



A manifesto for a critical expansion on *Malta Vision 2050*'s urban, architectural and building related strategies

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THE MALTA CHAMBER



VALLETTA



Intent

AP Valletta, engaged on behalf of The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry, was invited to consult on *Malta Vision 2050*, a public consultation document issued by the Government of Malta setting out the long-term national strategy for sustainable development. The document aims to guide Malta and Gozo toward environmental resilience, social well-being, and economic prosperity by introducing macro strategies for implementation over a 25-year period, working towards a 2050 deadline. The document presents a vision framework built on key themes such as climate action, resource efficiency, inclusive communities, sustainable mobility, and innovation.

In July 2025, both The Malta Chamber and AP Valletta submitted feedback on the Vision’s proposed priorities, targets, and policy directions in an initial *Analytical Commentary*. This current document, titled *A manifesto for a critical expansion on Malta Vision 2050’s urban, architectural and building related strategies*, represents The Malta Chamber’s and AP Valletta’s views and builds on three refinement points put forward in our initial commentary in a bid to enable a coherent, integrated approach to future planning.

This document is therefore a continuation of an ongoing feedback and exploratory exercise, intended to act as a response to the open consultation period following the *Malta Vision 2050* launch.

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Executive summary

In July 2025, The Malta Chamber approached AP Valletta to react to the Malta Vision 2025 with a view to produce a feedback document as part of the public consultation process. Such feedback would focus primarily on the impacts that the Vision is expected to have on urban development, heritage safeguarding and use, and the overall health of the built environment on the islands. AP Valletta responded with an *Analytical Commentary*, which gave a ‘first-look’ outline of key critical feedback, and scrutinised the Vision’s overarching mandate: an aim to work towards “A safe and resilient Nation, inspired by heritage and driven by progress, fostering a healthy quality of life for all”.

Chiefly, we ask for quantification around what ‘safety’ refers to; what progress looks like and how it is measured; whether the term ‘quality of life’ is equitable to all; and what measures can be put in place to ensure ‘resiliency’.

We go on to suggest that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a good starting point for a holistic metric system for success, but that a finer, more nuanced system of measurability is needed to ensure that the intentions of this vision can be met.

Accordingly, this document will provide a primer for three areas we believe would benefit from strengthening and refining, each aimed at improving the quality of the urban environment and the processes linked to the industry. These are:

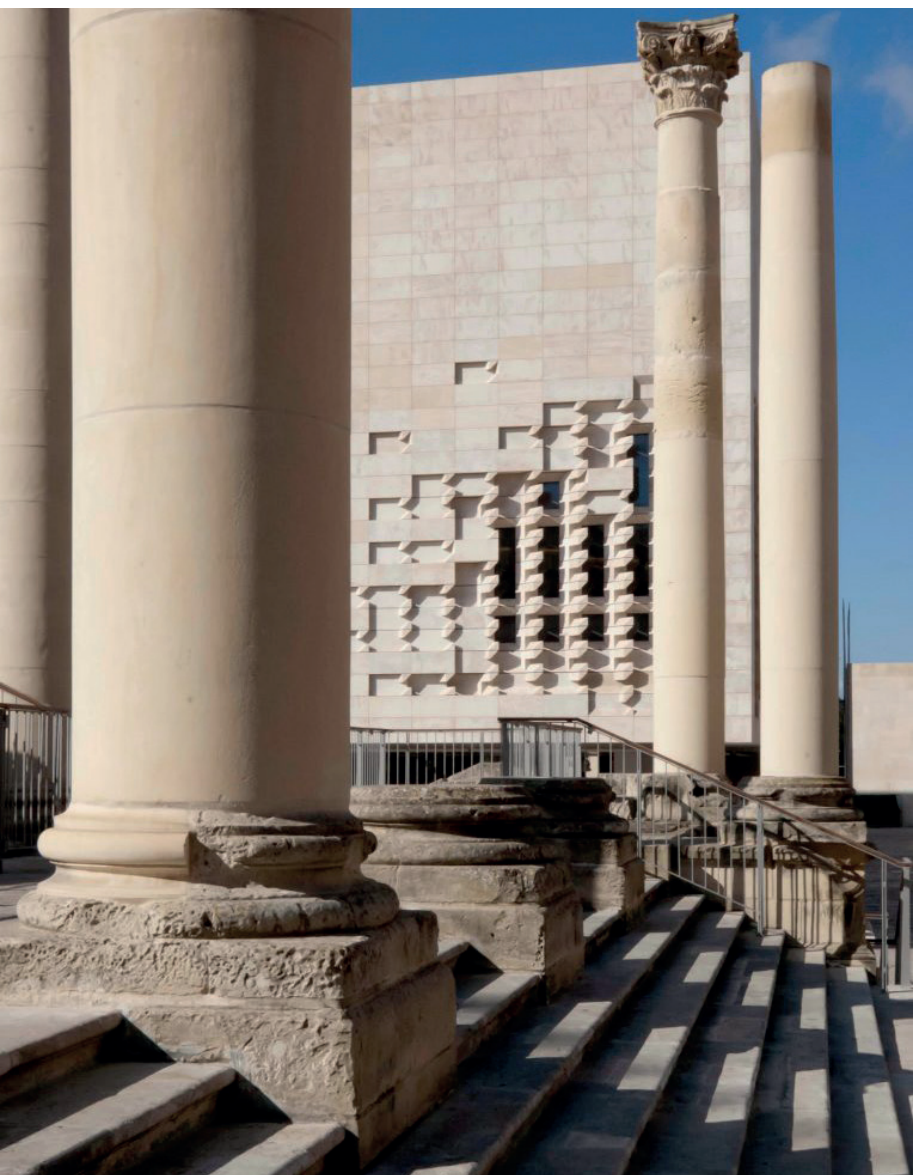
- Pillars for a new urban vision
- Setting up a construction platform
- Centralising an integrated spatial data platform

The first feedback point will outline five main pillars that could act as guides to a more detailed, place-led urban planning vision than what has been presented in the Vision document and in the current planning framework. These pillars focus on a commitment to the quality of the islands’ urban and rural environment as an integral part of its social and economic development. They promote measuring success in close proximity with the needs and aspirations of community, rather than those of specific interest groups. The second feedback point focuses on a proposal for an openly accessible construction platform or ‘home’ for built environment practitioners and stakeholders. This addresses the administrative and practical barriers existing in and around construction processes on the islands, and proposes a central action point for a unified construction platform to be included in the Vision. The proposal therefore outlines the need to foster management and operational excellence

in construction, from planning to execution. This includes the establishment of a database of Malta and Gozo’s network of practitioners and agencies involved in the compilation of regulations affecting construction, as well as a structure – either digital or tangible or both – that helps to create a more consistent and comprehensive approach to their preparation, administration and enforcement. This in turn enables the dissemination of best practice advice, true collaboration, and for more streamlined and qualitative construction processes.

Finally, the third feedback point relates to the issue of ‘smart construction’ outlined within the *Malta Vision 2050* document, which we propose extending to planning and pre-planning activity. Our feedback here comes in the form advocacy for an integrated spatial data platform. This is an idea for a digital platform that enables built environment professionals to access information from relevant authorities through one digital sink, allowing for building capacity assessment, identification of hot spots, and planning of integrated transport systems.

These three critical feedback points aim to form part of a greater insistence on nuance – we urge more attention and data-driven objectives to be created around urban issues, which constitute the backbone of the islands’ wider improvement goals.



Malta’s limited land and maritime space requires careful, forward-looking planning to balance development with environmental stewardship and long-term well-being. This pillar focuses on the intelligent use of both land and sea, ensuring that growth respects the carrying capacity of the country while enhancing quality of life.

Malta Vision 2050, p. 11



The creation of any forward-planning document needs to include detail on phasing, implementation and measurability alongside pillar focuses. An urban vision should focus less on the binary usage of ‘land’ and ‘sea’ and more on a holistic, integrated strategy underpinned by global best practice and advice and locally-led, regenerative solutions.

