Partial Review of the
Gozo and Comino
Local Plan (2006)
as amended in 2011

Gozo General Hospital Site
Public Consultation

MEPA
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Government has directed the Authority to undertake a Partial Local Plan Review of the Gozo and Comino Local Plan which was approved in August, 2006, and as amended in 2011 through a preceding Partial Review, for the Gozo General Hospital site. This review is required to update the planning policy guidance to facilitate the upgrading of the health services and health infrastructure overall, to achieve a higher quality of health services by Government for the general public and to specifically improve this institution and provide for more space.

1.2 The review is therefore needed to permit the implementation of redevelopment projects intended to achieve these broad goals for the health related services sector in Gozo. As directed by Government this may require and include additional investment through public private partnership (PPP).
2.0 Proposed Revisions

2.1 The Government objective for this review is:

‘To establish an updated development framework for the Gozo General Hospital Site, Rabat’.

2.2 This objective was published on the 3rd December, 2015 and representations were invited from the public until the 18th December, 2015. No submissions were received by the closing date of the public consultation exercise.

2.3 This Partial Review will allow for the further consolidation and improvement to the existing institution through centralization of services, to facilitate their access to the general public and also to avoid the need to develop new health services elsewhere in Gozo, including the unwarranted use of fresh land, considering that the present Hospital site is located within the development zone. It is highlighted that expansion beyond the current site boundary of the existing Hospital is restricted due to the fact that the hospital boundary is exactly at the edge of the Development Zone (DZ) and also on the edge of a ridge. This restricts expansion requirements towards further intensification within the existing site boundary.

2.4 In the interest of providing a dynamic policy framework, a number of pending issues need to be resolved through this Partial Review including the issues related to improving current shortcomings in the health infrastructure on site e.g. hospital access improvement needs both pedestrian and vehicular, hospital patient access to emergency, helipad requirements amongst other matters. These major requirements have a bearing on the provision of a direct and vital service to the general public, thereby justifying this exercise being followed by the Authority as directed by Government in the public interest.

2.5 The main proposed changes to the relevant policy guidance may be summarized as follows:
a) Amend General Policy GZ-SOCF-3 to take into account the upgrading of the Gozo Health infrastructure and to update the policy framework in line with the Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED, 2015).

b) Amend Maps 14.9 A/A1, Map 14.9-C and Map 14.9-D of the Gozo and Comino Local Plan of 2006 in line with the updated framework of the Gozo General Hospital Site policy guidance. These include changes that relate to use of Restricted Open Space and other green areas and also changes that relate to building heights in view of Hospital upgrading requirements within the Hospital Grounds boundary as indicated in Map GGH1 accordingly.

c) Amend Area Policy GZ-Rbat-8 to remove the references to the General Hospital site and add Policy GZ-Rbat-11 to permit greater flexibility on the utilisation of existing space within the Gozo General Hospital Site.
3.0 Strategic Guidance

3.1. This Partial Review is guided strategically by the ‘Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED)’ which highlighted in Para 2.10 that:

“Health and long term care systems must have adequate resources that are effectively managed to ensure their future sustainability, improve their quality and accessibility.”

3.2 SPED General Principles as per Para 3.1 require that a sequential approach is followed for the location of development whereby reuse of existing land and buildings and sequential redevelopment are preferred to use of vacant land ODZ where no other feasible alternatives exist. Thus the consolidation and centralisation being followed through the intensification of development in the existing Gozo General Hospital site is guided by the SPED Policy direction.

3.3 Furthermore, SPED Policy TO2.2 regarding social and community facilities requires primarily that ‘provision is made ....to cater for extensions to such existing facilities for.... health....which are accessible for all whilst minimising environmental impacts by maximising the efficient use and reuse of existing facilities’.
4.0 Gozo General Hospital Site Upgrading

4.1 These Partial Review amendments result primarily from the need to update the local plan policy framework relating to a primary site in government ownership in the approved Gozo and Comino Local Plan (2006), as amended in 2011, namely the Gozo General Hospital Site. The justification for these changes is presented in more detail in this section, highlighting the planning reasons and supporting the contemplated changes through planning justification.

