

GRDA views on Historical Built Heritage (Fort Chambray and associated buildings)

1. Preamble

A development application over a site at Fort Chambray, PA/2454/16, is proposing the “*Dismantling of British Barracks as part of Fort Chambray phase 3 development (with a view of incorporating the arcade in the future hotel building).*” This application was filed in 2013, but faced a lengthy screening process which was only concluded last month.

Along with this application, a separate application concerning this site was submitted last year, PA/3884/23, which is proposing amongst other works, the development of an aparthotel, and:

“demolition of the existing vacant British Barracks and dismantling of the front masonry screen and flanks as per PA/02454/16 which are proposed to be relocated and integrated within the proposed hotel main building;”

This site at Fort Chambray, over which development is being proposed, forms part of concession, which in 2005 transferred land at Fort Chambray to a private enterprise for a duration of 87 years.

2. Context

The Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA) has been set up to formulate, streamline, and help in the implementation of regional policies to help Gozo’s socio-economic development. This socio-economic development needs to reflect and enhance the long-term needs of Gozo taking into consideration its social fabric, its economy structure, and its man-made and natural assets.

As part of this role, the Authority devised and published a Regional Development Strategy for Gozo (RDS). The Strategy which has as its legal background, Article 8(1)(a) of the GRDA Act, is a central tool in the development of Gozo, expressing a clear, coherent vision and serving as a roadmap for ten years (2023 – 2033).

This vision centres on the notion of Gozo being an ‘Island of Villages’ that has distinctive characteristics. Characteristics, both physical as well as social, that form part of Gozo’s heritage and its identity. The vision for Gozo as presented in the RDS has three thematic areas, one of which focuses on ‘*Re-valuing Gozo’s Identity*’. Without Gozo’s identity there is no Gozo. Thus, the preservation, enhancement and promotion of Gozo’s identity need to be at the centre of any discussion that regards Gozo.

3. Feedback by the GRDA

Gozo's identity includes its culture, heritage, and arts. These are a vital part of Gozo's identity, and without these tangible and intangible assets, Gozo would not have the same identity. These characteristics of Gozo are not only what distinguishes Gozo and its communities from other Mediterranean, European, and global realities, but place Gozo within the Euro-Mediterranean canvas to which it also belongs.

Despite its small size, Gozo's heritage and culture is significant. Cultural expression in Gozo is visible in heritage sites and museums, local theatres, digital and multi-media libraries as well as traditional libraries, schools, religious groups, and band clubs. It can be experienced in the village cores, in the very façades of the residential houses, churches and public buildings built over the course of the last few centuries and even more recent urban growth and development.

Gozo's built heritage reflects its rich history and contributed to the development of the identity and culture of the Island. As outlined earlier, Gozo's Regional Development Strategy emphasizes the importance of re-valuing Gozo's identity by amongst other enhancing accessibility and connectivity to cultural heritage; revitalising and repurposing heritage assets for new forms of cultural activities; and promoting a culturally distinctive Gozo.

The GRDA reiterates the importance of '**Promoting and Protecting Gozo's Heritage and Culture**'. This is one of the measures included in Gozo's RDS, which specifies that:

"Despite its small size, Gozo's heritage and culture is significant. Gozo's built heritage includes churches, theatres, schools, monuments and public spaces that have contributed to the development of the identity and culture of the Island. Several historic and cultural assets in Gozo are privately owned. Gozo needs to reinforce the concept of guardianship and stewardship of its cultural assets to be bequeathed to future generations. Measures, including an inventory for intangible cultural heritage, should be undertaken, helping to pave the way for the protection and promotion of these cultural assets." [The Gozo RDS, pg 35]

In this regard, and in line with the vision and strategic objectives presented in Gozo's Regional Development Strategy, the GRDA strongly emphasises the protection, preservation, and proper use of historical assets, including Fort Chambray and its associated buildings.