



PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

IT-TLETTAX-IL LEGIŻLATURA

P.L. 4974

Dokument imqiegħed fuq il-Mejda tal-Kamra tad-Deputati fis-Seduta Numru 335 tas-26 ta' Mejju 2020 mill-Ministru fi hdan l-Uffiċċju tal-Prim Ministru, f' isem il-Ministru għall-Ambjent, it-Tibdil fil-Klima u l-Ippjanar.

Raymond Scicluna
Skrivan tal-Kamra

ANNUAL REPORT 2019



PLANNING AUTHORITY



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REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Mr Martin Saliba



I was appointed as the Executive Chairperson at the beginning of December 2019, just before the Christmas recess. Therefore, all the achievements, projects and initiatives undertaken during the year under review were carried out under the direction of my predecessor, Johann Buttigieg, who has since moved on to head another regulatory entity.

The Authority is thankful to Johann for his long service to the Planning Authority as a dedicated employee, where he progressed from a trainee to a technical officer within the Enforcement Unit. Then as a professional officer prior to being appointed as Executive Chief Officer in 2013. During the last four years of his tenure he was the Executive Chairperson of the newly constituted Planning Authority, after the enactment of the Development Planning Act of 2016.

The Authority's strong ICT services that transformed the planning permitting process, and an increase capacity of tele-working and hot-desking, originate from Johann's determination and vision for a paperless system and new mode of working conditions. This is a remarkable achievement within the local administrative and regulatory context, and a legacy which enhances the Authority's capabilities to face new challenges in the future

Maintaining momentum

In 2019, we saw a decline of about 12% in the number of new applications received over the previous year. This year in total we received 10,716 applications while in 2018 we received a staggering 12,173 new applications, which was an all-time record. Still, this significant volume necessitates the same timely response from all the staff and deciding bodies, to continue working with the same level of efficiency as in previous years. This is evident in the constant output of development planning application decisions which have been kept at a steady level of above the 10,000 mark since the year 2017.

With such a high volume of planning application decisions every year, the challenge faced by both the Compliance and Enforcement Directorate, as well as the Lands Surveying Unit is that of resources. We need to continue providing the necessary support and adequate resources for these offices to function effectively.

Continue to invest in our resources: ICT and Skills development

Over previous years we have significantly invested in the development of digital services related to our procedures, whilst enabling better work flexibility and family-friendly measures for our staff with the introduction of tele-working and hot-desking.

During this past year, we have further injected over €1.3 million to continue to expand and secure our digital services, through the upgrading of the Authority's servers, hardware infrastructure and the setting up of an off-premises data continuity centre and security systems, in order to prevent potential malicious attacks and loss of data.

Time and resources have been dedicated to the development of a new e-apps 3 and geo-server 2. These will be launched by the second quarter of 2020. Nonetheless, the current e-apps system has been further developed to give access to lawyers to submit applications for the revocation or modification of permits, while providing better tools for external consultees. Through these upgrades, external consultees will be able to identify the more relevant applications they need to assess. The e-apps portal has also been extended to allow submissions of building regulation forms and for their assessment by the Building and Construction Agency.

In 2019, we also saw the closure of the €7 million SIntegram Project which delivered the new base map for the Maltese Islands, through the delivery of scanning and surveying of aerial, terrestrial and bathymetric domains.

The investment in information and geographic infrastructure was coupled with an ongoing training programme as part of the continued professional development for both the Authority's staff and Government employees through different scholarship programmes. The SpatialTRAIN programme continued to offer scholarships in the field of Geomatics at MQF levels 4, 5, 6 and 7. With great satisfaction and encouragement, I congratulate the 17 employees who completed their studies in Spatial Planning at Diploma level during this year, whilst 10 of these opted to continue their studies to gain a Bachelor's Degree.

In collaboration with the Royal Town Planners Institute (RTPI), the Authority had 20 of its employees attend various conferences and training sessions abroad, during which they enhanced their knowledge on various planning and enforcement-related topics.

In addition, following the conclusion of the collective agreement for the professional staff in 2018, this year another collective agreement was concluded covering 254 technical and clerical employees. These two important agreements empower our employees with a rise in salaries, benefits and better work conditions through the added flexibility in working hours.

Enabling improvements in our built environment

During 2019, the Authority scheduled some remarkable buildings, these include Villa Gorg Guza in Paola, il-Palazz tal-Isqof in Birgu, the Blackley Bakery, Kington House and ancillary building in

Pieta, Villa Icilio, Villa Fort in Lija, San Guzepp – il-Knisja l-Qadima in Mellieha and a townhouse in Old Bakery Street c/w Eagle Street in Valletta upon which an Emergency Conservation Order was also issued to preserve its old archaeological and historical features. Furthermore, a number of traditional townhouses in Stella Maris Street and Capua Palace Street in Sliema were scheduled to preserve the Maltese streetscapes.

During the year, the Authority helped fund 44 projects submitted by local councils or non-governmental organisations worth approximately €6.4 million through the Development Planning Fund. We also launched the third edition of the popular Irrestawra Darek Scheme with a €5 Million pledge to fund the restoration of private residences in our village cores.

Other Initiatives

Procurement of Ladder to CPD

As part of our social responsibility commitment, the Authority fully funded the purchase of a Magirus TurnTable Ladder (M32L) for Civil Protection Department at a value of over €650,000.

