- Draft National Environmental Technologies Action Plan (2005)
- Draft Noise Action Plan (2011)

Programmes

- National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy (2011)
- Operational Programme I – Investing in Competitiveness and Quality of Life, 2007-2013 (2007)
- Fisheries Operational Programme for Malta, 2007-2013 (2009)
- Rural Development Programme - 2007-2013 (2009)

Scope of this document

21 The document puts forward a spatial structure for the purpose of guiding development and then presents the key issues for the sustainable management of land and sea resources with their respective spatial implications. Finally, the strategic spatial vision and objectives of Government to address these issues are set out.

22 This document represents Government's intentions and strategic objectives that the SPED must address. These strategic objectives are to be subjected to public consultation to ensure that the SPED is built on an understanding of the needs by the wider community and the private sector.

Strategic Framework

Introduction

23 Development takes place within a geographical context and is intrinsically influenced by that same context. Strategically there is a need to identify the characteristics of that space to then formulate how change through sustainable development can be managed to provide opportunities for growth while at the same time safeguard and promote the positive qualities that define that same space. This part of the document presents a brief overview of the Maltese geographical context and sets out the spatial structure of the Maltese Islands. The long term vision to guide the formulation of strategic objectives for the SPED is then presented.

Spatial Structure of the Maltese Islands

24 The geographical characteristics of the Maltese Islands, particularly influenced by geomorphology, have shaped our history throughout centuries and as a result also influenced development trends. The natural harbours on the south east gave rise to fisheries and port development whereas agriculture mainly dominated the rest of the land territory. The Northwest tilt on mainland Malta and the karstic topography particularly on Gozo, played an important role in the growth of settlement patterns and the location of marine related activities which are concentrated along the shallower parts of the north east shores.

25 Malta still exhibits a distinction between the western part which is dominated by unbuilt open areas accommodating agricultural activities and the eastern part which is more densely developed containing major residential areas, prime industrial and service functions and showcases of history, identity and culture. Within this broad distinction there is a large conurbation centred around the historic Grand Harbour from Pembroke in the North, to Qormi in the centre and up to Zabbar in the South, which houses the bulk of the population and is the economic motor of the island; a number of satellite towns such as St. Paul's Bay, Mellieha, Rabat, Zurrieq being major residential and tourism hubs and providing a service function to the surrounding settlements; and a scatter of small settlements around them such as Dingli, Safi, Qrendi and Mqabba.

26 The rural areas of the Maltese islands reflect the continuum of activities from very rural to very urban which blurs the distinction between the two. In general, the rural areas are characterised by low population densities, agricultural activities and natural resources. Agriculture land accounts for almost half of Malta's land area whilst woodlands account for less than 1%. Rural areas have three distinguishing spatial features influenced by the geomorphology of the islands namely ridges and valleys to the north of the Great Fault, the Rabat-Dingli uplands and the hills and plains to the south-east. These features have made the rural area north of the Great Fault and the central parts more varied in terms of rural functions

and landscape features while the south east is more homogeneous in character dominated by agricultural buildings and other structures and activities.

27 Gozo and Comino have a population density of only 452 residents per square kilometre; around one third of that for Malta. The distinction between urban and rural is much less clear in Gozo. Although Rabat dominates the island in terms of population concentration and non-agricultural functions, the remaining built up areas are small centres of population such as Xewkija, Nadur and Xaghra, and even smaller settlements such as Ghasri and Gharb in the wider rural area. Other settlements are dominated by the tourism and leisure function with low resident population.

28 Although the size of the Maltese Islands is comparable to other islands which can be considered entirely coastal, our status as a Sovereign state coupled with the intensity and diversity of development as a result of a high population density creates a clear spatial distinction from the inner part of the islands where activities are purely terrestrial and do not depend on the sea. A distinctive feature of the coast is that part of it is predominantly developed for urban uses such as the stretch of coast between Ricasoli and St. Julians, while the rest is dominated by cliffs, sandy beaches and rocky coastlines such as Dingli, Ghajn Tuffieha and the Xghajra to Marsascala stretch where the major use is agriculture. As the coastal zone extends to the sea and the wider marine environment, the geo-morphological and biological diversity present on the coast together with centuries of human activity create a distinctively rich landscape. The marine space up to 25 nautical miles covers an area of 11,354 sqkm, which for a small archipelago with a land area of 316 sqkm, attributes a higher spatial significance to the marine area.

29 On the basis of natural characteristics, existing uses and their interactions as well as administrative boundaries, the **Urban Area** (Development Zone), the **Rural Area** (Outside the Development Zone), the **Coastal Zone** (up to 12 nautical miles), the **Marine Area** (between 12 and 25 nautical miles) and **Gozo** have been identified as distinct spatial areas as shown on Map 1. The current Development Zone and Outside Development Zone boundaries, have been delineated through the Local Plans Rationalisation Exercise of 2006, the terrestrial limits of the Coastal Zone were identified by the 2002 Coastal Strategy Topic Paper. The seaward limit of the Coastal Zone extends to the 12 nautical miles boundary of the Maltese territorial waters. The limit of 25 nautical miles of the Fisheries Management Conservation Zone corresponds to the limit of the Marine Area addressed by the SPED. Gozo is treated as a distinct spatial area in line with the thrust in the NRP, Vision 2015 and the NEP. It is important to recognise the distinctive characteristics of Gozo and thus to ensure that policies for Gozo are not just a replication of a 'one size fits all' approach but are focused and created with Gozo's specific needs at the centre of policy making.

Vision

30 The Vision encapsulates the long term aim of the SPED which emerges from the key Government policy directions in the NRP under the Europe 2020 strategy, Vision 2015 and the draft National Environment Policy. It translates these policy thrusts into a spatial vision for the Urban Area, the Rural Area, the Coastal Zone and Marine Area and for Gozo.

By 2020, the Maltese Islands will have raised their potential for social and economic growth in the core sectors for development – Financial Services, ICT, Tourism, Manufacturing, Health, Education and Eco-Gozo; they will have improved the quality of life and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable groups, and the environmental awareness of their people; they will have moved closer to a low-carbon, zero-waste, green economy, will have halted the decline of their biodiversity and deterioration of their water resources and will have used space sustainably.

The Urban Area will become an attractive place for people to live, work, play and interact. It will be clean, pollution free, safe, green, distinct, evoke a sense of openness, energy efficient and generate energy from micro-renewable infrastructure. Its historic cores will become vibrant and their townscapes harmonious. The Urban Area will have a network of economically dynamic urban hubs and walk-able neighbourhoods with clusters of local facilities.