4.2 The Health Services in Gozo consist primarily of the Gozo General Hospital as the sole and predominant provider of health related facilities and services. The layout of the Gozo General Hospital has remained essentially similar to that envisaged decades ago and in some instances is inappropriate for today’s needs. Health facilities, especially emerging new facilities, require to be upgraded over time to accommodate developments in the provision of better services, and in many cases need additional space, alterations and extensions to fit current and emerging health standards and needs. This requirement is for both the reorganization of existing services, as well as provision of new hospital related infrastructure. This Review provides the opportunity for such a change through two main considerations:

a. The consideration of lateral extensions using parts of the open areas located inside the Hospital Grounds. The extensions may target the expansion and/or addition of Health and Community Services in Gozo, including Health Tourism. Such extensions should attempt to minimize on the take-up of landscaped areas, retain a healthy ‘open to built’ ratio and incorporate the upgrading of retained landscaped areas; and

b. The consideration of new buildings which are higher than the existing buildings and vertical extensions through additional floors over the existing Hospital building provided these are justified through specific health facility improvement needs and provided that higher floors are
of an adequate design to the satisfaction of the Authority. The height extensions are subject to visual assessment and simulation studies during the development application stage to ascertain that proposed heights do not create unacceptable visual impact and also respect the general context of the Rabat skyline. Proposals are therefore to limit as far as possible the visual intrusiveness by varying overall building heights to avoid unacceptable massing and by receding along the ridge edge. This vertical extension, for such an important institution, will permit the major reorganization of the Hospital and its services and lead to a more efficient use of current available space.

4.3 In the approved GCLP (2006) Maps the designation of all un-built spaces around the Hospital had been zoned as Restricted Open Space and therefore the built footprint was restricted to the existing layout. Development within the Restricted Open Space zoning was considered in the 2011 Partial Review and lateral extensions to allow for institutional requirements and upgrading were already contemplated to be followed. Maps 14.9-A/A1, 14.9-C and 14.9-D are being amended accordingly for the Gozo Hospital Site and its grounds as indicated on Map GGH1.
5.0 Amended Policies

5.1 Changes to General Policy GZ-SOCF-3 and Area Policies GZ-Rbat-8 and GZ-Rbat-11.

5.1.1 General Policy **GZ-SOCF-3 Health**, relates to extensions and/or other additional social and community facilities that promote an improved hospital and health services operation or better use of space that may be considered by the Authority. Such considerations are being followed in the interest of the provision of higher quality of facilities and services as well as the further consolidation of the area.

5.1.2 The health related infrastructure section is being removed from the previous Policy **GZ-Rbat-8 Government Centralised Offices Area** and reformulated through the new Policy **GZ-Rbat-11 Health Related Services and Facilities** for the General Hospital Site. **GZ-Rbat-8** as amended in 2011 will continue to provide guidance on the Government Centralised Offices Area.

**Policy GZ-SOCF-3 Health**

Although Gozo can be considered to be fairly well catered for with respect to health services, given the insularity of the island and its growing elderly and relatively large visiting population, there is the increasing need for the Hospital to be upgraded and extended, incorporating latest medical facilities and catering for a wider spectrum of users and services. Policy **GZ-Rbat 11** provides further detailed guidance for this site. The focus of the health services in Gozo shall continue to be the Gozo General Hospital. The Rabat Health Centre is envisaged to be relocated and upgraded. There is ample scope to continue to upgrade local health centres.

**GZ-SOCF-3:** MEPA will favourably consider development proposals for the upgrading of local health facilities and related centres (especially those related to the upgrading of medical facilities such as medical school, elderly and childcare facilities and the improvement of access for people with special needs), provided that all the other planning considerations are adhered to. The location of new health related facilities in areas Outside Development Zones shall follow the sequential approach as provided in the SPED.
Policy GZ-Rbat-8

This Policy is being amended to delete all references to Health and Gozo General Hospital that are now being covered by the new Policy GZ-Rbat-11.

Government Centralised Offices Area

MEPA will continue to promote the consolidation and centralisation of Government Ministerial and Departmental Offices in Victoria, Gozo. To this effect, MEPA favourably supports this principle and will consider development proposals for extensions to the Government Centralised Offices Area. The extensions however exclude the northern historic block of the Ministry for Gozo facing Pjazza San Frangisk and relate mainly to the rear Central Departmental Office Blocks.