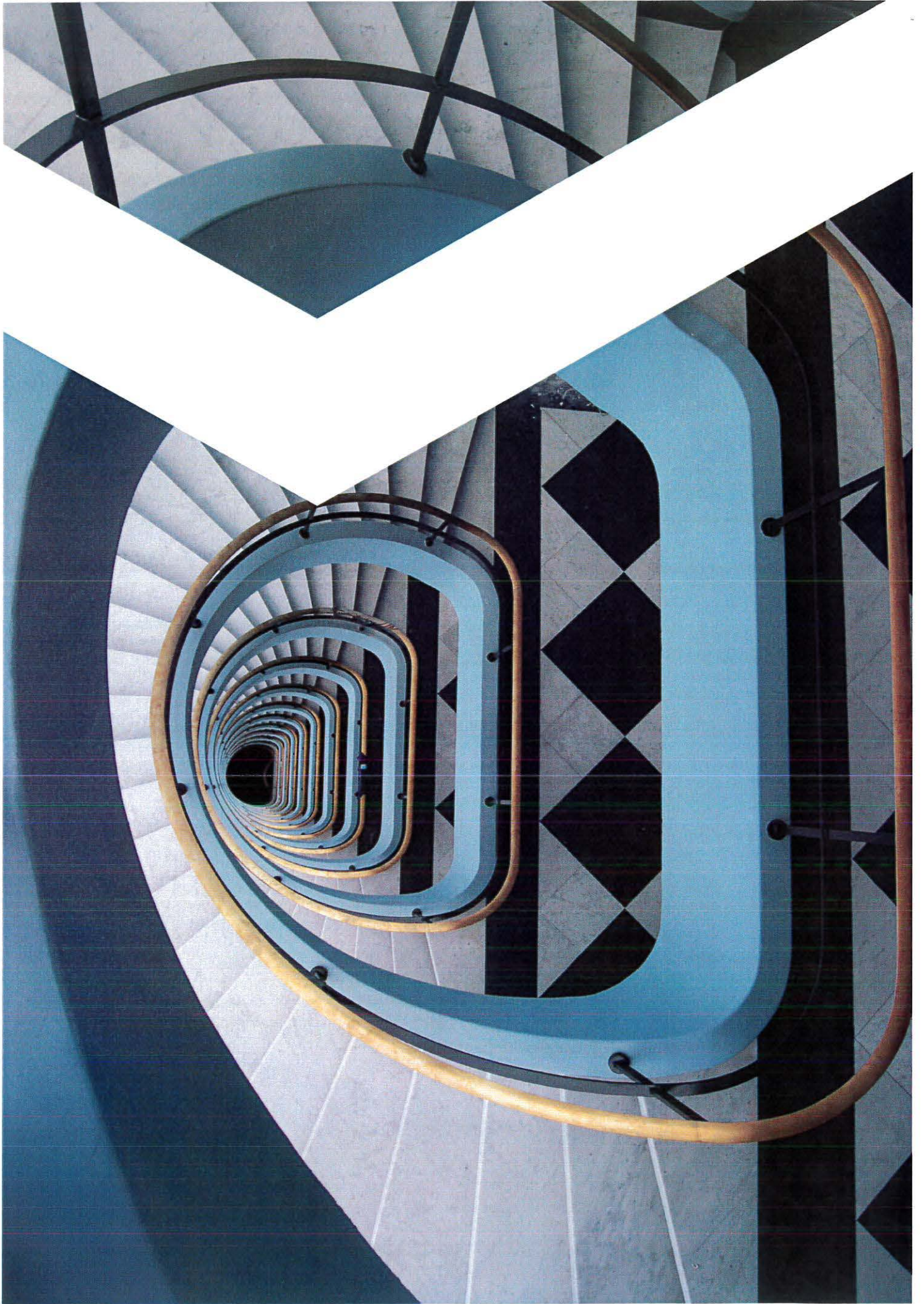
Study for Birdlife

Another initiative we supported this year is the funding of €60,000 to Birdlife which is enabling them to carry out research and monitor the behaviour of sea-bird. This study is being conducted in an area that is designated as Marine Special Protection Area for seabirds, under the Birds Directive. It is also a marine Special Area of Conservation under the Habitats Directive Area due to its overlap with the approved installation and extension of fish farms at Sikka l-Bajda.

Keeping the momentum

Now, the focus is increasingly being shifted towards an acceptable balance between quality development as part of our sustained economic growth and the social, environment and cultural well-being that characterise our islands. In the coming year, we need to be more focused on policy revisions to address challenging scenarios, such as the review process of the SPED; the review of the Rural policy guidance; the review of the Fuel Service Stations Policy; as well as the need to address better design solutions for our built environment.

I would like us to rise to the challenge. With the engagement of our staff, deciding bodies, and stakeholders, we need to actively come together to achieve better quality development for our urban and rural environment, for us and our future generations.



PLANNING DIRECTORATE

Director – Perit Christopher Borg

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DIVISION

Major Projects Unit (MPU) & EU and Special Projects Unit (EUSPU)

The processing of Major Projects development applications is not only limited to the assessment of the development proposals but, in many cases, involves extensive discussions with all stakeholders involved; a process which starts well ahead of the actual submission of a development application and continues throughout the planning process.

During the year, the MPU assessed different types of proposals some of which were very challenging in terms of achieving a high quality sustainable development within the established planning policy and legal framework. The Unit processed a variety of proposals which consisted of large-scale retail establishments, industrial development, community facilities, quarries and high-rise/landmark buildings for commercial use and tourism accommodation.

The Unit processed a total of 116 screening requests, also known as Schedule 1 applications and received 160 applications. A total of 192 applications were referred for a decision.

The EU and Special Projects Unit processed a total of 41 screening requests and received 207 applications. A total of 212 applications were referred for a decision. The Unit continued to show a commitment to make every effort to focus on the best way to assess applications in terms of quality, efficiency and transparency.

General Development Unit (GDU)

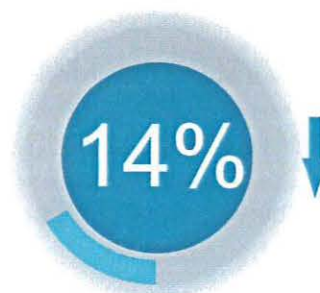
The GDU continued to achieve positive results in its objective to provide a solid and effective platform for the assessment of the majority of development permission applications received by the Authority. The Unit's officers received some 5,700 applications and concluded the processing of 5,200 by the end of the year.

During the year, several senior officials within the Unit attended training courses on Operational Management, Communication, and EU funds. Four officers carried out job shadowing experiences in both private and public entities in Italy and the UK.

The Unit also had an intake of two new professional officers and is now able to set-up its own satellite team at the PA's Gozo office.

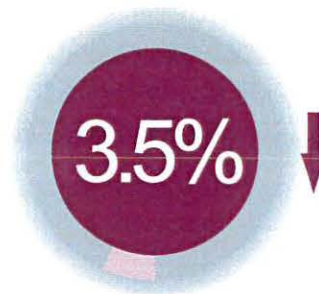
Urban Conservation Area (UCA) and Outside Development (ODZ) Unit

During 2019, the ODZ Team received 978 applications, showing a reduction of nearly 14% from the previous year. Throughout the year, the team concluded the processing of 1076 applications, resulting in almost a 10% increase over the previous year. The year ended with a caseload of 396 applications. Despite the reduction in applications received, there remains a steady demand for development in Malta's rural areas. This requires rigorous assessment to ensure that only that which is necessary to be built outside development zone is favourably recommended.



Drop in ODZ applications received from the previous year

The team responsible of processing applications within Urban Conservation Areas received 2,123 applications resulting in an average of 114 full development applications and 64 summary applications per month. The figures show a slight reduction of approximately 3.5% over the number of applications received in 2018. During the year the UCA Team processed and concluded 2055 applications, maintaining the same amount of the previous year. The Team closed the year with a caseload of 581 pending applications. The members of the UCA Team strived to guide applicants to be sensitive and adopt best practices when carrying out improvements within the Urban Conservations Areas, particularly in cases that included the rehabilitation of buildings having important historical and architectural elements.



Drop in UCA applications received from the previous year

Business Development Unit (BDU)

The BDU is tasked with assessing development applications of a commercial nature. In 2019, the unit saw a slight decrease in the number of applications received which in total amounted to 2022 applications. Whereas in 2018 the Unit received a monthly average of 183, in 2019 it received a monthly average of 168 applications. Ninety-one percent of the total number of applications received qualified as full process applications.

During the year, BDU officers concluded the processing of more development applications than the number received resulting in a reduction in the pending caseload.

Integrated Assessment & Building Unit

Sanitary Assessment (SA) Office

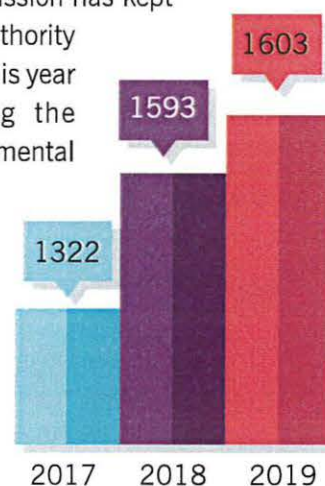
The SA office continued to support the main stream planning permitting system. In total the office carried out 28,787 assessments during the year. On average each new application was assessed 2.6 times, due to the submission of revised drawings.

Billing Office

During the year a total of 11,013 new bill calculations were carried out, of which only an insignificant percentage included recalculation for revised proposals or contestation of bill.

Development Notification Order (DNO) Office

DNO applications continued to remain a popular avenue for planning permission to be sought for certain types of works. Since 2017 the number of DNO submission has kept rising from 1,322 to 1,603 submissions in 2019. During the year the Authority received 1,593 DNO submissions. To facilitate the consultation process this year a new electronic consultation system was introduced linking the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, Transport Malta, the Environmental Resources Authority and the Planning Authority. This is an exemplary form of inter-governmental co-operation between agencies.