The Rural Area shall sustain the livelihood of farming communities through modernisation of agricultural practices and diversification of compatible rural activities; shall remain a place where people can escape from daily urban life, visually pleasant and rich in biodiversity; and become better green lungs with less buildings and dereliction, more accessible and more resilient to the impacts of climate change.

The Coastal Zone and Marine Area shall maximise the potential for sustainable socio-economic growth and renewable energy infrastructure, shall accommodate legitimate and compatible uses, sustain the livelihood of the fishing community, remain rich in biodiversity and visually striking and become pollution free and accessible for public enjoyment. It shall play a significant enabling role for the Maltese Islands to reduce their impact on climate change and strengthen their capacity to adapt to climate change.

Gozo will become an ecological island. It shall protect the Gozitan lifestyle, the island's environment, resources, culture and identity, and ensure that these play a significant part in attracting more visitors and investors to the island. Gozo's economy shall be refocused to increase support for a healthy, inclusive society, protection and proper management of its environment, the preservation of its cultural heritage and strengthen the island identity.

Key Issues for the SPED

Introduction

31 This section of the document identifies the issues that need to be tackled by the SPED in order to plan for the sustainable management of land and sea resources. There are four key thematic issues which emerge from a synthesis of the NRP, the Vision 2015, and the Draft National Environment Policy, consultation with Ministries and Government entities and from the Structure Plan Review Process:

- Socio-Economic Development
- Environment
- Climate Change
- Travel Patterns

These thematic issues are cross-cutting and affect all sectors of our economy, quality of life and the status of the environment we live in. The spatial implications and linkages between these thematic issues are discussed within the Maltese Spatial Structure as defined above.

Socio-Economic Development

32 Over the last two decades the Maltese economy underwent a significant restructuring process characterised by a shift from agriculture and the manufacturing sector towards the services sector. Emerging and growth sectors include chemicals, aircraft maintenance, business services, I.T. and financial services whilst tourism and electronics remain key sectors. The growth of the Maltese economy was accompanied by a high level of development pressure in many locations, where in addition to meeting needs, it was also characterised by investment in real estate.

33 Like many other countries, Malta faces an ageing population, mainly due to a lower fertility rate and an improvement in longevity. The 65+ age group represents 13.7% of the population, up from 11.4% in 1995. On the other hand, persons under 25 years of age make up 31.5% of the population, compared to 36.6% in 2005 (Demographic Review, NSO, 2010). This trend which resulted in an increasingly elderly population has been observed since the 1967 Census and is expected to continue in the foreseeable future. Focus is required on the demand on the limited financial resources of the State, including the pensions system, their need for supportive services, their risk of dependence, and the housing and social environment.

34 The NRP identifies the bottlenecks which are hindering sustainable levels of growth in the Maltese economy to be:

- a slow or declining labour productivity
- relatively low educational attainment and skill levels of the Maltese workforce
- long term sustainability of public finances especially in the face of health care and pensions expenditure resulting from the impact of demographic ageing
- quality jobs in target niche sectors

- low labour market participation particularly female and old age participation and administrative and regulatory burdens.

35 In addition the NRP also identifies the main infrastructural bottlenecks which require attention particularly education, energy and water resources, transport, communication and the environment. The provision of good quality supporting infrastructure is instrumental in pursuing growth of the identified sectors of the Maltese economy.

36 Housing price development is a socio-economic issue that influences economic performance. In the boom period, real estate price increases stimulate credit expansion and possibly raise unrealistic expectations of future capital gains. These factors support excessive housing construction, which often lead to a substitution of investment from the tradable sectors to the non-tradable sectors. The lower share of investment in tradable sectors can eventually lead to a slowdown in economic activity and correction in house prices. If the correction is significant, financial markets are often destabilised, as occurred on a global scale at the start of the financial crisis.

37 Malta experienced a property price boom in 2003 – 2005 with the NSO indicator suggesting that the boom continued until mid-2007. The property boom also coincided with the inflow of capital from abroad upon the repatriation of Maltese residents' savings abroad during the process of Euro adoption. This one-time phenomenon possibly explains the continued increase observed in the latter years of the boom. Therefore one should be careful in projecting these trends forward. A correction occurred in 2009 and 2010, well synchronised with the global recession and correction in real-estate prices. In conjunction, investment in residential housing has also declined suggesting that investors have possibly reassessed their expectations of long-term capital gains towards more realistic and sustainable levels.

38 The affordability of property for low income earners and vulnerable groups is an issue that requires attention and with the sharp rise in property prices, this puts even more pressures to identify where and how suitable and affordable housing can be provided. Another factor that may lead to an increase in the demand for social housing is the expected increase in the elderly population.

39 Health and long term care systems must have adequate resources that are effectively managed to ensure their future sustainability, improve their quality and accessibility. Focus on accommodating the demand for expensive institutional health and long term care needs has led to soaring costs in delivering these services. Waiting times are a long term issue in both health and long term care and may have an impact on the health and quality of life of patients apart from reducing their overall satisfaction with the health and long term care systems.

40 Growth in the potential of our human resource will increase investment, growth,

competitiveness and efficiency. Different levels of opportunities in education lead to better employment prospects and enhance the social cohesion of all people whatever their age, gender, background or status as they can develop their knowledge and skills to the good of society. The unsatisfactory rates of dropouts of early school leavers, 39% in 2008, and the percentage of tertiary educational attainment of 30-34 years olds, 21% in 2008, have implications on the quality of life and growth potential of the country.

Land Supply Issues

Housing

41 The Housing Topic Paper, 2002 estimated that to cater for projected growth in population and households and the demand for second homes, a total of 43,400 dwelling units would be required between 2000 and 2020. This equates to an additional 21,700 dwelling units for the SPED period (2010 – 2020). MEPA Land Availability studies indicate that in 2011, land available for housing development within the Development Zone but excluding around 86 hectares of land allocated for residential development in the 2006 Rationalisation Exercise amounts to 301 hectares. A conservative estimate of the capacity of the 301 hectares of land indicates that it can accommodate 37,000 dwelling units. With the 86 hectares of land allocated in 2006 this would bring the capacity to around 44,000 dwelling units. This figure is based on the assumptions that (i) only vacant land within those parts of the Development Zone designated as Residential Areas and Residential Priority Areas is taken into account (ii) an average height limitation of 3 floors for Residential Areas and 2 floors for Residential Priority Areas, and (iii) 15% of floor space being utilised for non-residential uses.

