

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



PLANNING AUTHORITY



CONTENT

05	Foreword by Planning Authority Executive Chairman
09	Planning Directorate
19	Development Management Directorate (DMD)
25	Compliance & Enforcement Directorate
31	ICT, Mapping, and Digital Services Directorate
39	Corporate Services Directorate
43	Council, Boards, and Committees
46	List of Images



Mr Oliver Magro

FOREWORD BY PLANNING AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

As I present the Planning Authority's Annual Report for 2024, I do so with a deep sense of pride in the accomplishments we have achieved together and a profound gratitude for the opportunity to have served as Executive Chairman.

This year marks the conclusion of my tenure, which began in 2022, and the culmination of a professional journey spanning several years within the Authority. It has been an honour to work alongside dedicated professionals who share a steadfast commitment to sustainable development, effective planning, and the responsible stewardship of Malta's built and natural environment.

In 2024, the Planning Authority continued to uphold its mission of balancing development needs with environmental and heritage preservation, strengthening enforcement mechanisms, and embracing digital transformation. Each directorate played a crucial role in advancing the Authority's strategic objectives, ensuring efficiency, transparency, and service excellence.

The Compliance and Enforcement Directorate reinforced its commitment to upholding planning regulations through proactive monitoring and streamlined processes. The strengthening of the Directorate's hybrid working system, the full digitisation of compliance certification, the automation of enforcement billing, and the restructuring of teams to oversee geographic areas rather than zoning have significantly improved operational efficiency.

With over 6,000 monitoring inspections carried out, 191 enforcement notices issued, and the closure of 327 pending cases, this directorate demonstrated a strong and consistent regulatory presence.

The ICT, Mapping, and Digital Services Directorate successfully navigated technological advancements, ensuring uninterrupted services despite human resource challenges. Key initiatives such as the implementation of eApplications Version 3, cybersecurity enhancements, and the migration of vital systems have strengthened the Authority's digital infrastructure.

Furthermore, the directorate facilitated over 2,300 online meetings and responded to over 30,000 emails and 121,600 phone inquiries, demonstrating its pivotal role in enhancing stakeholder engagement.

The Planning Directorate made substantial progress in strategic spatial planning, local policy formulation, and international collaboration. The ongoing SPED review, partial local plan revisions, and coastal management initiatives reflect the Authority's commitment to sustainable land and maritime development.

Heritage preservation efforts remained a priority, with thousands of restoration funding applications processed and over 100 new scheduling proposals advancing through the system.

The Development Management Directorate faced an increase in applications, particularly within the Business Development and General Development Units. While caseloads grew, the directorate maintained its efficiency, successfully concluding thousands of applications. The Major Projects Unit continued to oversee high-profile developments, ensuring compliance with planning policies while fostering investment and sustainable urban growth. Meanwhile, the ODZ and Urban Conservation Area teams remained vigilant in protecting Malta's rural and historic landscapes.

The Corporate Services Directorate upheld the Authority's commitment to employee development, procurement efficiency, and financial stewardship. Investments in training, talent acquisition, and wellbeing initiatives strengthened the Authority's workforce.

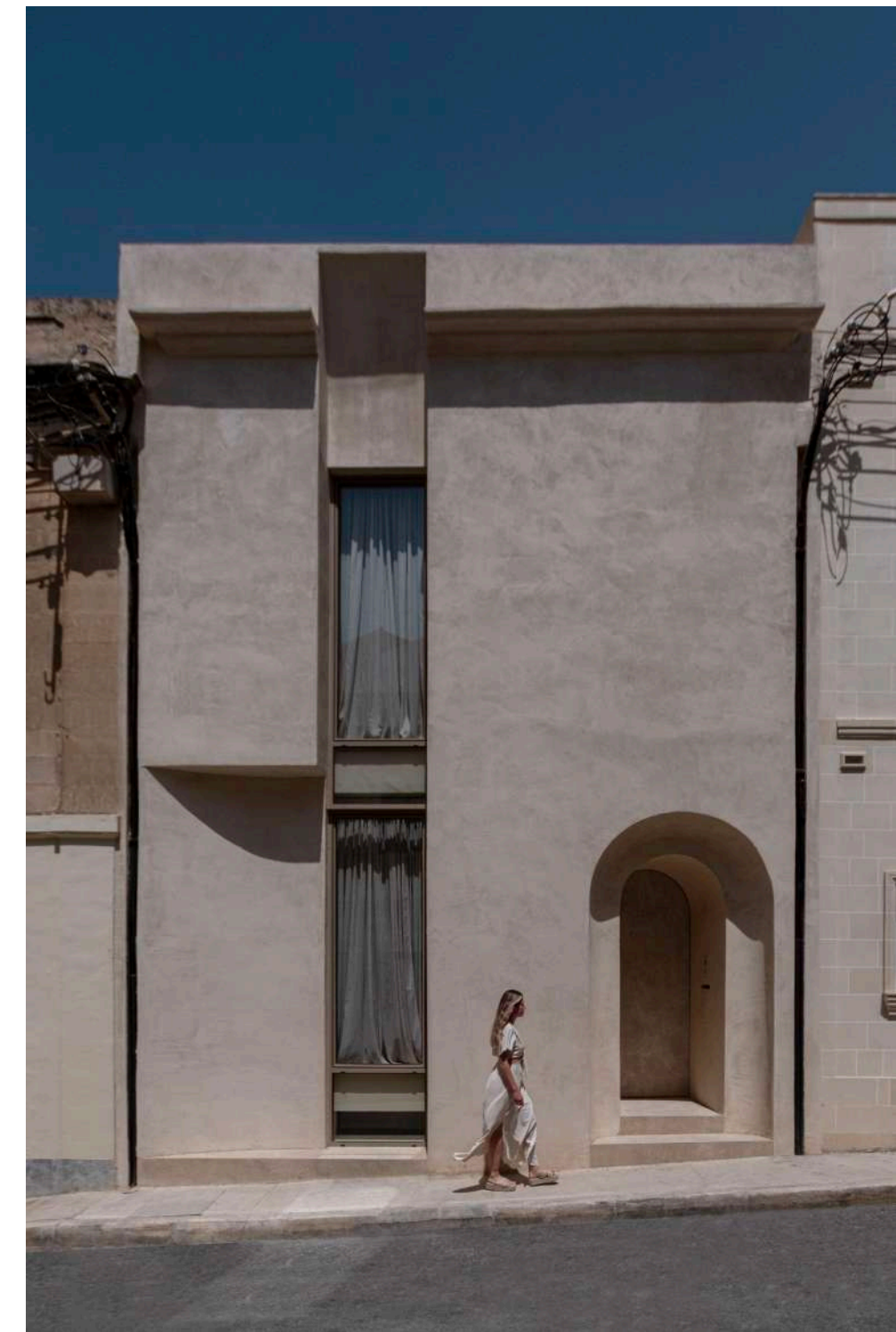
Financially, the Authority managed over €4.8 million in payments and disbursed significant funds under various schemes, reinforcing its role as a key facilitator of sustainable community investment.

As I conclude my tenure, I reflect with gratitude on the dedication and expertise of my colleagues across the Authority. Together, we have navigated challenges, embraced innovation, and upheld our responsibility to Malta's planning framework.

I extend my sincere thanks to the Board, management, and staff for their unwavering commitment to excellence. It has been a privilege to lead an institution that plays such a vital role in shaping our country's future.

Looking ahead, I am confident that the Planning Authority will continue to evolve, adapt, and excel. The foundations we have laid will serve as a strong platform for the next chapter in Malta's planning journey.

I leave with the assurance that the Authority remains in capable hands, ready to embrace new challenges and opportunities in the years to come.



PLANNING DIRECTORATE

Perit Christopher Borg - Director

Introduction

The Planning Directorate's 2024 Annual Report highlights a year of significant achievements and progress across its two main divisions: the Strategic and Local Policy Formulation Division (SLPFD) and the Foreign Policy Research, EU Affairs and Funding Division (FPREAFD). This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Directorate's efforts in strategic spatial planning, heritage preservation, funding initiatives and international collaboration.