DNO applications received

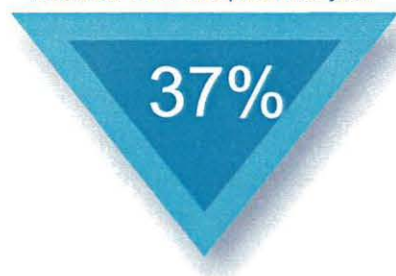
Minor Amendment Office

In 2019, the Minor Amendment office experienced an increase in applications, this is a result of the high number of applications received and permits granted since 2017. In total the Office received 3,105 minor amendment applications in 2019.

Regularisation Office

A notable decrease in the submission of regularisation applications was recorded in 2019. While in 2018 the Authority received 5,265 submissions, in 2019 the number dropped to 3,337, a decrease of nearly 37%.

Drop in regularisation applications received over the previous year



POLICY FORMULATION DIVISION

Strategic Planning Unit

Between January and December 2019, the Strategic Planning Unit received 32 planning control applications relating to site zoning. During the year, 21 applications were referred to the Executive Council for its consideration.

The Strategic Planning Unit also processed and finalised 3 Partial Local Plan Reviews amending three Local Plans during 2019. The Unit also continued processing 4 other pending reviews that have been initiated, together with initial work on a Development Brief, an Action Plan and a Supplementary Planning Guidance. Furthermore, as part of the ongoing Development Planning Application Monitoring Programme, the Unit analysed 16,319 permissions for development based on which information of development trends has been collated for further analysis and information purposes to assist strategic planning.

Green and Blue Development Unit

During 2019, the Green and Blue Development Unit utilised EU funds on projects aimed at improving the maritime planning process and enhancing the implementation of the SEA Directive.

Following the ratification of a protocol on integrated coastal zone management in the Mediterranean in April, the Authority feels further supported to continue to carry out its work in this sector.

During the year, the Authority published for consultation new procedures for the adoption of Social Impact Assessments in the planning process. Work on the annual reports on the Public Domain proposals and initiatives to evaluate the role of the Authority in the promotion of the use of Green Infrastructure continued.

Heritage Planning Unit

Throughout the year, HPU focused primarily on the administration of the every popular Irrestawra Darek funding scheme. Since 2017, three editions have been launched, all with the purpose to financially assist private property owners with restoration and rehabilitation works of their dwelling in Urban Conservation Areas. In the 2019 Irrestawra Darek edition, 560 applications were validated. 525 submissions related to privately owned residential properties located within Urban Conservation Areas (UCAs) and Grade 1 and Grade 2 scheduled residential buildings, while 35 submissions related to the promotion of a more homogenous upgrade of streetscapes within UCAs.

As in previous years, the scheme was open for private owners of residences, located within an Urban Conservation Area (UCA), who wished to carry out restoration and maintenance works on the facade of their old property. Private owners of such residences were given the chance to apply for a grant of 70% of the works, up to a maximum of €10,000.

Owners of Grade 1 and Grade 2 scheduled buildings were eligible for a rebate of 70% of eligible costs of restoration and conservation works. These works could be carried out on the facade, interior, and garden architecture of the property. Grade 1 buildings benefitted from up to a maximum of €100,000, whereas Grade 2 buildings were eligible for up to a maximum of €50,000.

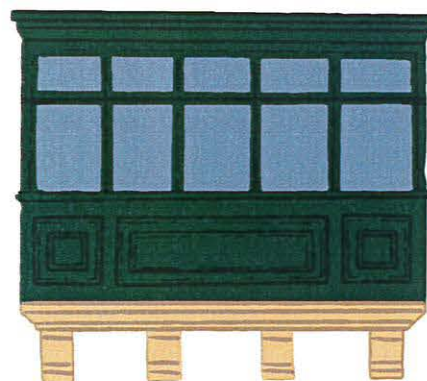
As an incentive to promote a more homogenous approach and improve the streetscapes of our traditional village cores, the Authority allocated €1 million and was giving individual properties up to €20,000 each. This on condition that the cluster of residential properties adds to not less than 50m of the streetscape. The properties need to be within an Urban Conservation Area and may include a commercial component.



Funds made available over the 3 years

The €5 million that was assigned to this scheme were made available from the fees the Authority generates from the regularisation application process .

The Unit also managed the Valletta Marsamxett Balcony Scheme which was launched at the end of 2018 and closed in March 2019. The scheme, which was 80% EU funded and 20% funded by the Planning Authority (PA), was intended to fund maintenance/restoration and replacement works related to traditional closed timber balconies and traditional open balconies. The grant amounted to 100% of the total eligible expenses (these amounts were capped according to the size of the balconies and the nature of the works). Additionally, the beneficiaries were also reimbursed the architect's professional fees (up to a maximum of €500).



67 applicants benefitted from the Valletta Marsamxett Balcony Scheme

A total of 80 requests for funding were submitted of which 67 were eligible and approved. The remaining 13 were either declined, invalid or incomplete submissions. From the 67 that were approved, just over 50% (34 beneficiaries) satisfactorily completed the eligible works and claimed in full. Another 23% (15 beneficiaries) only claimed the reimbursement of professional fees (these cannot be claimed from the scheme funds and are thus financed through PA funds). The remaining 27% (18 beneficiaries) did not complete the eligible works and thus they did not receive any funding.

As part of the Unit's responsibilities, throughout 2019, the Unit processed over 836 requests for the exemption of stamp duty on properties in urban conservation areas. In collaboration with the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage, the Authority scheduled a number of properties during the year, 52 in Sliema and 12 in various other localities in the Maltese Islands. Two properties in Fgura and Sliema were descheduled.

FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH, EU AFFAIRS AND FUNDING DIVISION (FPREAFD)

European and Multilateral Affairs Unit

In 2019, the European and Multilateral Affairs Unit (EUMA) focused its work on identifying the Authority's business needs through various internal discussions, which are feeding into the preparations for the next funding period (2021 – 2027). A number of project ideas, resulting from these needs, have been identified and work is underway to develop these further.

During the year, the Planning Authority concluded three funded projects namely a project on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, funded through the Structural Reform Support Programme; the SintegraM project, funded through the European Regional Development Fund;

and the SimwestMed Project, funded through the European Maritime and Fisheries' Fund. EUMA is coordinating the implementation of 14 projects with a total budget of over €10 million. Topics range from spatial information, human resources management, citizen science, property value, heritage trails, ICT, blockchain and business continuity, healthy cities, and smart cities.

EUMA continued to follow developments related to EU and multilateral legislation and policy, including the coordination of Malta's position on the EU proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on streamlining the measures for advancing the realisation of the trans-European Transport network (TENT-T). This was done through the setting up of a one stop shop authority for granting permits and positions in relation to the EU Urban Agenda. The Unit was instrumental in discussions with the EU Commission during a number of bilateral meetings in relation to the European Semester with discussions on planning policy procedures and Package meeting on environmental matters.

During the year, EUMA reacted to over 150 requests for information (some of which included detailed questionnaires or required a detailed account) requested by the EU and International bodies. The issues related to: Climate Change, the Construction Industry, Accessibility requirements in the built environment, the European Landscape Convention, Resources Efficiency, Research and Development Partnerships, Road Infrastructure, Single Digital Gateway, the Services Directive, Space Policy and State Aid. EUMA also followed the Planning Authority's input to a number of national documents emerging from EU and International legislation including the Noise Action, the Waste Management Plan and the Sustainable Development Strategy.