Background

Acting as the voice of the private sector in Malta, The Malta Chamber's principal role is to represent companies from all economic sectors and ensure that entrepreneurs enjoy the best competitive environment and regulatory conditions possible for the conduct of business. Its mission is to influence the formation of policy at national and European level towards the development of an enterprise culture, and to champion the creation of favourable economic conditions to the advantage of its members and the interests of the wider community. This includes built environment stakeholders, for whom the health and quality of the management and administration of design and construction activity is fundamental.

AP Valletta is a practice that is rooted in research, discourse, and urban thinking. Having been established over three decades ago, its team has been active and deeply engaged in contributing to the story of Malta and Gozo's urban development since formation.

Through the commitment of three of its current partners within the Chamber of Architects and Civil Engineers (Kamra tal-Periti) over the past two decades, AP Valletta has contributed to the authoring of a number of relevant publications which this current document makes reference to. These include *A Modern Building & Construction Framework for Malta*, published by the Kamra tal-Periti under the former Presidency of Simone Vella Lenicker, as well as *The Urban Challenge*, also published by the Kamra tal-Periti under the former Presidency of David Felice and co-authored by Jacques Borg Barthet. Furthermore, Vella Lenicker's associated work on the Planning Authority Users' Committee, the Climate Action Board, and the Intelligent Planning Committee is also worthy of note in this context. In addition, Borg Barthet was instrumental in the compilation of a Position Paper on *Spatial Planning* for the Kamra tal-Periti, an internal paper produced for the Chamber as a result of the work of the Committee on Planning.

All this experience pairs with research the practice has undertaken towards a vast portfolio of built projects – many of which work to an urban scale and have significantly impacted the story of public realm on the islands.

Achieving Malta's long-term vision requires more than strategic goals — it depends on the systems and tools that support their implementation.

Malta Vision 2050, p. 11



Despite this early statement within its content, the *Malta Vision 2050* omits specific reference to the tools – both for measurement and implementation – that link directly to an urban planning overhaul or renewal. With the built environment having a direct impact on the key structural changes proposed elsewhere in the Vision (economic, social, and health and well-being), a re-think on its current tools and infrastructure is essential to the success of the global ambition of the Vision.



Overview feedback

Before presenting detailed feedback and adjoining set of proposals in connection to design, architectural, urban and construction matters, AP Valletta, on behalf of The Malta Chamber has reviewed the Malta Vision 2050 as a whole, critically assessing its trajectories as they set out to work collectively for the improvement of all of the islands’ aspects of life. In doing so, we have identified areas within the Vision that remain lacking in clear definition. The following is a summary of key ambiguities we have identified within the overall scope of the Vision.

Environmental stewardship versus large-scale infrastructure

The Vision emphasises both the improvement of biodiversity protection, ecosystem restoration, and alignment with SDG 14 (Life Below Water), as well as the introduction of large-scale infrastructural developments, including port expansion, aviation capacity, and land reclamation. Without transparent criteria as to how these developments will be delivered, with what checks and balances related to environmental performance will be put in place, and at what cost to the natural or built context they will replace, it remains unclear how such projects could support, or at least align with, ecological objectives. Greater detail on evaluation frameworks, planning thresholds, and environmental mitigation strategies would be beneficial.

Growth versus quality of life

The Vision projects an anticipated population increase of roughly 20%, which it says must be supported by sustained economic growth. It also advocates for moving towards ‘quality over quantity’ in tourism strategies, as well as the residential development needed to meet this swelling population. These points raise questions on how

essential infrastructure and services — including health, transport, housing, and education — can be planned proportionally and according to the correct demographic assumptions, and how they will be scaled to maintain the high standards of quality of life also set down within the Vision. More and clearer explanation is needed here.

Vertical densification and land reclamation

Similarly, the Vision promotes urban intensification through vertical development, which conflicts with its commitments to protect arable land, cultural assets and community identity. Clarification is needed on how land use and zoning policies will manage these trade-offs whilst safeguarding heritage and agricultural resources amid increasing development pressures. We begin to answer this through our proposal for an improved spatial data platform – one that could provide smarter land-use and land division data.