42 The total capacity of the Development Zone to accommodate new dwellings is indeed much larger since a proportion of existing buildings have not reached their maximum development potential, new dwelling units are also allowed in other urban designations other than residential and residential priority areas, and over the last ten years the percentage of new dwellings permitted on previously developed land averaged 54% (ranging from 40% to 70% between 2000 to 2010). Therefore the number of units projected to be built on vacant land within the Development Zone is reduced to 11, 000.

43 No comprehensive information is available that takes stock of the quality of these vacant dwellings and quantifiably describes the issues that prohibit them from being readily available on the market. Furthermore, during the period 2000-2010, 75,000 new units were permitted compared to a projected demand of 21,700 units over the same period whilst 53,000 dwellings lay vacant in 2005 leading to the conclusion that there is an oversupply of land for housing.

Employment

44 Forecasts for job creation up to 2020 are required to determine the amount of

floor space needed to accommodate these jobs and ensure that the targets set out in the NRP are met. An employment rate of 62.9% by 2020 has been set, which implies an increase of 4.5% over the projected employment rate for 2010. The targeted increase of 4.5% is almost three times more than the increase Malta achieved between 2000 and 2008. On the basis of population projections found in the 2010 Malta Update of the Stability Programme 2009-2012, the NRP projected employment rate of 58.4% in 2010 would result in a total employment of 168,198 given that the 15-64 age cohort in 2010 was 288,011. The 2020 target employment rate is a proportion of the 15-64 age cohort (277,929) of the population for 2020 and this would result in a total employment of 174,817. The projected net increase in jobs over the period 2010-2020 is estimated to be around 6,620.

45 This projected increase in jobs by 2020 was categorised under the broad economic sectors of market services and direct production with 77.4% going into the market services sector, (4900 new jobs) and 22.6% in direct production (1720 new jobs). The subdivision was arrived at by projecting an average rate of shift (0.76%) of jobs from direct production to market services between 1997 and 2010 (Central Bank of Malta Annual Reports 1998-2010). It is acknowledged that the projected average rate of shift is only applicable over a relatively short period of time since applying the projection over a longer period would imply an eventual tapering off to 0% jobs in direct production which is both unrealistic and undesirable. The average rate of shift is also vulnerable to external economic influences.

46 On the basis of an average employee to floorspace ratio of 1:103 sqm (Malta Enterprise) the 1720 additional direct production jobs would require 28 hectares of land. In 2006, 502.4 hectares of land was available for industrial development of which 34% was vacant (170.1 hectares). MEPA data shows that between 2006 and 2010 around 4 hectares of land was taken up for industrial development per year. This implies that the need for land (28 hectares) can be met by the vacant land within designated industrial areas and so on a national scale the land required for industrial development up to 2020 is satisfied.

47 With an average employee to floorspace ratio of 1:50 sqm (MEPA data) the 4900 jobs in the market services sector would require 245,000 sqm of floorspace. MEPA Land Availability Studies indicate that in 2011, floorspace available for development related to market services within the Development Zone designated in the Local Plans amounts to 112, 832 sqm. In addition, Local Plans have identified other floorspace in areas such as Marsa Park (80,000 sqm), Gzira Employment Node (20,000sqm), Fort St. Elmo, Pembroke and AirMalta owned land at Luqa for employment uses related to market services. Over and above, around 260,000 sqm of floorspace has already been granted permission for market service related development in Smart City and Malta International Airport. This implies that the needs of the market services sector can be

met on already committed floorspace.

48 Therefore up to 2020, the overall floorspace requirements for employment uses have been met and leads to the conclusion that there is an oversupply of floorspace for employment purposes.

Environment

49 Malta has established a well-developed legal framework and a set of institutions in the environmental field that have protected ecological, archaeological and built heritage as well as landscapes. There has also been considerable investment in establishing the necessary infrastructure to reduce pollution, particularly in waste management and sewage treatment. Public investment in the conservation of historic buildings, fortifications and archaeological sites has also markedly increased over the past decade, due to increased awareness and the availability of EU funds. However, in many instances the environment is still seen as a competitor against development. Sustainable development necessitates a shift whereby development gradually works with and safeguards the environment and the natural resources it requires.

50 The Maltese environment still faces a number of challenges arising from a dense population within a very small land territory. The large number of competing activities, unsustainable consumption patterns and a general lack of awareness of the inter-linkages between socio-economic activities and environmental processes is leading to unsustainable use of natural resources and threatening the environmental quality which together are affecting environmental health and quality of life and potentially increasing our vulnerability to the predicted impacts of climate change.

51 The various elements that define our environment depend on the natural characteristics, their status and the impacts arising from human activity. The Draft National Environment Policy and the State of the Environment Report (2008) suggest that the way we utilise natural resources and the impacts arising from various human activities are leading to the deterioration of our environmental quality.

52 Living organisms and the variety they represent are valuable not only for their inherent value, but they also provide life-support systems upon which we are dependent. The diversity of habitats and species, exhibited by the Maltese Islands is not limited to rural and coastal areas as urban environments also contain living organisms of conservation value. Despite the legal protection afforded to important habitats over the last 15 years the Maltese Islands' *biodiversity* continues to be threatened by land development, invasive alien species, overexploitation and climate change.

53 The topography of the Maltese Islands is characterised by rocky outcrops and areas covered by *soil*. Contamination, salinisation, soil sealing and erosion are the key sources that affect soil quality. Malta's increasing

urbanisation together with intensification of agricultural practices and abandonment of agricultural land have also accentuated pressures on soil.

54 One natural resource that has been exploited over the years is limestone. The limited size of the Maltese Islands, high population density and the extraction methods have resulted in inevitable conflicts between *mineral extraction* and tourism, industrial, commercial and residential development and the preservation of natural and cultural resources. Permanent damage to ecology and landscape is a significant threat, whilst dust emissions from quarry operations affect agriculture and health. Since only a few exhausted quarries have been restored to beneficial after-uses compatible with their location, the current situation is considered to lead to unsustainable use of resources. In addition the wastage of mineral resources at the extraction stage and lack of re-use/recycling is leading to problems of waste disposal.

55 *Water resources* include surface waters, groundwater, transitional waters, coastal waters and marine waters. Whilst marine waters are in abundance, fresh water resources are limited in supply. The two principal sources of pressure on Malta's freshwater resources are over abstraction and pollution from nitrates. Lack of rain water harvesting practices and infrastructure and increased soil sealing have led to incidences of localised flooding. With a heavy reliance on reverse osmosis plants for potable water, management practices to recover water from treated sewage effluent are not yet maximised. The main pressures affecting the quality of coastal and marine waters arise from land based sources of pollution and development that alters the hydro-morphology of these waters (Water Catchment Management Plan, 2011). Inert construction and demolition waste has over the past decade increasingly been disposed of in the designated spoil ground to the NE of Grand Harbour. Shipping on the other hand exposes the marine environment to disturbance of sediments, introduction of alien species, release of hazardous chemicals and increased vulnerability to oil spills.