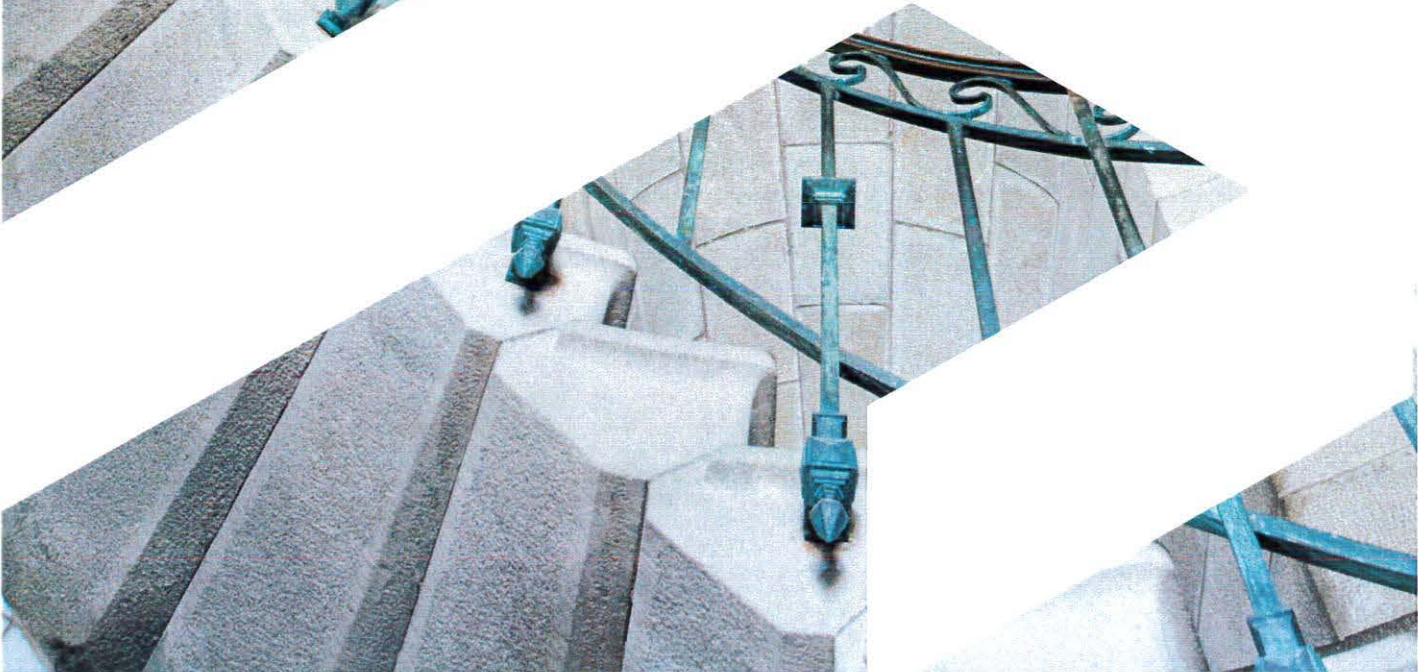
Research and Local Funding Team

The Research and Local Funding Team (RLF) manages the Authority's Development Planning Fund (DPF). The purpose of the Fund is to finance community projects proposed by Local Councils, NGOs or private individuals.

During the year, 44 project proposed either by local councils or other non-government organisations worth approximately €6.4 million were contracted through DPF. The amount contracted was the highest ever since similar schemes began to operate in 2003. Local Councils were given a presentation outlining various aspects of the PA funding process. This presentation was held with the assistance of the Department of Local Government and the Naxxar Local Council.

The RLF Team also manages the PA's internal Green Transport Initiatives (GTI's). By the year end, participation registered around 100 employees. This is considered to be a successful participation rate especially when considering increased use of family friendly measures (some of which incidentally contribute towards less traffic and parking) as well as the suspension of the minibus service. The PA continued to share its experience in green transport related measures with external users.

RLF officers also continued to assist with the processing of Transport Impact Assessments. FPREAD was also instrumental in organising the third Annual Malta Architecture and Spatial Planning Conference (MASP) which this year was entitled "Reinventing Places through Innovation". Officers within this division were involved in both the technical and logistics of organising this conference as well as providing direct support to the Chairman's office.



COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE

Director – Perit Raphael Axiak

The Compliance & Enforcement Directorate is tasked with the implementation of the measures and procedures, contained in the Development Planning Act (2016) and subsidiary legislation, referring to monitoring, regulation and enforcement.

The Directorate also participates in Executive Council and Planning Board meetings by providing feedback regarding petitions made by contraveners in relation to daily fines imposed in enforcement notices; the state of a site/development which would be subject to an active enforcement notice; and any breaches of obligations stipulated in planning permissions.

During 2019, the Directorate pursued with its strategy to provide continuous guidance to all stakeholders in property development so as to promote further the principle of self-compliance. Nonetheless, the work momentum and performance achieved by the Directorate over the past years was also sustained.

Directorate organisation

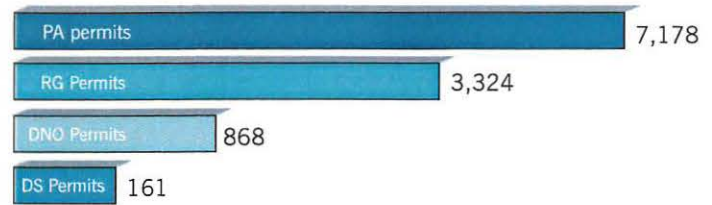
To accomplish its functions, the Directorate is structured in a number of specialised units and teams, namely the Development Zone & Gozo Unit, the Outside Development Zone & Sectors/Major Projects Unit, the Direct Action Team, along with the Compliance Certification and Commencement Notice sections.

At the beginning of 2019, the Unit Manager for the Outside Development Zone & Sectors/Major Projects Unit was appointed to fill in the position which had been vacant since December 2017. Three new officers also joined the Unit, enabling a restructuring of the Outside Development Zone Team for improved efficiency and efficacy. Three new officers also joined the Development Zone Team to cope with the increased workload experienced in the development zone areas.

Commencement Notices

The provisions of Article 72(4) of the Development Planning Act (2016) require the submission of a commencement notice, prior to the utilisation of permission or prior to the commencement of works, for each development permission issued. If a valid commencement notice is not submitted, the permission shall be considered as never having been utilised. If works commence prior to the submission of a valid commencement notice, a fine is imposed on the applicant, ranging from €50 to €200, as established in the Schedule of the Penalties Regulations. As a result of this provision, periti and applicants are abiding more with the requirement to submit the commencement notice within the stipulated period, triggering an internal mechanism whereby respective officers are notified of the commencement date of works for monitoring purposes. For the above reasons, the vetting of submitted commencement notices is a crucial function of the Directorate.

Commencement notices need to be submitted, on the form prescribed by the Authority, in relation to PA permissions, regularisation (RG) permissions, Development Notification (DN) clearances, and Removal of Structural Danger (DS) consents.



During 2019, the Directorate received 7,178 commencement notices in relation to PA permissions; 3,324 commencement notices in relation to RG permissions; 868 commencement notices in relation to DN permissions; and 161 commencement notices in relation to DS consents. Thus a total of 11,531 commencement notices were received. This represents an increase of more than 500 notices over the previous year. Each commencement notice was vetted to ensure that each section of the notice is duly filled and the notice was validly submitted. If not validly submitted, the permit and applicant are duly informed in writing of this occurrence, including the reasons why the commencement notice is invalid. If the commencement notice remains invalid, any development carried out would be illegal.