The SLPFD includes the Strategic Planning Unit (SPU), the Green and Blue Development Unit (GBDU) and the Heritage Planning Unit (HPU), while the FPREAFD includes the EU and Multilateral Affairs Unit (EUMA) and the Research and Local Funding Unit (RLF).

The Strategic and Local Policy Formulation Division (SLPFD)

The SLPFD is responsible for the whole range of policy-making functions of the Authority, from the highest level of the strategic spatial planning, at land and at sea, to the most detailed level of individual site planning.

The Division also provides input to other policy-making functions of Government, particularly in relation to the Environment, and EU and international policy initiatives. Through the allocation and management of heritage funding schemes, the Division has been involved more directly in the implementation of the Authority's and Government's policy objectives. Additional tasks assigned to the Division include the support of the operations of other Directorates within the Authority.

The Steering Committee of the SPED Review Process continued with the preparation of the initial studies which are now in an advanced stage of completion. This task

involves extensive discussions with external consultants and other senior officers in the PA.

In 2024, the SPU worked on four partial local plan review processes. This included the completion of the partial review of the Gozo and Comino Local Plan (2006) for the area of Hondoq, Qala, Gozo and the completion of the first draft of the partial review of the South Malta Local Plan (as amended in 2017) for the area of Hal-Far.

On the other hand, the SPU commenced with work related to the partial review of the Grand Harbour Local Plan for the Marsa Regeneration Area and concluded the South Malta Local Plan Partial review by withdrawing policy SMMS 04 - Yacht Marina Site.

During this year the SPU finalised the review of the Cemeteries Policy and Design Guidance (2015). The SPU is also responsible for the maintenance of databases and collating information on development decisions, which is then passed on to the National Statistics Office and Enemalta.

The GBDU represented Malta in the EU MSP Expert Group, overseeing the implementation of the EU MSP Directive. This unit managed to enter as an Associate Partner with a consortium for an EU-funded project that will explore how Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) enables the implementation of the European Green Deal. This project is expected to continue until 2026.

The GBDU formulated the work plan for the inter-departmental MSP Technical Committee to support the Planning Authority's work on the preparation of the National Spatial Strategy, which will replace the SPED as Malta's MSP Plan.

It also provided input to national positions concerning various issues related to the use of the sea, such as the UN Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction and the EU Westmed strategy.

With respect to Coastal Zone Management this unit prepared the biennial report on Malta's implementation of the Mediterranean ICZM Protocol and commenced a process for the development of a Coastal Area Management Programme under the framework of the Mediterranean Action Plan.

A feasibility study is expected to be carried out in consultation with relevant ministries to identify the objectives for the actual funded project which is expected to start in 2026.



The GBDU supported the effective implementation of the legal provisions concerning Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA) within the PA's work in plan and policy formulation. It also supported the SEA screening process of emerging policies and maintained the database that assists in monitoring internal procedures.

This unit continued to mainstream the climate agenda, environment protection, and sustainable development in the planning process. It also focused on improving climate action in strategic policy, participated in meetings of the Climate Action Board, and provided feedback on emerging policy by other entities as well as national positions to emerging EU policy such as the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.

The GBDU actively contributed to the PA's input in the delivery of Project Greens proposals for urban greening. The HPU continued to manage various Heritage Restoration Grant Schemes (Irrestawra Darek 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and Irrestawra I-Faccata, Irrestawra I-Kazin, Green Your Building, Irrestawra Darek 2023, and Irrestawra Darek Grade 1 and Grade 2 scheduled buildings).

A total of circa 3,800 requests for funding were submitted for all the grant schemes and the processing of these requests has continued throughout the past year, with more restoration works being completed and refunds affected after quality assurance by HPU monitoring.

The HPU managed the Certificate of Designation scheme, processing 3,160 requests to issue UCA certificates. This scheme provides a holistic financial package that enables the regeneration of historic urban cores.

With respect to scheduling, the HPU worked on proposals for the scheduling of heritage assets, taking into account 166 heritage assets and selecting 110 items for scheduling. It also concluded the British batteries theme and presented it to the Executive Council for approval, and concluded the hydraulic engineering theme.

The HPU is also responsible for the management of appeals from the scheduling of heritage items. In this regard it dealt with six active appeal cases, provided 27 submissions and attended 29 hearings.

In relation to the restoration schemes, the HPU conducted over 400 inspections to ensure that restoration works were carried out according to permit conditions and best practices.

The HPU continued to support Development Management through the submission of heritage-related recommendations within Development Notifications (130), Minor Amendments (127), Permitting Fee Exemptions (77) and recommendations for the release of bank guarantees.

28 funded Local Projects



Foreign Policy Research, EU Affairs and Funding Division (FPREAFD)

The FPREAFD is responsible for the PA's EU and Multilateral policy, research, co-ordination, implementation and funding. This division is also responsible for the administration of Local PA Funding.

The FPREAFD represented the Authority on a number of bodies including the EU Monitoring Committee on OPI and SMEs, the Italia-Malta Executive Committee, COCOSUD as well as other ad hoc meetings which involve expertise or roles found within FPREAFD.

The RLF continued to administer the Planning Authority's Development Planning funds, managing various funding schemes and facilitating the application process through the 'Eapps' software. It also contracted 28 local projects amounting to almost EUR 13 million, including a €10 million contract for the construction of a parking lot at the University of Malta.

Furthermore, it paid approximately EUR 1.7 million for 40 projects, benefiting local councils and NGOs and covering a wide range of projects from streetlighting to building facilities for the enjoyment of the respective communities. The migration to the 'Eapps' Software was finalised. Thus, beneficiaries of the Authority's locality funding scheme can now apply for funds directly through 'Eapps'. This system, which was introduced on 5th August 2024, is expected to facilitate the application process for PA funds. Moreover, it should also facilitate documentation searches and statistics generation in relation to the individual PA funding applications.

This task entailed close collaboration with ICT and included exchanges with the KTP, regions and Local Councils. During this year the RLF met with Local Councils and other applicants prior to and during the processing of PA funding applications to facilitate the application and processing stages of requests for funding. From Jan 2024 to date there were 55 such meetings.

The Secretariat of the PA's Development Planning Fund Committee, supported through FPREAFD, continued to formulate the agendas, record the meetings and the various follow-ups throughout the year. This committee meets on a monthly basis but more regularly if the need arises. During 2024, 14 committee meetings were held.