56 Malta's *built heritage and archaeological remains* are a significant component of our cultural heritage. Our high population density and dynamic urban environment however continue to pose difficulties to conservation objectives. These elements of cultural heritage remain under threat from demolition, inappropriate design and use of new and restored buildings which undermines street character. Unless legally protected, buildings of historical value and archaeological, particularly at sea, remain vulnerable to development pressures and human activities.

57 The national identity of the Maltese Islands is encapsulated in its *cultural landscape*, spanning the urban, rural and coastal areas. Malta's cultural landscape is threatened by the extent of built up area, industrial and coastal development, taller buildings on urban fringes that obstruct views of historic centres, modern agricultural

practices, increased vehicular access, litter, poor standards of design and workmanship, and lack of maintenance.

58 The introduction of significant amounts of substances or energy into the environment gives rise to pollution, with implications to human and ecosystem health. Malta's significant *air* pollutants are particulates and nitrogen dioxide mainly arising from traffic, industry and energy generation and ozone mainly from trans-boundary sources. National monitoring results indicate that air quality is of concern in certain areas, particularly those prone to traffic.

59 Surveys carried by the Occupational Health and Safety Authority in 2005 indicate that the employment sectors with the highest *noise* levels are construction, leisure and manufacturing industries. Recent data from MEPA identifies heavy traffic as the main source of ambient noise.

60 Many environmental health issues arise from the misuse, poor collection, storage and treatment of *chemicals* and other hazardous substances which pass into air, water, sediment and soil leading to contamination. Risk arises in particular from the hazardous waste stream as well as from uncontrolled chemical reactions associated with non-inert waste. Pesticides and biocidal products are considered to be of particular concern.

61 Our consumption patterns have led to Malta's *solid waste* management practice to be historically heavily dependent on landfills with low levels of material recovery. In 2006, 80% of total waste generated went to landfill. 87% of the total waste generated is inert waste which consists chiefly of Construction and Demolition waste. The principal impacts of this waste stream are land take up, pollution and nuisance related to transport and depletion of minerals considered as Malta's only non-renewable resource.

Climate Change

62 Due to their small size and location in Southern Europe, the Maltese Islands are vulnerable to the predicted impacts of climate change. The 2nd National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2010) indicates that the Maltese Islands are already experiencing a decrease in annual precipitation which may lead to episodes of drought, and more intensive storm events leading to flash flooding. Predicted changes in global sea levels are likely to affect coastal areas and groundwater. These impacts are expected to affect ecological processes and systems upon which most socio-economic activities and infrastructure depend.

63 Development that affects the health of ecosystems including habitat distribution, that makes inefficient use of energy and natural resources and does not take into consideration the projected impacts of climate change is likely to increase the vulnerability of the Maltese Islands even further since these natural resources are the basis of the ecosystem services upon which

the sustainability of economic sectors such as tourism and agriculture depends.

64 According to the 2011 National Inventory Report, Malta's Greenhouse Gas emissions increased by 38.8% between 1990 and 2009. The energy sector (including transport) was the principal contributor (87.9%) of gross national emissions in 2009. Whilst uptake of renewable energy infrastructure remains low, consumption patterns still need a significant push to be steered towards energy efficiency at end user level. Currently there is a skills shortage across the board to implement measures for energy performance in buildings. The use of alternative sources of fuel for cars may improve local air quality however it is not likely to generate a significant reduction to greenhouse gas emissions from transport as would occur with the shift from private car use to public transport. Waste generated 7.6% of total greenhouse gas emissions in 2009: unless consumption patterns shift towards reducing, re-using and recycling of municipal solid waste, the volume of waste that goes to landfill will not decline significantly and its decomposition will continue to generate greenhouse gases. The other sectors that are accounted for in the National Inventory Report are agriculture which generates 3% of total emissions and industrial processes (1.5%).

Travel Patterns

65 Ease of mobility is an integral element in supporting access to social and community facilities, retail outlets and enabling a better quality of life for all. Good quality and efficient transport infrastructure and networks sustain commercial activities both within the Islands and with foreign markets. There is always a need for an indispensable level of transport provision to meet required socio-economic development objectives. The development and management of the transport sector must however be undertaken in a manner that does not undermine the sustainability of other sectors, does not impact on human health and reduces the demand for non renewable resources.

66 The high dependency on car travel affects the physical environment. Current land use trends of dispersal and intensification coupled with a car dependent lifestyle have led to an increase in travel. Growth in travel has been accompanied by the use of public land for more roads and parking, thus using up a further scarce resource, damaging streetscapes and consequently affecting cultural and natural heritage. It also creates a serious impact on human health and our quality of life.

67 A further issue resulting from traffic growth is the increased demand for parking. Although provision increased over the past decade, it has not matched the higher increase in car ownership and use. This had deteriorating repercussions with a significant amount of town centre traffic being made up of cars searching for a parking space. This is particularly apparent in main employment and entertainment locations.

68 Traffic growth leads to pollution especially through congestion which deteriorates air quality. The main emissions from motor vehicles include carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, oxides of sulphur and other particulate matter. The two major concerns regarding vehicle emissions are their impact on human health and climate change. In 2009 transport accounted for 21.5% of energy sector emissions of greenhouse gases. Congestion imposes extra costs on road users through wasted time and fuel, delayed deliveries and reduced reliability, puts stress on the strategic road network and encourages traffic to use unsuitable residential roads to bypass the congestion thereby endangering the quality of life of those residents.

69 As car ownership and use have increased over the years, so bus patronage has declined. In addition to the impacts on health and the environment, there are social impacts associated with further private car growth. If the decline in bus patronage is not addressed this would inevitably reduce the level of service provided. The recent introduction of a public transport system with a new fleet of buses is expected to reduce emissions and drive a reversal of this downward trend which could otherwise seriously affect the mobility of those who do not have access to the car including the young, the elderly and the mobility impaired.

The Key Issues within the Maltese Spatial Structure

Urban Areas

70 Whilst an integral aspect of organising urban areas to reduce the need to travel, reduce demand for supporting infrastructure and contain urban sprawl is resolved through high densities, without parallel mechanisms to manage the associated impacts arising from higher densities, in certain instances this may lead to negative impacts at a local level. Urban areas should provide a safe living environment supported by the provision of adequate social and community facilities together with a thriving and compatible retail community. The liveability of urban areas is dependent on how these factors are comprehensively organised and managed.