Commencement notices received in 2019

Monitoring and surveillance

The strategic approach adopted by the Directorate is to pro-actively monitor ongoing development, with the aim of limiting abuse and, where necessary, initiate enforcement proceedings in a timely manner. The way the Directorate is organised allows for monitoring and surveillance of specific areas or sectors. For instance, during 2019, officers from the Sectors/Major Projects Team monitored circa 400 major developments and sector-specific projects related to livestock farms, quarries and batching plants. On average, officers from the same Team conducted 100 site inspections per month, throughout the year. In addition, monitoring was to commence within two weeks from the receipt of the commencement notice, with visits of regular frequency thereafter, depending on the sensitivity of the ongoing development.

Pro-active monitoring proved to be successful, both in terms of the obligations emanating from permission conditions, as well as verification of compliance with approved drawings and documents. Such monitoring also led to fewer problems at compliance certification stage, rendering the whole process smoother for developers and occupants of individual units. However, monitoring outside development zone is also dependent on random surveillance. This approach was also intended to address part of the recommendations made by the National Audit Office in the Follow-up Report of 2018. Further evaluations and preparations in relation to the formulation of a risk-based matrix intended to prioritise monitoring is underway and should be implemented by 2020.

Compliance Certification

During 2019, the Directorate received a record number of 10,442 requests for the issue of compliance certificates, which represents an increase of circa 15% over the previous year. The changes to procedures related to the receipt, vetting and assessment of requests for compliance



certificates introduced during 2018 led to higher efficiency in processing such requests, thereby providing an improved customer service. These changes were necessary to cope with the increased workload over the past years. Indeed, 10,327 compliance certificates were issued during 2019, representing an increase of circa 19% over the previous year.

Complaints regarding alleged illegal developments

During 2019, the Directorate received 3,134 complaints made by the public. These included complaints resulting from the assistance provided by the Directorate to the Building Regulation Office (BRO) in relation to the “Avoidance of Damage to Third Party Property Regulations”. The continuous training of staff and the ICT enhancements ensured that the load of complaints was still expediently and effectively investigated. The Directorate makes use of unmanned aircrafts (drones), especially in ODZ and sensitive areas, to gather baseline data and access remote areas for investigation purposes. In addition, extensive use of tablets (which are connected to the network) and smart-phones is made by the officers so as to access information remotely and resolve issues immediately. Indeed, a total of 3,340 complaints were investigated and closed off during 2019.



The investigation of complaints resulted in the identification of illegal development in 51% of the complaints received. In relation to 737 complaints, as a result of the investigations, the property owner or occupier submitted a sanctioning application for development permission. On the other hand, with regards to 824 cases (i.e. in 48% of the cases where illegal development was identified), the contraveners themselves removed the illegalities, prior to further action being taken. Nonetheless, during 2019, the Directorate was still compelled to issue 141 enforcement notices as a result of the investigation of complaints where the illegal development was not removed nor sought to be sanctioned.

Avoidance of Damage to Third Party Property Regulations

During the summer of 2019, as a result of the collapse of a number of buildings, the Directorate was requested to assist the BRO in the enforcement of the Avoidance of Damage to Third Party Property Regulations. However, in view of the absence of the BRO in Gozo, the Directorate's officers in Gozo dealt with these Regulations as well as the Construction Site Management Regulations specifically focussed on the provision of adequate hoarding, netting to scaffolding, and safe and unobstructed pavements for pedestrians. Assistance to the BRO is still ongoing and it is intended to be phased out when the new Building & Construction Authority is set up.

Stop and Enforcement notices closed in 2019



Stop and Enforcement Notices

During 2019, a total of 229 stop and enforcement notices were issued, representing a slight increase of circa 5% over the previous year. The low number of notices issued is in line with the strategy adopted by the Directorate to issue notices only where contraveners are uncooperative, thereby not following the guidance provided by officers. 70% of the notices issued were subjected to daily fines and this represented a marked increase of 47% over the previous year. Daily fines are a positive deterrent against contraveners to rectify their position within the least possible timeframe.

At the end of 2019, the pending caseload of stop and enforcement notices issued since 1993 stood at almost 6,119. Only 404 of these notices are subject to daily fine. To tackle this pending caseload, the Directorate embarked on a strategic approach, especially regarding the old cases. This yielded the desired results since, during 2019, the number of pending stop and enforcement notices was reduced by 1,048. This is a substantial reduction of 61% when compared to the number of cases of the previous year.

During 2019, the Directorate closed 538 notices after a permission to sanction the illegal development was issued. Another 328 enforcement notices were closed since the illegal development was removed by the contravener, whilst 27 cases were closed as a result of the removal of the illegalities through direct action by the Directorate. On the other hand, 144 cases were closed since the substance of the notices was superseded by events.

Direct Actions

Where contraveners fail to comply with the requirements of stop and enforcement notices, the Directorate intervenes, through direct action, to remove illegal development as required by the respective provisions of the Development Planning Act. During 2019, 27 notices were closed as a result of the removal of illegal developments through direct action. The Directorate focused on cases related to injury to amenity and illegal changes of use, especially to residential uses outside development zone and the abusive creation of sub-standard living quarters, for instance, within horse stables. Actions were also taken to remove dumped material which was causing injury to amenity or environmental damage.

During 2019, the Directorate dealt with major direct actions. Indeed, one direct action at Ta' Qali covered a site of over 50,000m² of abandoned and dilapidated land, which included a built-up structure of 8,000m². The whole site was transformed to an open space for public enjoyment. This was a record-breaking direct action case in terms of the extent of land. This action was complex in view of the number of stakeholders involved (authorities and entities) and the proper handling of the waste generated. This required constant communication and coordination between the stakeholders.

The strategy adopted by the Directorate, even at the late stage of direct action, is to persuade contraveners to remove the illegal development, rather than having to bear the costs and expenses incurred by the Directorate to remove the illegal development through direct action. In prioritising direct actions to be taken, the Directorate seeks to address illegal developments which are causing environmental harm, which constitute injury to amenity and/or block public access, such as structures erected in front of catering establishments.

Moving towards a paperless environment

To meet the Authority's objectives in creating a paperless environment, the Directorate embarked on a strategy to limit, as much as possible, the printing of unnecessary documents. During 2019, the Directorate managed to reduce the printing of documents in an enforcement file to just a few documents, whereas all other documents are retained in digital format. It is envisaged that by 2020, the Directorate will complete the move towards a full paperless system.

In parallel, this requires the improvement of internal procedures and enhanced automations for the Directorate's data management software. The new system is intended to provide better management of the pending caseload, improved details on the case statuses for every file and, more importantly, drastically reduce human error and inefficiency. For instance, during 2019, the Authority launched a new plotting system for planning applications termed PlotGIS which allows for better management and integration of data. The Directorate contributed significantly in the setting up of such system, particularly on aspects that are dependent on the Directorate's feedback. In this regard, the system has facilitated the recuperation of pending fees since applications cannot be processed and/or determined prior to the settlement of such fees. Furthermore, PlotGIS has improved the Directorate's timely feedback on planning applications, and it has indirectly resulted in keeping enforcement files updated.

Training of staff

The Directorate's strategy adopted over the years to provide suitable training for its personnel continued during 2019. In this regard, continuous training was provided to all the staff within the Directorate, with training focusing on media and communication, management, leadership and EU affairs. Staff were encouraged and sponsored to attend conferences, seminars, conventions, and workshops, both locally and abroad, some of which were also EU funded. This year, staff were also given the opportunity to attend training courses on project management and leadership for planners organised by the Royal Town Planning Institute in the United Kingdom.

