

The GRDA and *Għal Għawdex* seek to converge on *Għal Għawdex* Eight Point Plan

The seven stakeholders within the *Għal Għawdex* Forum and the Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA) held a formal meeting to discuss and find convergence on the Eight Point Plan launched by *Għal Għawdex*. This meeting followed the publication of the GRDA reaction to the proposed plan.

GRDA and *Għal Għawdex* Forum are in full agreement on most of the proposals with full agreement on **point 1**, namely the urgent need for the development of a specific spatial plan for Gozo, clearly differentiating Gozo's rural and urban planning from Malta's, and in line with Gozo's status.

There is also full agreement on **points 3 and 4** concerning the use of fiscal incentives to direct the construction and real estate market towards more desirable outcomes. Both GRDA and *Għal Għawdex* emphasise the urgent need to remove the indiscriminate nature of the existing reduced stamp duty measure currently in place which is applicable for all type of residential properties in Gozo, and agree that any fiscal incentives in this area need to be re-directed towards sustainable construction that adds long-term value to Gozo.

GRDA and the Forum are again in full agreement on **point 5**, ensuring Gozo's distinctiveness by designating Gozo as a 'design priority area', enforcing stricter architectural standards and use of traditional features that complement the surrounding areas.

On **point 8** concerning correct interpretation and strict enforcement of current policies, rules and regulations, the GRDA and the Forum are also in agreement and expect utmost importance to be given to policies G1, G2 and G3 of DC2015, by the Planning Authority, when delivering its decisions. These policies refer to the urban landscape and preservation of a distinctive Maltese identity, the visual impact on townscape and protection of skylines, and the relationship between new and existing buildings to respect the existing streetscape with gradual incremental transition to safeguard sensitive areas. Proper and correct interpretation of these policies as highlighted in Court Rulings, amongst others *Falzon vs Awtorita' tal-Ippjanar (Appell) (15/03/2023)*, would resolve numerous issues which were the cause of undesirable outcomes during the last few years.

The GRDA and *Għal Għawdex* broadly share the same views on **point 2(c)**, whereby ODZ should be preserved and hence applications for developments in such areas should not be considered, with the exception of genuine farming applications, including the restoration of dilapidated buildings in the countryside and other similar structures for strictly farming purposes. Parties agree with the monitoring of long-term use and are against change of use for development under the Rural Policy and Design Guidelines.

It was agreed that further discussion would be undertaken with regards to **points 2(a) and 2(b)**, regarding the suspension of DC15, Annex 2 regulations and extension of UCA boundaries respectively as GRDA has some reservations on potential uncertainty that full implementation might create. GRDA and *Għal Għawdex* however emphasise the vital importance of preserving the island's streetscapes and skylines.

Parties agree in principle with regards to **Point 6** which calls for the strict observance of the 150-metre buffer zone around historical and scheduled buildings and monuments, respecting and not exceeding existing height of historical and scheduled buildings. However, the GRDA wishes to undertake deeper analysis on this point before full agreement.

Point 7 calling for compulsory purchase of at least one parking space with each residential unit is the only other area where GRDA and the Forum agree that deeper analysis is required to take into account the congestion being caused in Gozo by increasing use of motor vehicles.

GRDA CEO Mario Borg expressed his satisfaction with GRDA's solid and open relationship with Gozitan voluntary organisations including those represented in the *Għal Għawdex* Forum. He stated that the challenges being faced by Gozo need to be fully understood, and action, including policy measures, should be taken to address them. The preservation of Gozo's distinctiveness must be a clear priority for all parties and consequently all policy measures must reflect this. GRDA is committed to continue working to help national competent authorities, fully factoring in Gozo specificities in any of their decisions and actions.

Għal Għawdex Forum spokesman Godfrey Swain stated that the Forum is pleased with the progress registered with the GRDA. The Forum has also held detailed, positive meetings with the Minister responsible for Gozo, Hon. Clint Camilleri, and the Minister responsible for Finance, Hon. Clyde Caruana, as well as a detailed and fruitful meeting with the Minister responsible for Planning, Hon. Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi, together with the Executive Chairman of the Planning Authority, Oliver Magro. The *Għal Għawdex* Forum also presented its eight-point plan during a meeting of the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD) chaired by David Xuereb. Hon. Clint Camilleri, Hon. Stefan Zrinzo Azzopardi, and Andy Ellul, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Dialogue, were also present for the meeting. It was clear to the *Għal Għawdex* stakeholders that there is overall consensus on the very urgent need to achieve the desired balance between protection and preservation of Gozo and economic prosperity. Future generations depend on today's decision makers to have the necessary will and vision to make this happen, concluded Mr. Swain.