71 The quality of urban settlements has been affected by increases in residential densities, with a shift to the development of apartments rather than independent dwellings (maisonettes or terraced/semi/detached houses). MEPA data for Dwelling Approvals (2000-2010) indicates that apartments accounted for 64% of all new dwellings permitted in 2000. This proportion rose to a staggering 90% in 2007 to then decrease to 84% in 2010. Increasing densities have had a number of negative effects manifested to different degrees in certain localities with impacts on the quality of streetscapes and public open spaces, social and community facilities, increased traffic flows and on residential amenity and the general upkeep of the environment. The drive towards the development of penthouses and residential use of semi basements needs to be considered in the light of its effects on building heights and densities, restricted access to rooftops, reduced potential for renewable energy generation infrastructure on adjoining properties as well as rainwater harvesting. While tall buildings may increase the efficiency of land use if they are actually occupied and may contribute marginally to the provision of open space, their impact on the Maltese landscape is becoming a matter of concern. Between 2002 and 2007 12 tall/medium rise buildings all located within densely built up areas such as Tigne/St.Julians/Sliema were approved.

72 Low provision of urban green space and other recreational facilities in towns and villages does not help to encourage healthy lifestyles. Proliferating incompatible uses in residential areas have reduced amenity and quality of life, and resulted in greater congestion, lack of pedestrian safety and air and noise pollution. The need for sufficient provision of parking space has had an effect on streetscapes. As a result the degree of social integration that builds a strong sense of identity within the community living there has been gradually eroding.

73 Despite the islands' high proportion of urban land which is attributed to the high population density, the 2005 Census indicated that 22% of all residential properties lay permanently vacant. In addition 5% of all properties were second or holiday homes. Similar over supply has been observed in the

commercial and industrial sectors. The principal cause of this high provision is the use of land and property for investment purposes.

74 If the current trend of out migration from historic cores continues, the loss of people and economic activity threatens the dynamics of the urban settlements as more and more structures are abandoned and allowed to decline. Factors that are leading to this movement of people away from these areas include the physical obsolescence of some properties due to age, lack of amenities, small rooms and provision of adequate transport infrastructure that are not considered sufficient to support the improved lifestyles of the 21st century. The lack of appropriate incentives directed to pull people back into these areas coupled with the availability of new suburban land and property which have provided a relatively quick and attractive alternative to undertaking costly maintenance works in older property assisted this migration. Incompatible redevelopment that does not complement the traditional forms still constitutes a pressure. The current approach to the control of design has not been entirely successful in improving the appearance and character of historic cores, whilst some areas have been negatively affected by the use of inappropriate restoration techniques or treatments.

75 The high car dependency is having a particularly negative effect on the characteristics and dynamics of Urban Conservation Areas (UCAs). The narrow streets can no longer physically accommodate the growing demand for parking and it is acknowledged that building car parks as a solution would damage the historic fabric of these areas.

Rural Areas

76 The smallness of the islands, the high population density and the transition experienced in the last decades from a predominantly agrarian society to industrialised and urban communities have led to significant change in land use patterns. The expansion of urban settlements and new built-up areas up until the designation of the Temporary Provisions Schemes in 1988 has led to the coalescence of towns and villages. This has had an adverse impact on the distinct characteristics of rural areas and resulted in a reduction of open countryside; damage to natural habitats, wildlife and natural hydrological processes; conflicting activities; soil erosion and soil sealing; risks of pollution, such as from ground level ozone; contamination of soil and water catchments; and the scarring of traditional landscape. Other significant threats come from dumping, indiscriminate blocking of access, and fragmentation resulting from urban development, roads, obnoxious industries and agriculture malpractices.

77 Agriculture dominates the rural environment yet loss and abandonment of agricultural land mainly as a result of land fragmentation remain critical issues for rural areas. The present situation of Maltese agriculture where it finds difficulties competing because of the uneven public

support enjoyed by foreign products is considered to be economically unsustainable. Consequently the agricultural industry has become intensive and specialised with concentrations of greenhouses, farm buildings and small-scale agricultural structures that generate a significant cumulative impact on the quality of the landscape, as do the use of unsuitable design and materials. User conflicts through the inappropriate siting of animal farms and the lack of waste management have arisen. The challenges of modernisation require an appreciative understanding of the spatial context within which it occurs.

78 The Maltese landscape has been moulded over time by natural and anthropological forces and can be described as a cultural landscape. It is characterised by the karstic rock formations, the closely-knit geometric forms of settlements dominated by domes and steeples, terraced agricultural fields and Mediterranean flora. This valuable asset for tourism has generated development pressures that are not always in harmony with their locational context. The transformation of the landscape and of rural character by development is particularly visible in the urban sprawl on the fringe of Malta's conurbation. The numerous structures present in the countryside are testament to the islands' past where the military structures, archaeological features and rural buildings give the islands their cultural identity. Various buildings of heritage value have been abandoned whilst others were subjected to significant structural changes and additions.

79 Moreover, particular rural areas are under threat of degradation by the large number of people they attract, mainly for recreational purposes. The absence of suitable and practical management measures intensifies this problem.

Coastal Zone and Marine Area

80 The coastal zone within the Maltese Islands is perceived as a limitless resource that can accommodate all types of uses, in particular the marine environment, which is not covered by an adequate property management system. Consequently this has given rise to conflicts as the limited coastal space on land has been gradually taken up by uses that do not necessitate a coastal location, to the detriment of the legitimate coastal uses as well as the natural and cultural resources. With the coast accommodating most of the nation's strategic infrastructure (energy, ports, desalination and sewage treatment plants) and it being identified as a tourism zone in Malta's current tourism policy, the impacts from user conflicts within the coast become even more significant.

81 Increased building heights and new materials and designs have eroded the traditional character of settlements in the urbanised coast. Coastal engineering works have led to an increase in the artificialisation of the coastline and loss of sandy beaches whilst fishing villages have been almost completely transformed and displaced by recreational and holiday accommodation facilities. Demand for development is

concentrated in areas that have easy access to the sea leading to intensification in already developed coasts. Competition for a coastal space is significant even from legitimate coastal uses such as port-related activities including fuel storage, aquaculture and recreation, which reflects the needs for modernisation of operations.

82 The use of the marine environment for economic activities has been increasing over the last two decades, diversifying from fisheries and shipping with the development of the Malta Freeport, the establishment of bunkering sites, the introduction of aquaculture as well as the development of yacht marinas. All these activities also generate the demand for ancillary facilities on land. Although the fishing industry in Malta is mainly artisanal, its social and cultural importance far outweighs its economic contribution to the national GDP. Together with aquaculture it is considered to be a major user of the coastal and marine space with the 25 nautical mile Fisheries Management Conservation Zone dedicated to sustainable fisheries.