During the past years, the Authority worked on overseas development exposure initiatives funded through the Erasmus+ Programme. During 2019, three enforcement officers from the Directorate benefitted from this initiative and carried out job shadowing placements with Plymouth City Council in the United Kingdom. This initiative facilitated the development of the officers' capabilities and competences through exposure to working procedures and practices of the host organization.

Towards the end of 2019, representatives from the Directorate benefitted from a unique working experience sponsored by the Government of China. The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Malta made available, to Maltese public officers, a number of training programmes and

seminars on urbanisation, building smart cities and rural development. Officers from the Directorate attended seminars which were held between September and December 2019 in various cities including Beijing, Ji'nan, Weihai, Shanghai, Fuzhou, Xiamen and Hefei.

Conclusion

The Directorate seeks to raise public awareness, relating to planning issues, by participating in various programmes (on television and radio) and public lectures, as well as contributing to campaigns on social media and other publications. The objective is to sensitise the public about the environmental damage and the injury to amenity caused by certain illegal development. Hand in hand with this, the assistance of the public to monitor and provide the necessary surveillance across Malta and Gozo is crucial since officers cannot be everywhere all the time. The public can easily (and anonymously) report any alleged illegal development and this is thoroughly investigated. On the other hand, our able officers and managers seek to persuade property owners and occupiers to self-comply with the requirements of the law, since it is far more cost-effective than taking direct action. The rate of success of the Directorate is measured by the fewer stop and enforcement notices issued and the less direct actions taken, whilst ensuring that development is being carried out legally.



ICT, MAPPING AND DIGITAL SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Director – Ing. Stephen Ferrito

Information, Communications and Technology Unit

With technology constantly evolving and customer demands continually increasing, the Authority needs to consistently keep abreast of potential improvements, challenges, risks and opportunities to be able to continually deliver a quality and timely service to all its customers. Furthermore, the Authority's core business functions continue to become more automated, available fully online whilst becoming totally dependent on the ICT infrastructure. This leads to business continuity risks, which the Authority addressed last year and will continue addressing in the coming year.

The Authority invested heavily in Information and Communications Technology, especially in hardware, to ensure better efficiency to our customers and to ensure business continuity. In 2019, the Authority continued its investment of over €1.3 million in upgrading the Authority's server room, hardware and the setting up of an off-premises data continuity centre while investing in the latest security systems.

During the year, the Authority continued to improve its eApplications system by ensuring that all types of applications processed by the PA are available through this portal. The system has also included lawyers as stakeholders for the submission of permit revocation/modification requests, while consultees have been given tools for identifying the more relevant applications to review for their particular entity. The portal has also started to include BRO forms and their requirements.

The Authority, throughout the year has invested in tools to help improve the efficiency of its workforce, such as the seamless changeover to Office 365 and the migration of the email system to Cloud. Various improvements were carried out to the internal database and work flow systems including the re-engineering of the plotting system to improve work effectiveness together with extending teleworking capabilities. Added attention was given to system and data security and an investment was made to acquire the latest software and hardware to continually prevent potential malicious attacks.

The Authority embarked on a scanning initiative as part of the Document Management System Project, which is managed by Jobsplus through National Funds with MaltaPost p.l.c as the contractor for the provision of service. The aim is to digitise all non-digital Planning Authority's applications from 1968 to 2006. This process will ensure that essential information will never be missing. In addition the Authority's operations will be facilitated as older documents will be accessible in a digital format.

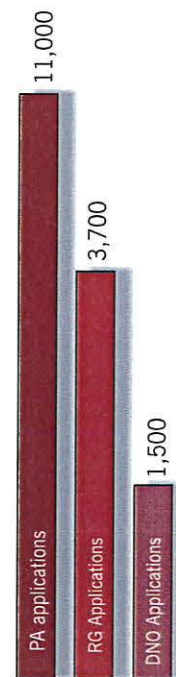
In 2019, a new updated app was programmed and will be launched in the beginning of 2020 as part of the servizz.gov.mt. This app increase visibility of all types of applications including Development Notification Orders, Regularisation Applications, Dangerous Structures together with Planning Applications and Enforcement Notices issued.

The Authority continued to keep abreast of latest ICT related developments and started to investigate the potential of applying blockchain technology within the planning process. Key business functions that will benefit from this technology have been identified with the scope of ensuring more secure digital documentation.

Vetting and Plotting Team

In 2019, the Initial Vetting Team reviewed nearly 12,000 planning applications and forwarded over 10,000 applications for further processing. The plotting team processed close to 11,000 planning applications, 1,500 DNOs and 3,700 regularisation applications, coping with the significant load in a timely manner.

During the year, a new version of the plotting system was deployed, making use of the latest GeoSpatial tools, which automatically saves to the development management database all the relevant data relating to the site including past cases relating to the site. This has enabled the Authority to ensure that new applications are not processed if the Authority is owed fees in relation to the site through previous case files and ensures end users are given correct data.



Processed applications by the Plotting team

Customer Care Unit

The Customer Care Unit provided feedback to approximately 90,000 calls, nearly 4,000 of which relating to reports of perceived illegal development. The Unit dealt with over 23,500 emails relating to general queries and more than 3,500 emails relating to Enforcement issues.

3,200 complaints regarding alleged illegal development were registered and forwarded to the Enforcement Directorate for investigation. In addition, Customer Care is continuously updating the Authority's database ensuring that applicants and representees may be contacted on their latest email address. The Unit also communicates with applicants, informing them of important deadlines relating to their applications, ensuring timely action on their part.

Information Resources Unit (IRU)

The Information Resources Unit continued to provide the necessary support to the organisation through its national and international roles in research, data cycles, project acquisition and foresight.

IRU played a crucial role in the acquisition of over €13 million in EU funding including the SIntegraM project, a €7 million endeavour that delivered a plethora of innovative applications and solutions that enhance social wellbeing. The implementation phase of the project included the creation of the new Malta basemap and the delivery of scanning and surveying equipment for aerial, terrestrial and bathymetric domains.

The SIntegraM project came to its conclusion this year, a year ahead of schedule. All the equipment acquired through this project started being used and the necessary training provided.

Requests for data emanating from the project such as LiDAR and orthophotos were regularly received from several entities. In 2020, the Unit will seek to update the data capture process for continuity processing, the field-work and the population of the data structures, as well as inter-government negotiation to use the SIntegraM portal for their uploads.

As part of the EU Regions Week which took place in October 2019 in Brussels, Malta was requested to participate in an international multimedia exhibition called "Europe can be MORE thanks to Cohesion Policy!". This exhibition was organised by the Ministry of Investment and Economic Development in Poland and provided a 2-week showcase for several selected projects from all Member States. SIntegraM was selected to be represented in this event and was also nominated to represent Malta in the RegioStars 2019 Awards in Category 1 - Smart Growth: Promoting digital transformation.

Two scholarship calls and a number of courses were initiated as part of the SpatialTRAIN EU funded project. The project which was approved in May 2018 offers government employees the chance to benefit from a scholarship should the employee pursue studies in the field of Geomatics at MQF levels 4, 5, 6 and 7. Courses have been taken up at all four levels by a wide range of public entities. The training provided so far has already upscaled existing skills of public officers to enhance their use of spatial data and information systems. The project will be completed at the end of December 2022.

The Unit continued with its preparation of an exploratory feasibility study for the setting up of a National Spatial Intelligence Institute (NaSpl) that will serve the Government of Malta due to its dedication to the use, research and training of spatial data on a national scale. This will ensure continuity of the spatial data management, research and training by the public administration post-project.