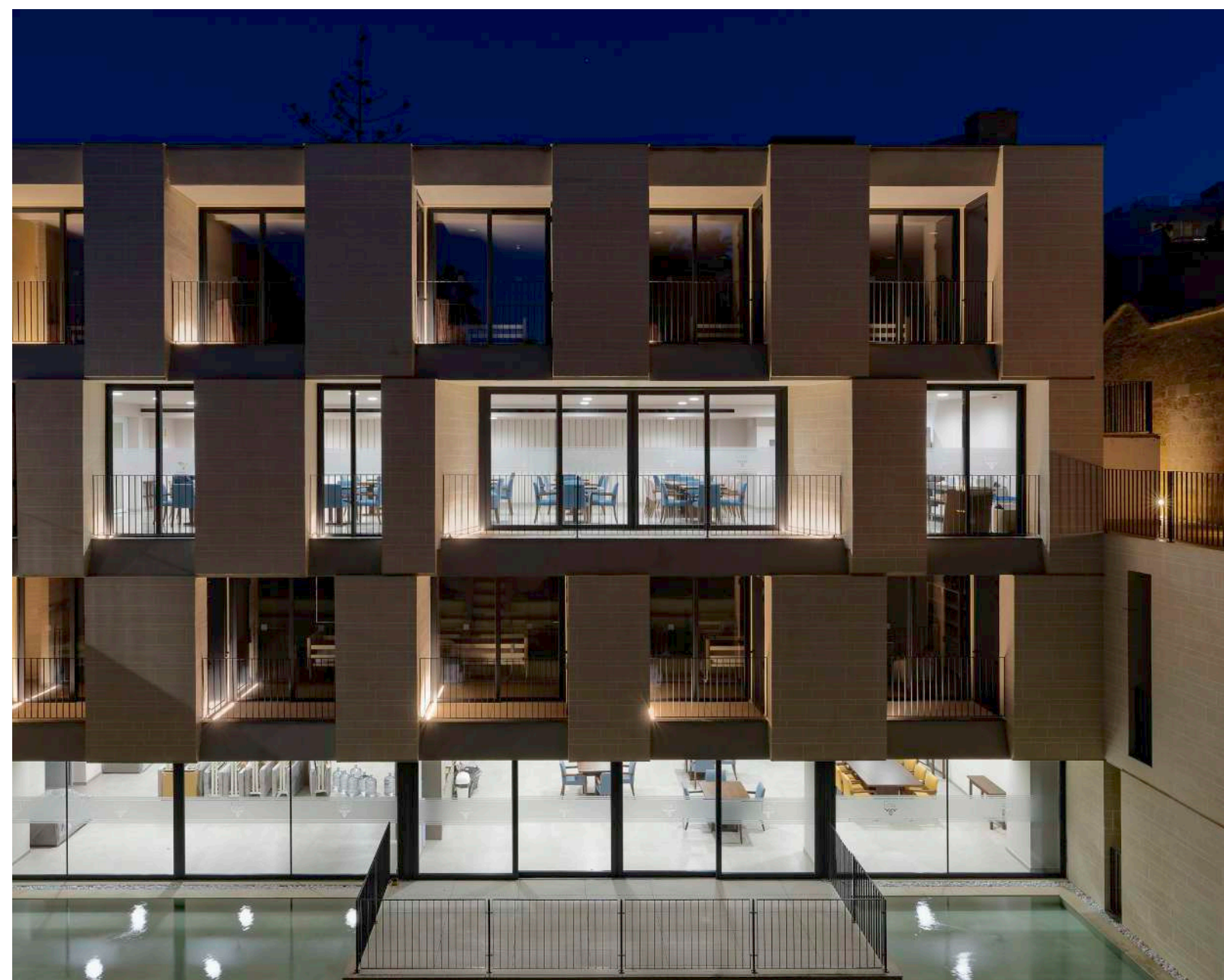
An Internal Audit Assignment relating to Locality Funding was commissioned by the MPWP. This audit was conducted by the Internal Audit and Investigation Department (IAID) within OPM. This entailed a comprehensive review of the Locality Funding scheme. The final draft by the IAID was forwarded to the PA in late 2024 and the final meeting was held in December 2024. The report concluded that the process generally operates satisfactorily but some changes were deemed necessary

to improve operations and accountability. The report is expected to serve as a basis for a number of changes so that the PA's Locality Funding scheme operates on a better basis.

On the EU & Multilateral Policy Front, the EUMA handled the PA's positions during negotiations in various EU fora, including the EU Council, the United Nations, and the Union of the Mediterranean.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that the EUMA coordinated the Planning Authority's position on EU and UN agendas, particularly on the EU Agenda on the Urban Environment and the REPowerEU plan. This unit processed over 300 requests related to EU and UN documents.

With respect to EU funded projects, the EUMA managed two projects, under the Erasmus+ and Technical Support Instrument funding programmes. It also successfully closed four projects under the Operational Programme 2021-2027 and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology.



3 EUMA Projects



In total, EUMA administered these five projects, with a total budget of approximately EUR 8.5 million. With respect to new projects, the EUMA submitted four projects for EU funding consideration, from the Operational Program 2021-2027 and the Technical Support Instrument, focusing on priorities such as intelligent data networks, digital tools for public spaces, built cultural heritage, and strengthening human resources.

The PA has also very recently been awarded another new Erasmus+ Job Mobility project, with a budget of EUR 42,766, to cover job shadowing placements for 13 employees in similar foreign organisations.

EUMA has also been successful at being selected from entries across all Europe, for two high-level PA employees to attend best practice urban project peer-learning site visits at Malmo, Sweden, organised by the Creative Europe Living Spaces.

With respect to the implementation of EU legislation and international obligations, EUMA proactively ensured that all the deliverables emerging from the legislation led by the PA were delivered in time, including the EU Regulation on Projects of Common Interest (including Malta as a signatory for the use of a new digital reporting tool and liaising with the project promoter), the INSPIRE Directive, the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive and the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Protocol.

In addition, EUMA followed up to confirm that planning aspects are considered in the implementation of other policy areas. This included work on the Noise Action Plan, input to Malta's National Action Plan (NAP) under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Union for the Mediterranean Meetings, the 8th Environment Action Programme, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the Biodiversity areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the United Nations Environment Programme.

EUMA also coordinated the PA's input to the World Urban Forum, attended by the Ministry's Permanent Secretary and his intervention at the roundtable discussions. This necessitated coordinating a PA position with various technical officers and their Directors within the PA, the drafting and reviewing of briefing notes, discussions with officers, and briefings to management and the Permanent Secretary.

This year the EUMA also stepped up its efforts in following up on centralised funding programmes to explore the possibilities of tapping funds from such programmes, notably Horizon Europe, the various strands of the Interreg Programme, Erasmus+, the Space Funding Programme and funding related to the EU Urban Agenda.



In addition, for the development of new EU funded projects EUMA staff attended various training sessions, established contacts with Managing Authorities, organised various meetings to discuss project ideas, screened EU Funding Programmes/Calls and reviewed Operational Programmes to match project ideas and funding opportunities, designed the concepts of projects, prepared project budgets and successfully completed project application forms.

In this regard, the Unit spearheaded the submission of five new EU Funded Projects, one of which has been successful (Erasmus+ Job Mobility) and four which are pending evaluation (ERDF SUD Built Heritage Restoration Scheme, ERDF SUD Sensors in Public Open Spaces, ERDF SustAln and TSI consultancy on human resources).

The topics range from capacity building through PA staff working in similar organisations abroad, the retention and restoration of built cultural heritage, the use of sensor data for better management of public open spaces, the creation of an intelligent spatial data network and employee attraction and retention.

EUMA also followed up on nine EU Funded Projects led by other entities, where the PA was requested to support projects as stakeholders. The Unit has also strengthened its contacts with Managing Authorities and local/foreign networking partners to explore possibilities for future projects and establish a robust system to monitor, assess and organise calls for EU funded proposals, as well as invitations to participate and recommendations to PA management to this effect.

In parallel, the Unit continued the coordination of the implementation of existing EU Funded Projects. The total amount of projects which were implemented during 2024 amount to seven (closure of SpatialTrain, SintergraM, PA+, implementation of TSI PACE in geomatics and EU funding, Erasmus Training courses, Creative Europe Living Spaces Peer-Learning Visits and EIT healthy Cities generator), with a total budget for the Planning Authority of 8.5 million Euros.

The Unit was instrumental in tasks related to these existing projects which included attending project meetings and meetings with PPCD, line ministries, coordinating the submission of implementation reports, providing required documentation for audits and fulfilling the projects' publicity requirements.

The added value of the Unit's work on internationally funded projects, was coming up with new funding ideas in line with the PA's core functions and funding opportunities to come with concrete and successful proposals, leading the submission of EU Funded Projects applications, award of EU Funds for the Authority and ensuring the swift implementation of existing projects.