83 With the potential of marine related development still not fully exploited, it is possible that future development proposals for marine use particularly in the renewable energy sector, short sea shipping and diversification of the aquaculture industry will also increase. Given the distinctive difference in water depths between the northern and southern shores pressure for maritime development within the coastal zone will likely be concentrated along the northern shores. In the absence of a holistic policy direction that addresses marine space, the potential for conflicts between marine uses as well as coastal activities is high and if left unchecked may be detrimental to the efficient use of the marine resources.

84 Land based activities are the main sources of coastal and marine pollution that affect the natural processes and the socio-economic activities that depend on them such as bathing water quality and seafood quality. Coastal and marine areas are also vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, not only through increased temperatures that may affect marine ecosystems but also through increased storm surges and sea-level changes that are likely to accelerate coastal erosion and affect coastal habitats and the densely used low-lying coastal areas.

Gozo

85 The island faces a number of realities and challenges mainly originating from its double insularity which may necessitate a more tailor-made approach to address them. Being an island within an island, the operators in Gozo suffer from a number of comparative disadvantages to their counterparts in Malta such as high transportation costs. Transport in Gozo is highly dependent on private car use causing congestion, air pollution and noise in certain areas. The recently introduced new public transport system is expected to help reduce these impacts. The small size of the island renders space very sensitive and as a result limits opportunities for both business and industrial activity. Issues with space are

also evident in the extremely fragmented farm land which limits the optimal use for agriculture. An emerging issue is the lack of sufficient child-care centres on the Island. This will become more pressing in the near future given the number of parents having to travel to Malta for work, compounded with the fact that people will remain active for a longer period of time. Capacity constraints in tertiary education are also evident.

86 Gozo is characterised by an ageing population and a high dependency ratio. Its economy is highly dependent on tourism, retailing, and governmental services. These factors combine to create a number of threats to the Island's future opportunities. These include a real risk of environmental degradation due to the continuous over-exploitation of the rare and limited resources such as landscape and biodiversity; excess urbanisation; and high seasonality in tourism arrivals. All these elements put the same distinctiveness and quality that attracts the visitor to Gozo in the first place at risk. The transformation of coastal recreational areas into highly urbanised waterfronts changes the characteristic landscape and squeezes the natural coastal biodiversity further. Fragmentation in rural activities in connection with farm holding and land ownership increases the risk of making agricultural activities non-profitable. This will have adverse implications on the rural setting especially the loss of traditional activities and maintenance of dwellings.

National Spatial Strategy

87 The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) sets the basis on which all areas of the Maltese Islands will achieve their potential for sustainable development and takes forward the Vision of the SPED. The NSS implements the spatial dimension in the national and sectoral Government policy documents as listed in paragraph 19.

88 The NSS addresses the thematic issues and the Maltese spatial structure issues identified in this document through a set of Thematic Objectives that permeate all socio-economic sectors. Objectives for the Maltese Spatial Structure are also elaborated where: (i) the bulk of development is directed to the Urban Area with the aim of consolidating it within a spatial hierarchy whilst improving further the liveability of towns and settlements; (ii) the Rural Area is promoted for agriculture and diversification in support of farming activity in addition to protection and management of the natural and cultural resources that give it its distinctive qualities; and (iii) a planning framework is proposed to integrate socio-economic growth and environmental management within the Coastal Zone and Marine Area.
The Strategic Objectives are inter-linked and are presented as a holistic set to guide the policy formulation stage of the SPED.

89 The sustainable use of land and sea resources depends on the efficient use of available space. In preparing policies, plans and programmes Government will adopt a sequential approach to the use of land where development should be guided first to the re-use of existing developed land (through change of use), secondly to re-development of existing development land and finally to the use of vacant land. The NSS for the SPED is formulated on the basis of this approach.

90 Administratively the NSS is to be adopted without prejudice to subsequent procedures and assessments required by legislation.

Socio-Economic Development

Thematic Objective 1: to manage the available potential space and environmental resources on land and sea sustainably to ensure that socio-economic development needs are met whilst protecting the environment by

- Providing a framework for the spatial planning of the Coastal Zone and the Marine Area
- Achieving a wider mix of compatible uses on land and sea
- Guiding the location of the bulk of new jobs and homes within the Urban Area
- Reducing development densities of urban settlements
- Increasing green open space
- Prioritising degraded, previously developed land and buildings

Thematic Objective 2: To ensure that provision is made for new social and community facilities and to cater for extensions to such existing facilities for education, child care, health, the elderly, the disabled, rehabilitation and places of worship which are accessible for all whilst minimising environmental impacts by

- Guiding the location of the bulk of new social and community facilities within the Urban Area
- Retaining land which accommodates existing social and community facilities for such use
- Facilitating the provision of at least 5 child care centres
- Facilitating the extension of MCAST
- Facilitating the provision of health centres at a regional level and homes for the elderly at a local level
- Maximising the efficient use and reuse of existing facilities

Thematic Objective 3: To support the lifting of persons out of risk of poverty and social exclusion by

- Seeking to integrate social facilities for vulnerable groups within existing communities, with special focus on the Cottonera, Valletta, Msida and Qawra areas.
- Seeking to increase the supply of affordable and social housing, especially for vulnerable groups

Thematic Objective 4: To seek to ensure that existing strategic infrastructure is safeguarded and that provision is made for infrastructure (water, electricity, sewers, fuel storage, telecommunications) to sustain socio-economic development needs whilst encouraging the Best Available Technology and protecting the environment by

- Supporting the implementation of the Energy Policy
- Facilitating the Interconnector cables to Sicily and extension of the Delimara Power Station
- Directing new large scale fuel storage facilities towards the Freeport area
- Retaining and upgrading existing large scale fuel storage facilities in the Grand Harbour area
- Ensuring that the environmental impact of new small scale fuel storage facilities is minimised
- Facilitating the consolidation of infrastructure and networks
- Facilitating the improvement of the quality and quantity of location and distribution of utilities infrastructure

Thematic Objective 5: To ensure that existing recreational resources are protected, enhanced and accessible, and to facilitate the provision of new recreational facilities to improve social cohesion, human health, air quality and biodiversity by

- Safeguarding Burmarrad Country Park, Delimara Country Park, Ta' Qali National Recreational Centre, Marsa

Sports Centre, Mellieha Foresta 2000, Buskett and Majjistral National Park from deleterious and incompatible land uses