IRU provided analytical outputs as a result of cross-thematic analysis across the diverse spatial and non-spatial data domains, which enabled the streamlining and implementation of various data flows enabling the development of more informed decision-making processes across all directorates. Through thematic spatial data modelling and reporting, IRU offered continuous GI support vis-à-vis spatial data manipulation and analysis.



CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Director – Mr Kevin Portelli

Human Resources Unit

During 2019, the Human Resources Unit actively pursued the implementation of the Authority's ongoing strategies on manpower planning and capacity building, succession planning, learning and development, health and safety, employee wellbeing initiatives and corporate social responsibility.

In a bid to attract new talent and consolidate its employer's branding, during 2019 the Unit coordinated the Authority's participation in the UoM KSU Career Expo 2019 in February, and in the MCAST and UoM freshers' weeks held in October. The Unit also contributed to the promotion of the Authority's brand as an employer through the participation on TV programmes and the publication of articles in printed and online media.

During 2019, as part of the Authority's succession planning strategy, 17 employees completed their studies in the Diploma in Spatial Planning. 10 of these employees progressed to the 4-year bachelor's degree course in Planning Studies. The Authority continued to make use of the various apprenticeship schemes offered by MCAST and MITA, offering working opportunities to ICT students. New apprenticeships have been secured with students pursuing courses in planning and land surveying disciplines.

Through the Erasmus+ Programme, the Authority provided 16 of its employees with valuable overseas job shadowing experience. Through the placements in the UK, Italy and the Netherlands, participants were exposed to work processes and procedures adopted by foreign organisations, in the areas of Development Control, Enforcement, Human Resources and Procurement.

Another EU-funded learning initiative pursued in 2019 was the PA+ project. This training programme funded through the European Social Fund, provided employees with training in operational management, customer care, media and communications, EU Affairs and ICT. Further training under this project is projected to be delivered in 2020.

In 2019, the Authority, through the SpatialTRain project which is part-financed from the European Social Fund, awarded sponsorships to 14 employees to pursue certificate, diploma bachelor's and master's level courses in the field of geomatics.

Thanks to its close collaboration with the Royal Town Planners Institute (RTPI), the Authority sponsored the attendance of 20 of its employees to various conferences and training sessions organised by the RTPI. The events focused on various planning and enforcement-related issues and contributed to the Authority's ongoing development and training programme.

In October, the Unit organised an induction course spread over 3 sessions for 52 new recruits. During these seminars, officers from the various directorates delivered briefing sessions to new recruits to help them understand the multiple functions of various sections within the Authority.

Following the success achieved in previous years, the Unit was again largely involved in the co-ordination of the fourth MASP conference, held in November at the Malta Hilton. The theme for this year was Reinventing Places through Innovation. 190 employees and 166 architects and other

stakeholders attended the conference. A professional development day was held on the following day, which saw the attendance of 398 employees. These had the opportunity of joining various training workshops led by specialised trainers. The day closed off with a team-building activity.

Through the various learning and development initiatives, the Authority provided its employees with 13,470 hours of training during 2019.

During 2019, the Unit processed 39 calls for application, following which 12 positions were filled through an internal promotion and 23 positions from external recruitment sources. This involved the processing of 246 applications and interviews with 186 candidates.

Following the conclusion of the collective agreement regulating the salaries and working conditions of 137 professional employees in 2018, this year, the Unit assisted in the conclusion of the negotiations on the collective agreement covering 254 technical and clerical employees. The two agreements improved the working conditions of employees through the added flexibility in working hours and the improved salaries and benefits.

The Unit extended hot-desking and teleworking to additional sections within the Authority. These innovative working arrangements, which have been introduced in the first quarter of 2018, enable the Authority to maximise the use of its office space, allow employees to save on travel time and fuel costs and contribute to the reduction of traffic and its negative effects. By the end of 2019, 64 employees were participating in hotdesking working arrangements. 20 new teleworking concessions were granted, raising the total number of teleworkers to 66 by the end of the year.

In its drive to raise well-being awareness among employees, the Unit organised a session wherein 42 employees voluntarily had their glucose level, blood pressure and body mass index checked by representatives of Health Promotion Unit. 75 employees participated in the voluntary yearly influenza vaccination programme.

The Unit also organised specialist ergonomics evaluations for its employees and conducted the annual eye-tests for VDU-users. Training was provided to 14 employees on a voluntary basis on the use of the AED machines. Each of the five premises currently used by the Authority are equipped with an AED machine. Three blood donation events were held during 2019, with a total of 20 units of blood being collected.

As part of its corporate social responsibility, the Authority supported charities and institutions through the regular organisation of events including various dress-downs, the summer BBQ and other employee activities.

Procurement and Support Services Unit

During 2019, the Authority published and awarded a number of tenders for the provision of services and supplies to the Authority. These included tenders for the procurement of ICT hardware and software, the procurement of land surveying equipment and the leasing of more efficient and environmentally-friendly vehicles. Other tenders have been issued for the provision of consultancy services in architecture and building conservation, the preparation of a transport impact assessment, and for the provision of training services for the PA+ and SpatialTRain projects which are partially funded by the European Union.

During the same year, the Authority negotiated a number of service and supply contracts on GIS and geomatics consultancy, blockchain anchoring, security software, public relations consultancy, the Geoserver update and the procurement of electric bicycles to be used by employees as part of the Authority's commitment to a greener environment.

During the summer months, the Unit co-ordinated water-proofing works, and the repair of old membrane and the installation of new membrane on two of the blocks at the Floriana main offices. A new VRF air conditioning system was installed at the Mapping Unit and a number of old air-conditioning units were replaced by new ones. The Unit also carried out various maintenance works as part of its ongoing maintenance programme and co-ordinated various refurbishment works in offices and meeting rooms, whilst seeing to the everyday needs of the various sections within the Authority.

Finance Unit

During 2019, the Finance Unit introduced a number of initiatives directed at further improving the quality of service provided to its external clients. One of the initiatives included the addition of services that can be provided by the Authority and paid for by its clients online, through the Authority's web portal. These services include applications for the modification of development permits and applications for the revocation of development permits.

The Unit also introduced a new internet banking payment channel for clients to settle their bills online, while payments to suppliers began being made directly into their bank account.

The Unit proceeded with its role of managing the finances of the Authority and of the various schemes administered by the Authority. This included regular reporting on the Development Planning Fund and the Irrestawra Darek Schemes, the calculation of salary arrears for 400 employees following the signing of two collective agreements, and the timely processing of refunds on overpaid, withdrawn and refused applications for development permission.