Conclusion

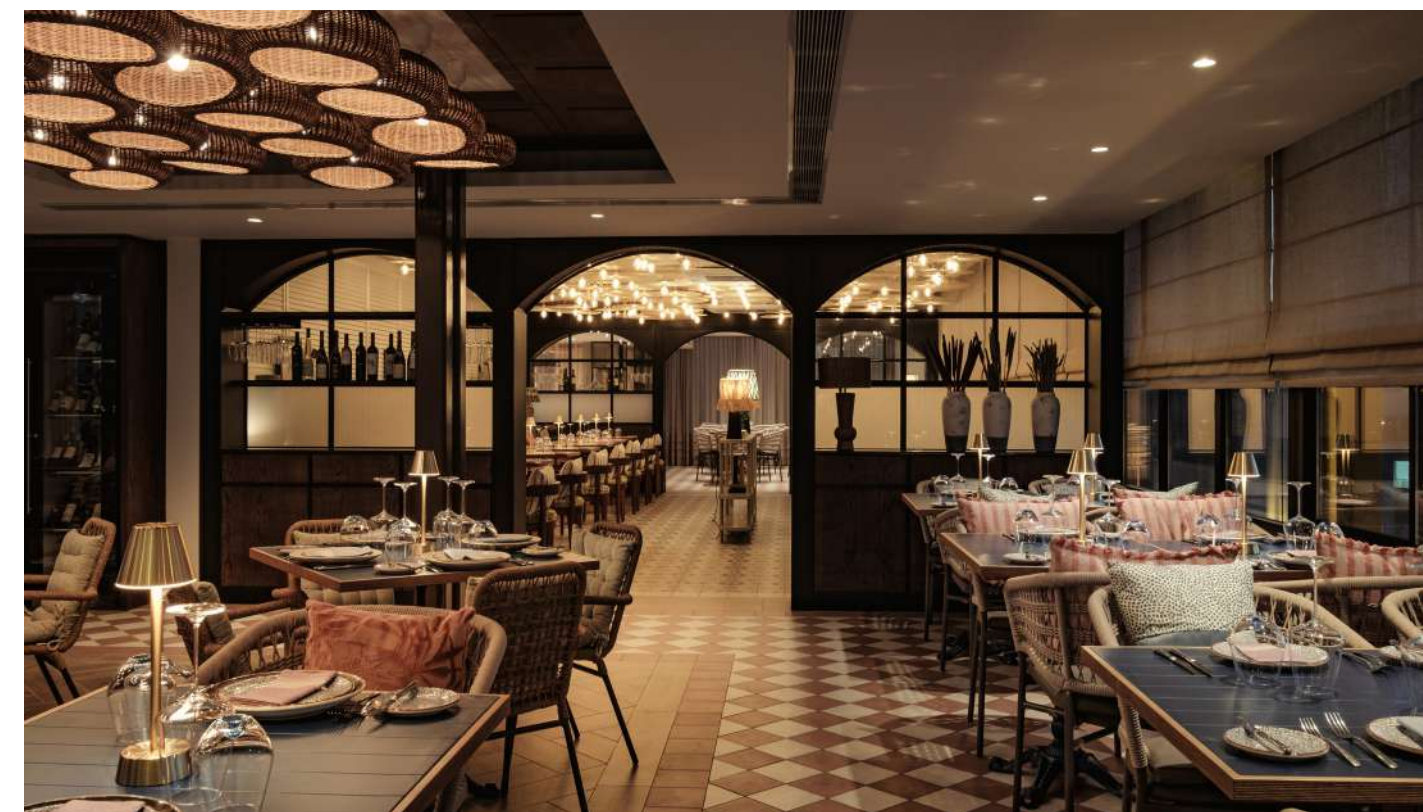
In 2024, the Planning Directorate made significant strides in both strategic and local policy formulation, as well as in EU and Multilateral affairs, and funding.

The Strategic and Local Policy Formulation Division (SLPFD) successfully advanced several key projects, including the partial reviews of local plans and the formulation of the National Spatial Strategy.

The Green and Blue Development Unit (GBDU) played a pivotal role in representing the Authority with respect to Maritime Spatial Planning and Coastal Zone Management, while the Heritage Planning Unit (HPU) managed extensive heritage restoration grant schemes and contributed to the preservation of Malta's cultural heritage.

The Foreign Policy Research, EU Affairs and Funding Division (FPREAFD) effectively coordinated the Planning Authority's positions in various international negotiations and managed multiple EU-funded projects. The successful migration to the 'Eapps' software streamlined the application process for local funding, enhancing efficiency and accessibility for beneficiaries.

Looking ahead, the Directorate is dedicated to the fostering of sustainable development, whilst securing innovative project funding. Collaboration with local and international partners will be key to achieving these goals.



DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE (DMD)

Perit Silvio Farrugia - Director

2023	2024
134	423
Total	
2,137	

Business Development Unit (BDU)

The Business Development Unit (BDU) is responsible for the assessment of all applications of a commercial nature which are not major in scale.

In 2024 there was a 33% increase in the number of new applications when compared to the previous year (a total of 2137 in 2024 / 1606 in 2023).

Although BDU managed to conclude a larger number of applications than the previous 12-month period, (a total of 1714 in 2024 / 1516 in 2023), the surge in new applications resulted in an increase in caseload of 423 new cases.

While new shops and offices remained the more common commercial uses applied for, a spike in the number of applications for public service garages in the past year was evident.

The main challenge for 2025 is to address the pending caseload and ensure that new applications are still processed within established timeframes.

2023	2024
330	508
Total	
4,333	

General Development Unit (GDU)

The General Development Unit (GDU) assesses development applications of a residential nature for sites within the development zone but outside the urban conservation areas.

In 2024, there was a 10% increase in the number of new cases compared to that in 2023 (a total of 4333 in 2024 / 3955 in 2023). While in 2023, 52% of applications were summary applications, the ratio went down to 46% in 2024. The number of concluded cases remained relatively the same as in the previous year (a total of 3825 in 2024 / 3853 in 2023), resulting in an increased caseload of 508 cases. Regaining an effective caseload management and

ensuring complete compliance with the legal provisions is likely to be the main challenge for 2025.

Integrated Assessment and Permitting Unit (IAPU)

The Integrated Assessment and Permitting Unit has been reorganised, with the Initial Vetting and Billing sections being incorporated within the ICT, Mapping and Digital Services Directorate.

The Unit remained responsible for the processing of Regularisation applications (RG), assessing planning applications in terms of Sanitary and Health regulations and the permitting of Minor Amendments applications and Development Notification Orders.

During 2024, all sections within this unit increased their output, when compared with the previous year. The Regularisation Team referred a total of 1653 applications to the Planning Commission, which is an increase of 278 applications from the previous year.

A similar outcome resulted in the permitting of the Development Notification Orders, with this section increasing its output from the 1154 DNOs approved in 2023 to a total of 1278 DNOs accepted in 2024.

The Minor Amendment Section increased the amount of accepted Minor Amendments applications by 48 applications for a total of 3273 applications. The Sanitary Engineering Office kept up with the same method of



the previous year i.e. assessing all planning applications referred by the Directorate and the Planning Board / Commissions in the minimum time possible.

This Unit is committed to increase the output for the coming year, while ensuring that each application is assessed in accordance with the respective subsidiary legislation.

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

In the year of examination 2024, the ODZ Team within the Development Management Directorate received 816 applications, a negligible increase over the previous year. Despite this minimal increase, the backlog of pending applications has remained, mainly resulting from a number of staff changes during the past year.

Although the new staff members who joined the team during the past two years are starting to yield positive results in the quality of reports, the total number of concluded cases went down to 938 from the previous year. Several applications were also referred for reassessment from the Environment and Planning Review Tribunal following submission of additional or revised information. The year 2024 ended with a pending caseload of 541 applications, a decrease of almost 90 applications from the previous year.

The trends of applications in rural areas for formalisation of recreational uses post-COVID has continued throughout the past year together with the marked increase in applications for farms. Proposals for subdivision of land with individual access and applications for stables remained markedly high.

These applications dilute the necessary applications located Outside the Development Zone, many times resulting in an overall incorrect perception regarding permissible development ODZ and increasing the pressures on staff members who are required to ensure that the usual standards of rigorous assessment are applied.

The Urban Conservation Areas team received 1,776 applications during the past year, with 1,492 cases being concluded, a net increase over the previous year in both incoming cases and output.