- Safeguarding strategic multipurpose sports complexes; Kordin, Kirkop, Cottonera, Qawra, Rabat (Gozo), Tal-Qroqq National Pool from deleterious and incompatible land uses
- Setting out a framework to guide a limited provision for major impact recreation away from sensitive areas
- Directing the bulk of new formal recreation facilities to the Urban Area and the Urban Coast
- Ensuring that the scale and design of supporting infrastructure improves the intrinsic quality of the experience of informal recreation

Environment

Thematic Objective 6: To safeguard environmental health from air and noise pollution and risks associated with use and management of chemicals by

- Controlling the location, design and operation of development
- Identifying and designating pollution hotspots including air and water quality, noise and land contamination, and focusing resources for positive action and improvement
- Identifying and designating areas for management and protection from sources of pollution
- Promoting alternative modes of travel such as walking, cycling and marine travel

Thematic Objective 7: To promote the efficient use of resources including local stone, water and soil, and manage waste in a manner that safeguards natural processes, and minimises impacts on cultural heritage, landscape and human health by

- Considering further mineral extraction preferably through extensions of existing quarries provided that there is no unacceptable adverse impact on protected areas and species
- Safeguarding mineral resources from sterilisation
- Identifying appropriate after uses for disused quarries
- Ensuring phased extraction of minerals and restoration of quarries
- Protecting natural hydro-morphological and hydrological processes
- Promoting rain water harvesting provided that there is no unacceptable adverse impact on protected areas and species
- Controlling the location of development to prevent soil sealing and erosion
- Protecting agricultural land and gardens to prevent loss of soil and soil sealing
- Supporting the implementation of the Waste Management Strategy
- Controlling demolition of buildings and structures and excavation of sites

- Preferring proposals which move away from sole reliance on final disposal of waste
- Reviewing the policy on dumping of inert waste at sea

Thematic Objective 8: To safeguard and enhance biodiversity, cultural heritage, geology and geomorphology by

- Identifying, designating and managing areas, buildings, structures, sites, spaces and species for protection and appreciation
- Controlling activities which might have an impact on areas, buildings, structures, sites, spaces and species
- Safeguarding protected areas including SACs, SPAs and MPAs whilst enabling activities aimed at enhancing their management objectives
- Strengthening the links within the ecological network of the Maltese Islands
- Facilitating restoration of damaged ecosystems
- Re-appraising the value of the character, amenity and distinctiveness of designated areas and sites for their built heritage value
- Setting out a positive planning policy framework for culture-led regeneration programmes and projects

Climate Change

Thematic Objective 9: Controlling Greenhouse gas emissions and enhance Malta's capacity to adapt to Climate Change by

- Supporting the implementation of the Energy Policy
- Requiring the integration of small scale renewable energy infrastructure into the design of buildings, especially large structures
- Ensuring that development plans and proposals contribute to national targets for GHG reductions and mainstream climate change adaptation measures
- Directing development away from areas which are prone to significant risk of flooding with the exception of interventions required to manage these areas

Travel Patterns

Thematic Objective 10: To facilitate the provision of a road network and a parking framework that supports modal shift whilst minimising their adverse environmental impacts particularly on protected areas and species by

- Shifting the emphasis from new road construction to better integration of public transport priority measures on better managed roads
- Safeguarding the implementation of the TEN-T network

- Revising the current standards for the provision of off-street car parking
- Supporting the implementation of the Public Transport Strategy (Park and Ride)

Thematic Objective 11: To facilitate the provision of an efficient public transport service and other green modes by

- Requiring transport assessments for a wider range of travel generating schemes
- Seeking the inclusion of public transport, walking and cycling prioritisation measures in road improvement, traffic management schemes and large scale development
- Identifying stretches of the road network where bus priority routes can be introduced to facilitate the diversion of trips onto public transport
- Supporting the implementation of the Public Transport Strategy (Public Transport Interchanges)

Thematic Objective 12: To ensure the continuing efficient operation of the international and inter-island transport hubs whilst minimising adverse environmental impacts by

- Promoting the efficient use of the port area on land and sea of the Grand Harbour and Freeport
- Ensuring that provision is made for the land requirements of the Freeport and the Airport
- Ensuring that the transport network serving these hubs can accommodate their anticipated growth
- Consolidating Cirkewwa and Mgarr Harbours to ensure their continued effective functioning.

Urban Areas

Urban Objective 1: To accommodate socio-economic development in those parts of the Urban Area well served by public transport and existing infrastructure, to contain urban sprawl and minimise the need to travel by

- Designating a hierarchy of urban areas as follows:

  Principal Urban Area (PUA) – to accommodate major employment, social and residential development needs

  Regional Urban Settlements (RUS) – to accommodate employment, social and residential development serving regional needs

  Small Urban Settlements (SUS) – to accommodate development serving local needs

- Guiding the distribution of new dwellings so that the bulk is located in the PUA mostly on previously developed land

- Guiding the distribution of new jobs so that the bulk is located in identified Business Hubs predominantly for retail, office, tourism and leisure uses and in identified Enterprise Hubs predominantly for the economic sectors identified in Vision 2015
- Designating a range of local centres in subsidiary plans to accommodate a mix of small scale businesses and enterprises

Urban Objective 2: To improve the townscape and environment in historic cores by

- Controlling form, scale, density and type of development within historic cores and their setting
- Facilitating appropriate housing types for the historic cores

Urban Objective 3: To identify, protect and enhance the character and amenity of distinct urban areas by

- Carrying out an appraisal of the value of the character, amenity and distinctiveness of urban areas
- Designating sub-areas within urban areas for a distinct range and scale of functions linked to appropriate size thresholds
- Identifying in subsidiary plans sites which are derelict, in a state of abandonment, of poor quality or include incompatible uses and seek their upgrading through high quality development
- Controlling the proximity of non-residential uses in urban areas
- Establishing appropriate building heights and development densities
- Protecting and greening open spaces which contribute towards the character and amenity of urban areas, reduction of soil sealing and support biodiversity.
- Retaining and seeking to upgrade existing sports facilities, public gardens, playgrounds, promenades and other public open spaces in urban areas
- Seeking to achieve a minimum level of urban green space per person
- Reducing traffic in urban areas by promoting pedestrianisation and green modes of travel

Urban Objective 4: To ensure that all new developments are energy efficient and provide a sense of place, respond to the local character, improve amenity and the pleasantness of place and ensure safety by