Debt Collection Office

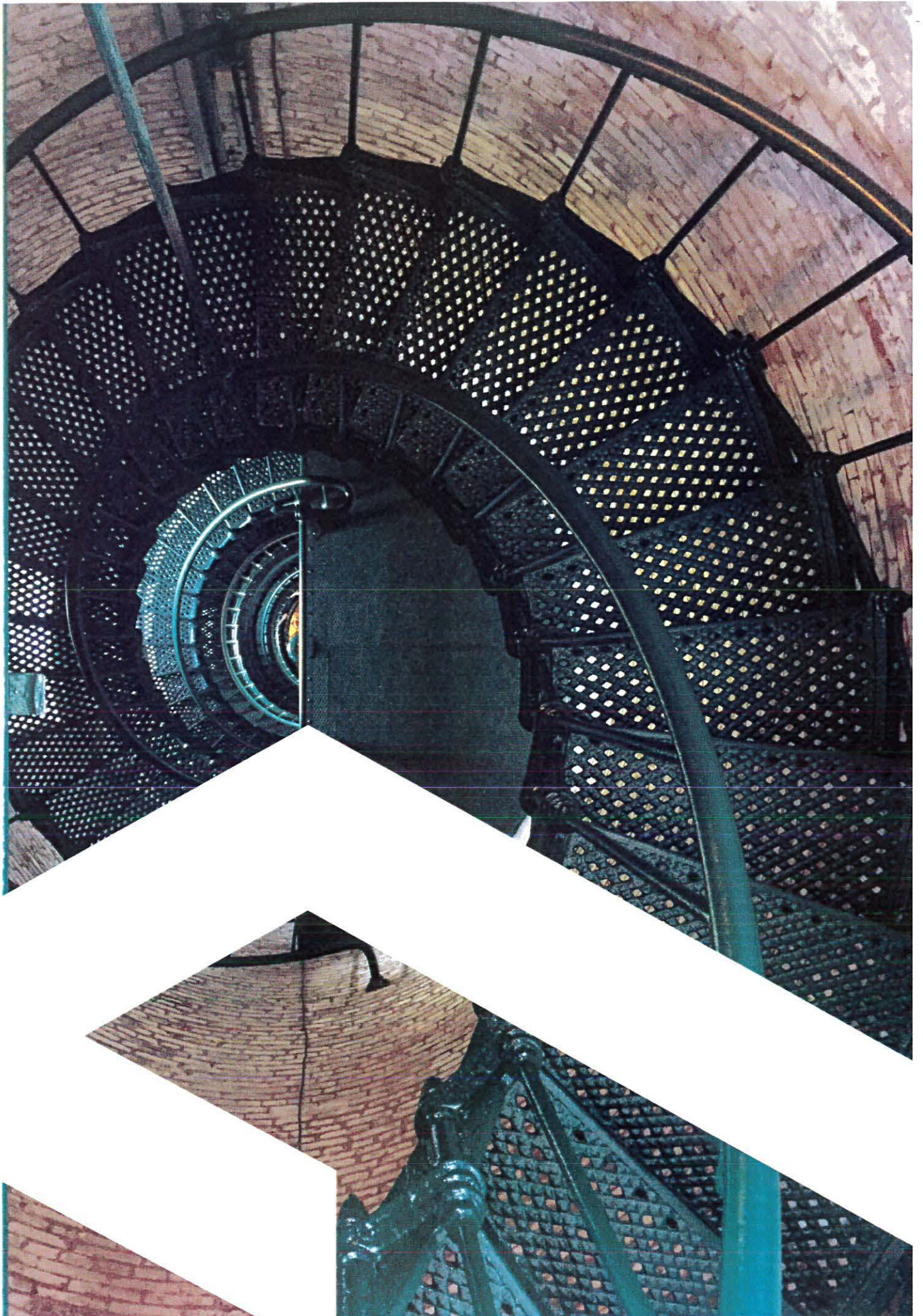
In 2019, the Debt Collection Office proceeded with its collection efforts for the recovery of amounts due to the Authority on daily fines, credit agreements with developers paying their permit application fees by instalments, and other debts. Regular vetting of enforcement files was carried out by the Office to ensure the accurate and timely issue of daily fines invoices by the Finance Unit and mitigate any future recovery issues.

During 2019, the Debt Collection Office processed 406 invoices for daily fines and 358 *ittri bonarji* for direct enforcement action and filed in court 119 judicial letters and garnishee orders for the recovery of outstanding debts.

The Office also provided regular assistance to the Legal Office and the Enforcement Directorate in cases where executive judicial letters have been contested in Court, in drawing up affidavits and administering oaths, and in petitions for compromise penalties before the Executive Council. During 2019, the Debt Collection Office provided its assistance to the Enforcement Directorate in 21 petitions against daily fines before the Executive Council. The Office drew up affidavits and

administered oaths to 25 enforcement officers summoned by the Environment and Planning Review Tribunal. It also assisted the Authority's Legal Consultants and Legal Office in 59 court cases before the Court of Magistrates.

The Office periodically monitors petitions, appeals and court cases in order to take appropriate follow-up action. It also liaises regularly with the Planning Commission in respect of development permit applications being processed which have pending daily fines and/or direct action bills due on the site to which the application relates.



COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

Executive Council

Chairperson

Mr Johann Buttigieg (replaced by Mr Martin Saliba in December 2019)

Members

Perit Vincent Cassar

Dr Louise Spiteri

Dr Andre Borg (replaced by Mr Jesmond Muscat in April 2019)

Dr Veronique Dalli (replaced by Dr Christian Zammit in April 2019)

Perit Elizabeth Ellul

Perit Michelle Piccinino

Secretary

Mr Joseph Borg (replaced by Dr Anita Giordimania in April 2019)

Planning Board

Chairperson

Perit Vincent Cassar

Deputy Chairperson

Perit Elizabeth Ellul

Independent Members

Mr Joseph Brincat

Dr Desiree Cassar (replaced by Perit Duncan Mifsud in April 2019)

Dr Timothy Gambin (replaced by Perit Deborah Busutill in April 2019)

Mr Matthew Pace (replaced by Mr Karl Attard in October 2019))

Dr Ivan Tabone (replaced by Mr Alfred Pule in October 2019 – resigned in November 2019)

Representative of Environment NGOs

Ms Annick Bonello

ERA Representative

Prof Victor Axiak

Public Officers

Ms Jacqueline Gili

Ms Simone Mousu'

Members of the House of Representatives

Hon Dr. Marthese Portelli (resigned in November 2019)

Hon Clayton Bartolo

Secretary

Mr Joseph Borg

Planning Commissions

Development Permissions (within the Development Scheme)

Chairperson

Perit Simon Saliba

Members

Perit Anthony Camilleri

Perit Mariello Spiteri (resigned in August 2019 and replaced by Ms Stephania Baldacchino)

Supplementary Members

Perit Mireille Fsadni

Secretary

Ms Marthese Debono (replaced by Ms Lorna Vella in July 2019)

Outside Development Zone and Urban Conservation Areas

Chairperson

Perit Elizabeth Ellul

Members

Mr Anthony Borg

Perit Claude Mallia

Supplementary Member

Mr Carmel Caruana

Secretary

Ms Monica Gauci

Regularisation Permissions

Chairperson

Mr Martin Camilleri

Members

Dr Charles F Grech

Ms Stephania Baldacchino (moved to Commission within the Development Scheme in August 2019)

Supplementary Member

Mr Frank Ivan Caruana Catania

Secretary

Ms Claudine Faure

Design Advisory Committee

Chairperson
Dr David Mallia

Members:
Perit Kevin Fsadni
Dr Charlene Vella

Secretary
Mr Eugenio Delceppo

Agriculture Advisory Committee

Chairperson
Mr Sharlo Camilleri

Members
Mr Frankie Ivan Caruana (replaced by Saviour Debono Grech in September 2019)
Dr Duncan Chetcuti Ganado
Mr James Gauci
Mr Neville Muscat
Mr Sandro Sammut
Mr Joseph Zammit

Secretary
Mr Eugenio Delceppo

Development Planning Fund

Chairperson
Perit Vincent Cassar

Members
Chev. Paul Farrugia
Perit Frans Mallia
Dr David Mallia
Perit Rita Vella

Secretary
Mr Enzo Cachia

Users' Committee

Chairperson

Dr Edward Woods (appointed in September 2019)

Members

Ms Marie Barbara

Perit Tara Cassar

Perit Martin Debono

Mr Philip Fenech

Perit Simone Vella Lenicker

Mr Mario Fava

Perit Kevin Fsadni

Mr Malcolm Mallia

Mr David Xuereb

Secretary

Mr Joseph Borg