The increase reflects the increased proficiency of the newer employees becoming more familiar with processing procedures, as well as more time with minimal disturbance owing to the revised public contact hours.

The team closed the year with a caseload of about 900 pending cases, an increase over the previous year of almost 90 cases, which also reflects the overall increase in number of applications received.

1,776
applications to the UCA
1,492
applications concluded



Applications for improvements within Urban Conservation Areas with the least detriment to the heritage and architectural value of the properties are always assessed favourably.

Justifiable alterations to cultural and/or historically significant properties ensure that our historic areas are upgraded to modern standards without compromising the possibility of future generations from making use of these significant properties.

This year, both teams will focus on reducing the current backlog in order to have a more manageable caseload, resulting in turn in recommendations being carried out in a more timely manner and resulting in reduced overall pressure on staff.

The Major Projects Unit and EU and Special Projects Unit
The processing of Major Projects development applications is not only limited to the assessment of the development proposal 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 Unit assessed different type of proposals which were very challenging in achieving 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 and industrial development for community facilities, quarries and high-rise / landmark buildings for commercial use and tourism accommodation.

The Major Projects Unit processed a total of 70 screening requests (Schedule 1 applications) and received 119 validated applications. A total of 85 applications were referred for a decision within the period January 2024 to December 2024.

EU and Special Projects Unit processed a total of 20 screening requests and received 169 validated applications. A total of 153 applications were referred for a decision within the period January 2024 to December 2024.

MPU and EUSPU are committed to make every effort to focus on the best way to assess applications in terms of quality, efficiency and transparency and will continue to think broadly and expand further the current planning policies to meet today's trends and demands.

Such approach is translated into rich material for discussion and exploration to achieve results that are meant to be taken as examples of good practice.

COMPLIANCE & ENFORCEMENT DIRECTORATE

Perit Raphael Axiak - Director
Thomas Paris – Deputy Director

The Compliance & Enforcement Directorate is tasked with the monitoring, regulating, and enforcing functions of the Planning Authority in line with the provisions of the Development Planning Act (CAP. 552) of 2016 and the subsidiary legislations.

The Directorate's hybrid working system - involving a combination of work from the office, home, and on site through tablets which are connected to the Authority's network systems - has had a positive impact on the Directorate's productivity and efficiency.

The Directorate is compelled to continue strengthening its hybrid remote work practices to ensure improved effectiveness in dealing with an increasing workload and increased complexity of cases.

Commencement notices

Article 72(4) of the Development Planning Act requires the developer to notify the Authority with the commencement date prior to the utilisation of a permission or prior to the commencement of works for each permission. If the commencement notice is not submitted, or if it is submitted but invalid, any development carried out would be illegal. Offence fines are applicable if the legal requirement to submit the commencement notice is not adhered to.

In view of the 2023 legislative changes to the Development Planning Act, which amended the definition of "commencement notice", there is no longer the need for the submission of the commencement notice in relation to regularisation (RG) permissions and PA permissions, which approved sanctioning of development only. This has led to an overall reduction in the number of commencement notices submitted by circa 27%. During 2024, the Directorate received a total of 6,372

6,372

commencement notices



5,209

PA permissions

commencement notices, of which 5,209 were related to PA permissions. Moreover, the format of the commencement notice form has been simplified as much as possible to avoid the submission of unnecessary information and, at the same time, to reduce the frequency of invalidation of said notices.

This resulted in a reduction of the administrative burden on the Directorate since each commencement notice has to be vetted to ensure that it has been validly submitted.

Nonetheless, if the permission includes a condition which requires adherence to a requirement prior to the commencement of works, then the commencement notice is not validated until it is verified that the obligation/s have been complied with. The Directorate is compelled to act and stop any works prior to the validation of the commencement notice.

Monitoring and surveillance

Proactive monitoring of ongoing development ensures that breaches of development control are identified and dealt with promptly, whilst fewer issues are encountered at compliance certification stage.

The beneficiaries of monitoring of ongoing development are the end customers, who are usually the occupants of individual units. Moreover, the Directorate is required to investigate complaints received and follow up with the necessary actions.

During 2024, the enforcement officers of the Directorate carried out circa 40 site inspections per working day. 6,161 registered inspections were carried out to monitor ongoing works in relation to permissions issued by the Authority. Another 4,350 registered site inspections were carried out in relation to the investigation of complaints and enforcement notices.

To facilitate monitoring and the carrying out of its functions, the Directorate has gone through a reorganisation of its teams in 2024. The teams of enforcement officers are now responsible for geographical areas rather than zoning.

For instance, if we consider the town of Mosta, one officer is responsible for all the land within the local council boundary, rather than an officer being responsible for the development zone (DZ) area and another officer being responsible for the outside development zone (ODZ). On the other hand, a specialised team dealing with major projects and sectors (such as quarries, farms and industrial buildings) was retained.

1,974

PlotGIS queries

24%
increase

PlotGIS queries

The full digitalisation of the processes through PlotGIS seeks to implement checks during the vetting and assessment of planning applications to determine whether such applications sanction or regularise all the illegal development on site. This has also facilitated the recovery of fines and fees, which are still pending on specific sites, and which are still due to the Authority.

Timely feedback by the Directorate's officers on planning applications is required to ensure that the established timeframes of application processes are not affected. During 2024, the Directorate received and replied to a total of 1,974 PlotGIS queries, which represents a 24% increase from the previous year.

Compliance certification

Article 102 of the Development Planning Act requires that prior to the installation of water and electricity services in a premises, a compliance certificate is to be issued by the Planning Authority. The process is fully digitised.

The compliance certificate is a confirmation, subsequent to an inspection by officers from the Directorate, that the development, in part or in whole, has been completed in line with the approved drawings and the conditions of the respective permission.

Compliance certificates may also be requested by banks in relation to bank loans, by Government entities prior to the issuance of operational licences, and other matters related to individual properties.

Throughout 2024, the Directorate received a total of 11,228 requests for compliance certification, which represents an increase of 6% over the previous year.

In spite of several vacancies amongst officer positions, the average number of days to determine a validly submitted request was maintained at 7 days during 2024. This is the same number of days maintained throughout 2023, which was reduced from 9 days during 2022, and from 13.5 days during 2021.

Complaints regarding alleged illegal developments

During 2024, the Directorate received a total of 2,411 complaints, from various sources, alleging illegal development.

Since a substantial number of the investigations arising from anonymous complaints received during the previous years resulted in no action being taken by the Directorate, either because the allegations were unfounded or the details provided were insufficient and no clarifications could be sought regarding the reported breach/es, the Planning Authority has started requesting complainants to provide contact details.

6,161

registered
inspections

4,350

inspections investigation
of complaints and
enforcement notices

40

site inspections
per working day

2,411

complaints



162
enforcement notices

521
cases with
sanctioning application

87%
cases illegal
development

In this manner, complainants are kept informed on the outcome of the investigation and can be contacted in case of queries or requests for clarifications from the investigating officers.

Notwithstanding this change, the total number of complaints received throughout the year is the same as that recorded in 2023. The period from receipt of a complaint to its full closure is circa three months.

During 2024, the Directorate identified illegal development in circa half of the total cases registered. To address such infringements, the property owner/occupier submitted a sanctioning application in 521 cases.

On the other hand, in 482 cases where illegal development was identified, the contraveners themselves complied or removed the illegal development, prior to further action being taken by the Directorate.

During the year, the Directorate issued 162 enforcement notices resulting from complaints received. This implies that in 87% of the cases where illegal development was identified, the officers persuaded the contraveners to address the illegal development without the need to resort to the issuance of an enforcement notice.



Stop and Enforcement Notices

Where contraveners are not cooperative with the Directorate's officers to deal with identified infringements, officers are compelled to issue stop and enforcement notices in response to breaches and contraventions of the Act, subsidiary legislation and/or permissions.