GZ-Rbat-8:  MEPA may consider vertical and/or lateral extensions to the built footprint of the area identified for the Gozo Government Centralised Offices Area as indicated on Map GCLP-PR-RABAT-01 for the further upgrading and consolidation of these uses in this central prime location.

The vertical change in height is to be limited to one additional floor on the three main departmental blocks to the south of the site. No additions in height over the existing building height of the Ministry for Gozo block facing Pjazza San Frangisk will be considered by MEPA.

Use of the open space to the east of the blocks and within the institutional grounds will also be favourably considered by MEPA.

MEPA will also require the removal of accretions that have developed over time within the site, especially in the internal courtyards originally planned as open spaces in the historic building design, as a planning gain condition.
New Policy GZ-Rbat-11

Health Related Services and Facilities

The Authority will continue to promote the upgrading, improvement, consolidation and centralisation of the main health facility in Rabat through development of the Gozo General Hospital Site and its grounds. The site as indicated on Map GGH1 shall be safeguarded for this use. The current extent of the hospital buildings are envisaged to require both vertical and/or lateral extensions in order to cater for current and future upgrading, modernisation and reorganization needs of health services.

An increase in demand for geriatric intensive care and a higher visiting population, including tourists and locals, is also envisaged due to an increase in life expectancy and increased inter island travel to Gozo. The current intensive geriatric care facilities currently also lie within the Gozo General Hospital complex. Combining intensive geriatric care with other hospital facilities is a sensible approach as the two functions are complementary. Other developments needed include a number of related facilities including elderly, child-care and medical school facilities and also a general reorganization of the Hospital blocks and grounds including new related facilities and extensions.

GZ-Rbat-11: The Gozo General Hospital site and its grounds, as indicated in Map GGH1, shall be safeguarded for upgrading and consolidation of the Gozo General Hospital and the development of health related and ancillary facilities. The main intensive geriatric care and child care facilities for Gozo shall also continue to be located within this complex following a multi-use and dual-use approach for this site.

MEPA may consider new buildings, redevelopment of existing buildings on a larger footprint and height and vertical and/or lateral extensions to existing buildings within the area identified for the Gozo General Hospital Site as indicated on Map GGH1.

The open spaces within the Gozo General Hospital site may be utilised for required development to cater for future consolidation, expansion and modernisation needs and the upgrading of the hospital and future health related services provided a balanced and satisfactory ‘open-to-built’ ratio is achieved.

The site layout should preferably steer additional development away from the south-eastern escarpment and ridge edge and will be receded subject to the results of the appropriate visual impact studies. Overall, the building/s is to follow a suitable and acceptable high quality architectural design.

The three-dimensional design strategy should seek to produce a broadly low-lying development with buildings being between 2-3
floors high (12.3 -16.3m), also taking into account the guidance on the site layout above. It is acknowledged that the nature of the land-use may require an architectural statement in terms of height. Extensions beyond the stipulated height will be considered within the Gozo Hospital boundary subject to further studies, including photomontage assessments, as required by the Authority in the development application stage to ensure that the development respects the general context of the Rabat skyline.

Furthermore redevelopment and improvements in the site may be favourably considered by the Authority such as

- The improvement of the helipad and the emergency areas, and the child care centre,
- the provision of services and infrastructure facilities, including under-grounding of such facilities,
- circulation improvements to create a ring-road around the main Hospital building and other vehicular and pedestrian access improvements.

The site is to remain suitably landscaped with adequate parking areas.

Development is to continue to safeguard the archaeological remains located within the site.
6.0 Conclusion

6.1 MEPA invites the public and all interested parties to submit representations on the draft revisions to the Gozo General Hospital Site Policy Framework indicated in this document. Submissions should be addressed to:

The Director of Planning  
Partial Review of the Gozo and Comino Local Plan  
The Gozo General Hospital Site Policy Framework  
The Malta Environment and Planning Authority,  
St. Francis Ravelin,  
Floriana, CMR 01

or on the email address: gozohospital@mepa.org.mt

Submissions should be received not later than Friday 04th March 2016.
APPENDIX 1: Amended Proposed Map GGH1
APPENDIX 2: Public Consultation Submissions

No Public Consultation Submissions have been received for the initial public consultation period.