- Setting out a policy framework to promote high quality design particularly on buildings located on the edges of the urban area and the urban coast
- Controlling space standards and function of development, also integrating civil protection requirements
- Ensuring that the design of buildings

makes efficient use of energy and resources and reduces waste
- Seeking to minimise risks from crime through design
- Seeking to reduce risk hazards through design and location
- Seeking to integrate the requirements of people with special needs in the design of buildings and facilities

Rural Areas

Rural Objective 1: To facilitate sustainable rural development and the diversification of activities within the Rural Area to sustain agriculture by

- Protecting good quality agricultural land from development
- Supporting the modernisation of existing animal and arable farms located away from sensitive areas
- Guiding new animal and intensive arable farms to intensive agriculture zones identified in subsidiary plans
- Integrating renewable energy and waste management infrastructure and sustainable water management for efficient resource use in intensive agriculture
- Broadening the range of acceptable activities by farmers in rural areas on agricultural holdings
- Controlling the cumulative effect of rural development

Rural Objective 2: To ensure that existing rural recreational resources are protected, enhanced and accessible and to facilitate the provision of new recreational facilities which enhance the public's rural experience in a manner which does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on protected areas, species and areas of high landscape sensitivity by

- Identifying and managing key rural areas popular for informal recreation which enhances the rural experience from deleterious and incompatible uses
- Promoting informal recreation in the vicinity of the Principal Urban Area
- Reappraising the network of country pathways identified in subsidiary plans and prioritise for implementation
- Ensuring public access to rural areas whilst minimising the negative impacts, particularly from vehicular access, in the locations identified above
- Ensuring compatibility between recreational activities and between these activities and other land uses

Rural Objective 3: To guide development which is either justified to be located in the Rural Area in approved Government policies, plans or programmes, or is incompatible with urban uses and where alternatives are not possible, to the Rural Area away from protected areas and areas with a high landscape sensitivity, preferably on previously developed land or existing buildings and ensuring the improvement of the quality of the rural environment by

- Setting out a policy framework to control the location and design of such development and guide appropriate environmental measures
- Controlling the cumulative effect of such development
- Requiring compensation measures to enhance the rural environment

Rural Objective 4: To protect and enhance the positive qualities of the landscape and the traditional components of the rural landscape by

- Carrying out a reappraisal of designated areas
- Identifying and classifying a hierarchy of landscapes to protect the most sensitive landscapes, to promote rehabilitation initiatives towards the enhancement of the degraded landscapes and guide the control of location and design of development within the landscape
- Carrying out a reappraisal of strategic open gaps identified in subsidiary plans to prevent coalescence of urban development and identifying further areas for designation
- Encouraging the reuse of existing structures worthy of conservation, in a manner which is compatible with the rural character and prevents formalisation of the countryside
- Establishing a hierarchy of rural settlements to guide the nature, scale and type of development within them

Rural Objective 5: To rehabilitate, upgrade and regenerate deteriorating natural environments on the basis of their type and location by

- Identifying deteriorating natural environments
- Preparing management or action plans with priority for nature conservation

Coastal Zone and Marine Area

Coastal Objective 1: To prioritise uses that necessitate a location on the coastal zone and marine area in a manner which minimises user conflicts, does not accelerate coastal erosion, protects biodiversity, cultural heritage, landscapes and visual access to them, public access and use and increases resilience to climate change impacts by

- Designating

  a predominantly terrestrial urban coast to promote compatible urban coastal uses, safeguard legitimate coastal uses and visual access from promenades, and enhance public use of bathing areas; and

  a predominantly terrestrial rural coast to encourage the continuation of traditional agricultural use where predominant and public access for informal recreation, to restrain mineral extraction from extending towards the coastline and improving small

scale beach facilities. The rural coast may also accommodate legitimate coastal uses of strategic importance which may be incompatible with urban coastal uses and where no alternative locations on the designated urban coast exist.

- Facilitating the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and work towards good environmental status.

- Adopting

  the boundaries of the coastal water bodies identified in the Water Catchment Management Plan, to achieve and maintain good ecological status of the marine environment;

  the boundary of the Territorial Waters as the seaward limit of the Coastal Zone boundary to manage activities and development (shipping, fisheries, infrastructure and oil exploration), promote large scale renewable energy infrastructure to ensure their economic viability and maintain good chemical status;

  the Contiguous Zone boundary (24 nautical miles) to manage cultural heritage; and

  the Fisheries Management Conservation Zone boundary to manage fisheries.

- Managing

  that part of the seabed and subsoil that falls within the 25 nautical miles.

Coastal Objective 2: To facilitate the sustainable development of the fishing and aquaculture industries by

- Seeking to maintain identified locations as strategic harbours for fisheries
- Prioritising identified fishing grounds for fisheries whilst minimising environmental impacts
- Guiding the location of aquaculture zones to accommodate new and relocated aquaculture installations away from sensitive areas and to minimise conflicts with coastal and marine uses
- Guiding land based ancillary installations for aquaculture which do not necessitate a coastal location towards Enterprise Hubs.

Coastal Objective 3: To ensure that existing coastal recreational resources are protected, enhanced and accessible and to facilitate the provision of new recreational facilities which do not restrict or interfere with physical and visual public access of the coast and in a manner which does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on protected areas, species and areas of high landscape sensitivity by

- Guiding major impact recreational facilities which necessitate a coastal location towards the terrestrial urban coast
- Supporting the implementation of Government's policy on the development of yacht marinas
- Guiding formal recreational facilities which necessitate a coastal location towards the terrestrial urban coast away from the designated ports
- Protecting and encouraging informal recreational facilities on the terrestrial rural coast
- Protecting designated swimming zones and identified diving sites from conflicting uses
- Guiding beach replenishment towards beaches with proven coastal erosion

Gozo

In addition to the above strategic objectives the following applies specifically to Gozo.

Gozo Objective 1: to ensure that the socio-economic needs of Gozo are met and to protect the distinctiveness of Gozo's settlements, cultural and natural environment to support the implementation of Eco-Gozo's initiative by

- Designating a Business Hub in Rabat for predominantly retail, office, tourism, leisure uses
- Designating Business Hubs in Marsalforn and Xlendi for predominantly tourism and leisure uses, and Mgarr for predominantly leisure uses
- Designating Enterprise Hubs in Xewkija and Ta' Dbiegi for predominantly industrial and craft-related uses respectively
- Facilitating the establishment of new child care facilities close to or within established Business and Enterprise Hubs
- Supporting a regional agro-tourism policy specifically for Gozo and as a niche industry for Gozo
- Establishing family friendly recreational parks and walkways
- Managing the cultural landscape, the undeveloped coast and enhance its biodiversity
- Supporting afforestation initiatives in line with biodiversity goals