During 2024, a total of 191 stop and enforcement notices were issued. This represents a reduction of circa 18% from the previous year. This is in line with the Directorate's strategy to persuade contraveners to rectify infringements, rather than resorting to the issuance of stop and enforcement notices.

In addition, a total of 22 breach of notices were also issued on pending enforcement notices during the same period. Circa 76% of the notices issued were subjected to daily fines.

The Directorate closed a total of 327 pending stop and enforcement notices which accumulated over the years. A total of 125 notices were closed following the issuance of a permission to sanction/regularise the illegal development, and a further 117 enforcement notices were closed after the illegal development was removed by the contravener.

Enforcement Billing

Towards the end of 2024, the Directorate embarked on a project to automatise, simplify, and expedite the issuance of daily fine invoices relative to enforcement notices.

The new procedure will ensure that the invoices are issued directly by the Directorate, a task which over the years has been shared between the Authority's Debt Recovery Office and the Finance Section. The new enforcement billing system should be fully operational by the first quarter of 2025.

191
stop and
enforcement
notices





ICT, MAPPING, AND DIGITAL SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Ing Stephen Ferrito - Director

The ICT, Mapping and Digital Services Directorate looks back with satisfaction and pride at the accomplishments achieved throughout 2024. As a support and service-oriented directorate, we remain committed to delivering high-quality services to our diverse stakeholders, including Periti, other professionals, applicants, internal users, and government agencies such as the Building and Construction Authority.

The ICT Unit continued to provide uninterrupted support, with service interruptions limited to essential maintenance periods. Despite ongoing human resource challenges, the Unit successfully completed numerous significant projects while maintaining service excellence.

Notable achievements included the review and enhancement of network security through the implementation of Checkpoint Harmony for better email and OneDrive security, along with comprehensive cyber awareness sessions for staff.

The migration from SSCM to Intune marked a crucial step towards modern device management, while the removal of the on-premises Exchange server further streamlined operations. Additionally, security hardening of key Microsoft 365 components ensured enhanced data protection.

Infrastructure upgrades were another focus, with the upgrade of all VMware clusters and the migration of SintergraM servers to a more secure environment. The upgrade of the 3CX communication platform underscored efforts to modernise communication systems.

The Unit also made significant strides in online and internal systems. eApplications Version 3 went live in May, introducing better response times and an enhanced user experience. Further improvements included the

3,097
job requests

4,006
emails

7,889
phone calls



integration of CD applications and locality funding, along with a comprehensive review for Accessibility Directive compliance.

Internal systems were not left behind, with a full revamp of the intraweb and Image Viewer, as well as enhancements to Artemis Court Cases and the introduction of a new Plot GIS system.

Throughout 2024, the ICT Help Desk logged a total of 3,097 job requests, with 51% of these resolved within three hours, demonstrating a continued commitment to timely support. The Help Desk also handled 7,889 phone calls and received 4,006 emails, reflecting extensive user engagement and service.

Despite resource challenges, the Directorate remained dedicated to innovation and ensuring the availability of the latest tools, software, and hardware to support its online and hybrid services.

These services, ranging from application submissions and reviews to digitisation and decision-making sessions, continue to be valued by applicants, the public, and professionals alike.

As we look forward to 2025, the ICT Unit remains focused on addressing emerging challenges and further enhancing the technological capabilities and services offered by the Directorate, ensuring a continued high standard of service delivery.

The Operations arm of the Directorate plays a pivotal role in supporting the Authority's core functions. This encompasses a wide range of essential services, including efficient mail handling, meticulous document management and digitisation, providing exceptional customer care and support, meticulously plotting application locations, extracting and analysing crucial data, and effectively guiding other directorates in leveraging and enhancing our ICT management solutions.

The Authority consistently prioritised excellent customer service, exemplified by the provision of personalised service to over 5,000 clients at the Front Desk Reception. Furthermore, the team facilitated nearly 2,300 online meetings, amounting to nearly 400 hours of virtual interaction.

The team effectively addressed over 30,000 emails concerning enforcement, mapping, and general customer care inquiries, while diligently responding to over 121,600 phone calls, including over 4,400 reports on perceived illegal development and 81,400 generic queries.

The Records Retention and Digitisation team diligently ensured the safe preservation of all physical records while actively managing the Authority's digitisation project. This critical function is invaluable to numerous

71,000
plans and drawings

15,300
plotted sites



clients who require access to historical permit records, particularly during property transactions. Notably, the team successfully scanned nearly 15,000 files, resulting in the digitisation of over 352,000 documents.

The Mailroom consistently maintained efficient document handling procedures, ensuring proper segregation, timely delivery, and accurate processing. This function is paramount in ensuring that all physical and electronic correspondence, including older files, is effectively processed and delivered to the designated recipients within the Authority's administrative processes.

Beyond this, the Mailroom meticulously uploaded over 9,000 representations onto internal databases for consideration during the application processing phase and efficiently printed over 71,000 plans and drawings as an integral part of the development permitting process. The Plotting Team carefully plotted over 15,300 sites, accurately indicating the locations of various applications. This encompassed the plotting of over 9,400 planning applications, 1,700 regularisation applications, 1,200 development notification orders, and approximately 450 dangerous structure applications.

Additionally, 160 plots were specifically prepared to assist the Finance Ministry. Notably, the team consistently met the three-calendar day processing target while effectively addressing the significant number of republications necessitated by changes in proposals, locations, site sizes, and other relevant factors.

A significant milestone in 2023 was the successful integration of the Planning Application Initial Vetting and Billing applications section within the Operations arm of the Directorate.

This streamlined integration empowered the team to issue over 10,000 bills while diligently validating nearly 10,300 applications, effectively reducing the backlog to a manageable level of approximately 300 applications. The Operations Office continued to provide invaluable assistance to a diverse range of clients. Numerous Periti found the Unit's support indispensable, particularly when navigating complexities within the Authority's systems and procedures.

Moreover, the Operations staff effectively guided and supported internal clients, assisting them in navigating the Authority's procedures and processes. They served as a crucial point of reference whenever operational challenges arose, effectively bridging the gap between users and our ICT software developers.

Additionally, the team proactively provided stakeholders with relevant statistics and reports, enabling the Authority's management to effectively evaluate performance and identify areas for improvement. The

Office diligently addressed over 5,000 emails pertaining to operational and eApplications issues.

The Alignment Interpretation Unit (AIU) played a crucial role in processing a significant volume of files. In 2024, the AIU received 3,287 files from the Land Survey Unit for Setting Out, preparing 1,045 plans while determining that 632 files did not require alignment. Notably, 1,216 files had plans already prepared through the AIS Automatic Consultation process or had been addressed for the Initial Setting Out.

The unit also processed 9,086 applications sent to AIS for assessment, resulting in the preparation of 2,572 plans. Another 6,504 cases were determined to not require an alignment, with 10 cases necessitating a topographic survey prior to plan issuance. In total, between plans for setting out and the Automatic Consultation process, AIS produced 3,598 plans.

The unit also received 2,206 files referred by Development Management for consultation, conducted 101 alignment interpretations on topographic surveys, and prepared 497 alignment plans in response to queries from architects and applicants.

The Land Surveying Unit (LSU) experienced a period of transition in 2024, marked by the retirement of key personnel and the promotion of three Surveyors to Senior Land Surveyors. The unit strategically recruited two MCAST apprentices who had completed their degree courses and engaged another MCAST student. Furthermore, drone surveys were conducted for quarries and other large-scale projects. The LSU generated substantial revenue, amounting to €89,153.60, from its services, encompassing topographical surveys for Planning Control (PC) applications, private architects, corporate clients, and setting-out services.

The Topographical Survey Section conducted a total of 99 surveys across Malta and Gozo in 2024, encompassing an area of 516,390 m². These surveys comprised 303,830 m² of external surveys and 212,560 m² of internal surveys. Of these, 39 surveys were commissioned by external clients, while 60 surveys were initiated by internal requests. All surveys were meticulously recorded in ArcGIS and linked to the relevant plan references.

The Setting Out Section addressed 2,134 requests for scheme alignment and formation levels for developments within a scheme, with 1,657 originating from Malta and 477 from Gozo. The Geodetic Control Section continued its crucial work in maintaining the Horizontal and Vertical control networks of the Maltese Islands, concurrently conducting tests and collecting results for the creation of the first Geoid Model of the islands, facilitating the transition from ED50 to WGS84.



€45,000
sales generated from
the Mapping Section
transitioning to ArcPro



Notably, the LSU generated significant revenue, issuing survey quotations that amounted to €45,042.26 in invoices and €44,111.34 in Planning Control bills, contributing to the overall revenue of €89,153.60.

The Geomatics Unit has played a pivotal role in implementing the INSPIRE Directive, with the PA acting as the Competent Authority. The unit actively participated in key meetings, organised seminars, and provided training on data harmonisation and uploading data to the INSPIRE portal.

Progress includes the successful migration of the system to the cloud platform Haleconnect, integration with the JRC Geoportal, and the installation of the ESRI Geoportal. The unit also provides crucial support for NSDI initiatives, assists with GIS needs, and explores emerging technologies like ArcGIS Online.

In the realm of research and innovation, the unit secured high-definition satellite imagery, developed methodologies for boundary delineation, and explored the potential of AI applications in mapping. The AI-based EMBAT project, undertaken in collaboration with the University of Malta, has secured funding and is poised to commence in 2025.

The unit actively engages in European collaborations, including the EEA's EIONET and Copernicus programs, securing contracts for land monitoring projects. Moreover, the unit actively participates in various international workshops and conferences.

The Mapping Section successfully transitioned to ArcPro, completed several mapping projects, processed numerous requests, and generated over €45,000 in sales. Key deliverables include orthomosaic models, digital elevation models, and road network updates.

The Spatial Data Management and Projects Team made significant strides in various projects, including updating the basemap, conducting extensive UAV data collection, analysing spatial data, and engaging in vital research initiatives.

For the basemap update, data collection encompassed 80% of the Maltese Islands, with UAV flights meticulously planned and executed using DJI Hub 2. Ground control points were established in several key locations to ensure accuracy.

UAV data collection was conducted in various sites, including quarries, urban areas, and historical fortifications. Flight logistics were meticulously managed, and permits were secured for smooth operations.

The team effectively handled MoUs and data requests, processing 37 requests related to projects such as SIntergraM and ERDF156, successfully closing 30 MoUs, and providing assistance to various entities with spatial data requirements.

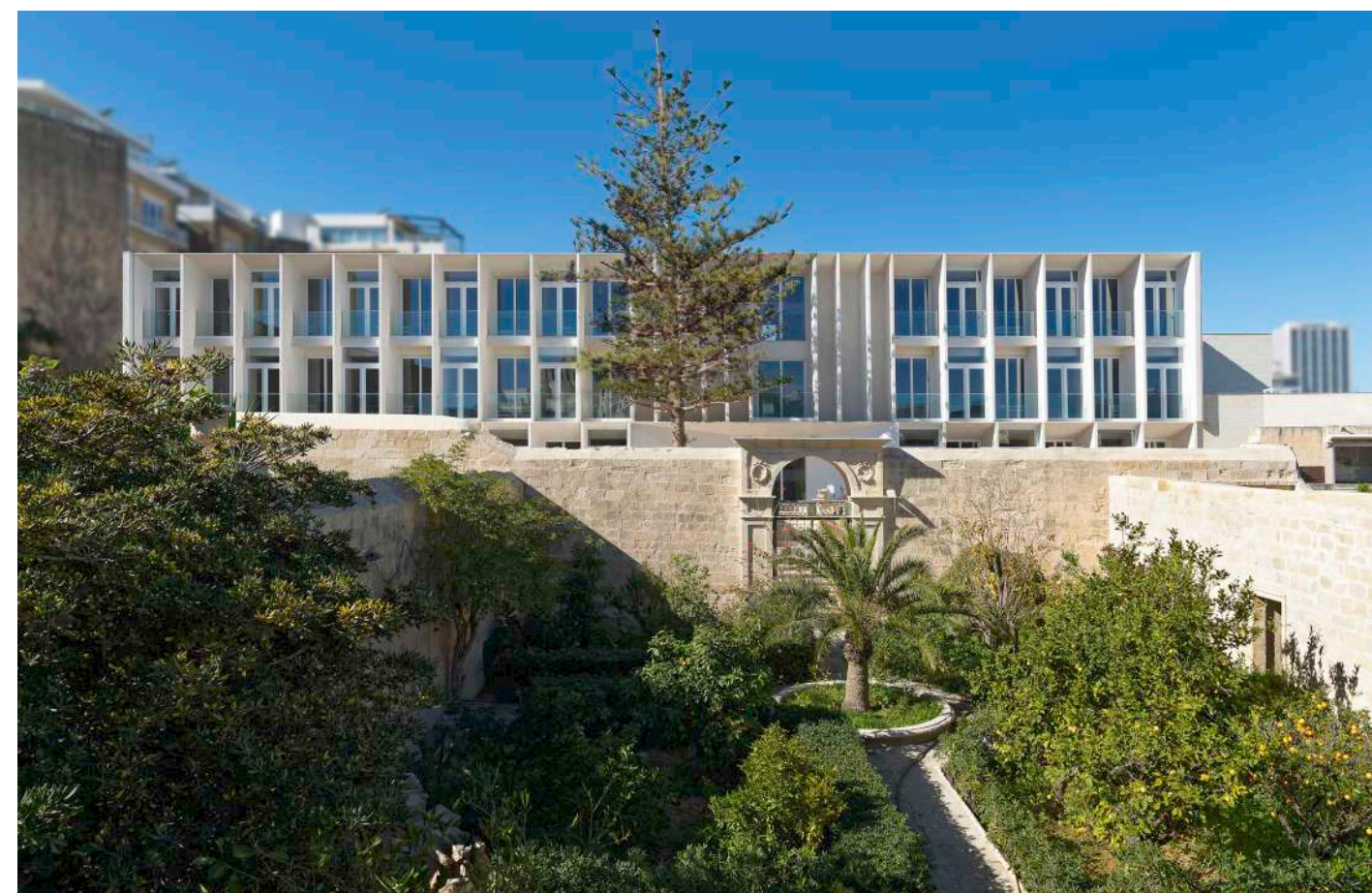
In data analysis, the team maintained comprehensive databases on dwellings and non-dwellings, providing statistical reporting and developing insightful dashboards. For research projects, the SustAI project involved a thorough review of application forms and the drafting of pertinent tenders. The SIntergraM project focused on financial reporting, tenders, and inventory closure.

The team also conducted terrestrial laser scanning at Dwejra and Gharb, enhancing the spatial mapping capabilities. With respect to ESPON, the team updated agreements, actively participated in international seminars, and effectively organised events on climate change adaptation and spatial planning.

Overall, the team played a crucial role in spatial data collection, infrastructure development, research, and collaboration with national and international entities. The ICT, Mapping and Digital Services Directorate concluded 2024 with a sense of accomplishment, having successfully met the challenges and achieved significant

milestones. This year witnessed the continued evolution of the Directorate, driven by a commitment to delivering high-quality services and embracing technological advancements.

Key achievements include the successful implementation of eApplications Version 3, enhancements in network security, and advancements in spatial data management, including the continued development of the national basemap and the exploration of innovative technologies such as 3D modelling and AI. Looking ahead, the Directorate remains committed to continuous improvement, embracing emerging technologies, and further enhancing the services it provides to stakeholders, ensuring a continued high standard of service delivery in the years to come.



CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTORATE

Mr Kevin Portelli - Director

Human Resources Unit

Over the past year, the Human Resources Unit pursued the Authority's strategies in manpower planning and capacity building, employee retention, employer branding and talent capturing, employee relations and health and safety matters.

A significant aspect of the HR Unit's activities involves managing the workforce efficiently. The Unit published 20 external calls and 45 internal calls, attracting 264 external applications and 95 internal applications, respectively.

The selection processes resulted in the recruitment of 19 new employees and 58 internal promotions. 21 officers progressed to higher grades having met the required performance standards.

The Unit also concluded 77 probation exercises, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of recruits during their initial period of employment. As part of the ongoing initiative to promote flexibility and an improved work-life balance, the HR Unit processed 18 new teleworking requests and renewed 110 existing contracts.

The Unit has made significant progress in the negotiation of new collective agreements to further improve the existing conditions of employment.

A strategic approach to talent acquisition involves engaging with the University of Malta and other educational institutions. Through the IPS scheme, seven university students were engaged for a 12-month period in the fields of Architecture and Law, contributing to their academic and professional growth.

Another six students from MCAST were engaged by the Authority as apprentices. The Unit coordinated employer branding talks with MCAST students, both at the Institute

58
internal promotions

21
officers progressed to
higher grades

and the Authority's premises, to enhance the Authority's image and appeal to potential employees.

As part of its responsibility to ensure health and safety in the workplace, the Unit administered the provision of personal protective equipment and sunscreen lotion to employees, replenished first aid boxes located throughout the premises and in Authority vehicles, maintained the five Automated External Defibrillators located on the Authority's grounds, and coordinated special parking arrangements for a number of employees.

In collaboration with the Employee Development and Wellbeing Unit, a first aid course was organised, increasing the number of certified first aiders to 23.

The procurement and distribution of summer and winter uniforms for front office personnel, maintenance staff, and security officers was also coordinated by the Unit.

Procurement Unit

During 2024, the Procurement Unit of the Authority issued and awarded multiple tenders for the provision of services and supplies. These included contracts for professional services of notaries public, consultancy services to be provided by a restoration architect, the leasing of a 4x4 pick-up truck, and the purchase of IT and spatial equipment, software and other IT services.

In the same year, the Authority granted and executed fresh agreements for consultancy services, supply of IT equipment, software and licenses, eye tests for employees, supply of bottled drinking water, PR initiatives, cash-in-transit service, and maintenance of M&E equipment.

The Unit also published an expression of interest for the temporary leasing of office space, a tender for the leasing of nine (9) fully electric crew vans, and a tender for the leasing of six (6) 4-wheel drive mini-SUVs.

Furthermore, the Unit reviewed needs analysis exercises conducted by PA Directorates for procurement exceeding €10,000. It also handled flight bookings for all officers travelling abroad and followed up with HR, ICT and Accounts as necessary.

The Procurement Unit assisted the Geomatics Unit in preparing and submitting a bid for the negotiated procedure (NP) issued by Eionet for the production of the Corine Land Cover 2024 (CLC 2024).

It also assisted the DCS Office during an NAO audit of the Planning Authority's Financial Year 2023 and contributed to the compilation of the Business and Financial Plans for 2025–2027.

Support Services Section

In 2024, the Support Services Section ensured the upkeep and functionality of the Authority's premises and operations. It serviced fire extinguishers, maintained vehicles as per leasing instructions, and managed the maintenance of landscaped areas.

The Section ensured active maintenance agreements, signed a new switchgear agreement with major servicing and repairs, and supported ceiling re-testing while cordoning off unsafe areas.

Key tasks included PAT and legionella testing, maintaining office signage, initiating discussions with ICT to design a system for inventory management, and decommissioning an old UPS.

Major projects included preparing a new office annex, which involved cleaning and furnishing the space, updating Energy Performance Certificates, and installing a car charger near the guardroom. The Section also undertook routine repairs, maintained water dispensers, and facilitated smooth daily operations to support all Authority sections effectively.

Finance Unit

The Finance Unit is responsible for the management of the Authority's finances and of the various schemes administered by the Authority. Further to the normal day-to-day financial control activities, in 2024 the Unit undertook the following activities:

- Regular and timely reporting of financial information;
- Regular reporting on the Development Planning Fund and the Irrestawra Darek Scheme, and timely processing of disbursements to beneficiaries of the scheme;
- Ongoing provision of accounting services to the EU and Multilateral Affairs Unit in relation to EU funding claims;
- Timely processing of refunds on overpaid, withdrawn and refused applications for development permits; and
- Timely processing of payments to suppliers and service providers in respect of supplies and services rendered to the Authority.

The Finance Unit processed more than 1,400 payments to over 300 suppliers with a total value of €4.8 million. The Unit also processed more than 1,900 refunds on applications for a total value exceeding €2 million.

Additionally, the Unit processed 334 payments with a total value of €3.5 million to beneficiaries of fund schemes administered by the Authority. The Unit maintained its investment strategy to maximise interest return, by investing in fixed term deposits with local banks and in local bonds.

Employee Development & Wellbeing Unit

Over the past year, the ED&W Unit successfully concluded two Erasmus+ projects: one focused on training and the other on job mobility. The Unit also continued to provide essential administrative support for various EU-funded projects under the TSI program. Furthermore, a strategic funding proposal was submitted, focusing on staff retention, talent attraction, and effective remote work management.

The Unit coordinated several key initiatives, such as maintaining the provision of health insurance cover for all staff, organising VDU eye tests, evaluating requests for the reimbursement of self-initiative training, and managing ad-hoc training and sponsorship agreements.

Throughout the year, numerous activities and initiatives were implemented to engage and support staff. These included Reaching Out calls, PAWellnessWednesday events and emails, regular updates on the closed Facebook group, team-building activities, staff recognition and birthday notifications, and networking events like food trucks and break events.

Other activities included religious celebrations, fundraising events, T&A training circulars, Christmas events, children's workshops during Carnival and Easter, an Easter treasure hunt, updates on the employee discount card, a blood drive campaign, the Health Matters event, and an International Pet Day competition.

Monthly wellbeing tip notifications were also shared. The latest leadership and management initiative features monthly articles designed to promote continuous learning opportunities.

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Representative of Environment NGOs

Mr Romano Cassar

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Mr Saviour Debono Grech
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Mr Christian Vassallo
Mr Sandro Chetcuti
Perit Simone Vella Lenicker
Mr David Mifsud
Mr David Xuereb

Secretary

Ms Dorianne Ciantar

LIST OF IMAGES

The Images reproduced in this Report are the winning projects of the 2023 Malta Architecture & Spatial Planning Awards

Page 4
Restoration Award
AP VALLETTA
 St Paul's Pro Cathedral

Page 7 & 8
Interior Architecture Award for Residential Projects & Design Award for Good Architecture, Building and Structure
3DM ARCHITECTURE
 Twenty -four

Page 13 & 37
Commercial and Public Buildings Award & Design Award for Good Architecture, Building and Structure
C&K ARCHITECTS
 Villa Anna Teresa

Page 14 -15
Public Vote Winner
HERITAGE MALTA
 The Grand Master's Palace

Page 17
Interior Architecture Award for Hospitality and Tourism Projects
BOX CONCEPT
 AX-ODYCY Hotel

Page 18
Residential Architectural Award
SON ARCHITECTURE
 BOTHOUSE

Page 20
Interior Architecture Award for Commercial or Public Buildings
BOX CONCEPT
 Salvo Grima Offices

Page 22
Urban Planning Concept Award
AP VALLETTA
 Sewda Valley

Page 24
Small Projects Award
PERIT ANDREW SULTANA & MR AUSTIN CAMILLERI
 Id-Daħla tal-Palazz

Page 28
Outstanding Students Project Award
GARY JAMES GHIRXI
 Adaptive Re Use of a Landscape in Tension

Page 30
Rehabilitation & Conservation Award
SIMONDS FARSONS CISK PLC WITH LEAD ARCHITECTS RITCHIE STUDIO
 The Brewhouse

Page 38
Public Open Spaces Award
DESIGN & TECHNICAL RESOURCES
 Green Islands



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