Clarity on authentic community involvement

The Vision proposes establishing a ‘Central Programme Management Office’ which will coordinate across different ministries, working alongside a bottom-up approach to encourage citizen engagement and private sector participation. We believe this would benefit from finer detail and a tangible explanation on how non-governmental stakeholders might be meaningfully involved in informing policy, shaping priorities, partaking in progress monitoring, and generally contributing beyond traditional consultation.

Deployment plans

Finally, our feedback underscores the need for not just one overriding implementation roadmap, but for individual delivery plans for themed sections within the Vision. High-level priorities such as energy transition, data governance, and green infrastructure need to be translated into concrete programmes, ensuring they do not remain aspirational but are supported by phased, financed, and enforceable plans.

Malta Vision 2050 will be overseen by a dedicated Programme Management Office (PMO), tasked with cross-ministerial coordination, monitoring, and transparent reporting. The first months will focus on operationalising the PMO, aligning existing sectoral initiatives with the Vision, and establishing a national dashboard to track progress against key performance indicators.

Malta Vision 2050, p. 12

Key areas requiring clarification and further engagement

How does the Government intend to reconcile potentially conflicting objectives, such as the pursuit of large-scale infrastructural developments (e.g. port expansion, land reclamation, and increased aviation capacity) with the Vision’s commitment to ecological balance, biodiversity protection, and alignment with SDG 14?

What frameworks, criteria, or methodologies will be used to evaluate and guide major spatial developments, including thresholds for environmental mitigation, land use planning, and policy coherence across sectors?

What demographic projections and assumptions underlie the anticipated 20% population increase, and how will essential infrastructure and public services, particularly in health, housing, transport and education, be scaled to sustain quality of life standards?

In view of the Vision’s promotion of spatial intensification through vertical development, how does Government intend to safeguard arable land, cultural assets, and community identity, and what zoning or planning safeguards will be introduced to manage these trade-offs?

How will the balance between top-down coordination (via the proposed Central Programme Management Office) and bottom-up engagement be operationalised, particularly with regard to ensuring meaningful participation from civil society and the private sector in implementation, monitoring and decision-making processes?

Pillars for a new urban vision

Strategic, efficient, sustainable management of natural assets to ensure ecological balance and long-term national prosperity.

Malta Vision 2050, p. 60



The vision document currently focuses on four key strategic points grouped under 'urban planning'. These are: industrial space allocation; efficient urban planning; green Malta; and land reclamation. These headings should be less siloed, more symbiotic, and predicated on different metrics of value and prosperity beyond fiscal economics or GDP. The four points also limit the Vision's capability to align urban planning goals to the many impacts that other parts of the vision document will have, areas which will necessarily impact the urban environment.

Pillars for a new urban vision

The Malta Vision 2050 proposals on urban planning should be bold in their intention and endeavour, yet also build on inherited knowledge and expert experience. Many of the key barriers named in this manifesto, as well as their associated solutions, form part of a long-standing and ongoing conversation – a legacy of urban strategy advocacy that was formalised almost twenty years ago in The Urban Challenge, yet continue to be vastly unreleased yet fundamental to meaningfully enacting a paradigm shift in urban thinking.

In close collaboration with The Malta Chamber, AP Valletta draws on this material and experience to provide a critical response to the *Malta Vision 2050*’s chapter on ‘Smart Land and Sea Usage’, as well as the sub-chapter on ‘Smart Construction’. Overall, our feedback contends that any new urban vision necessitates a close audit of current local planning positions and existing construction-related policy. With that in mind, guidance should be written with achievability and practical road-mapping as a goal, ensuring that it moves beyond pie-in-the-sky thinking and is grounded in content that is useful and realisable.

The current content related to urban planning in the Vision document lacks grounding in two main areas: demonstrable framing within international best practice on architectural development, urban design,

infrastructure, mobility, and environmental practice; and evidence of more specific, localised and/or regionally-informed design solutions. Its division into ‘land and sea usage’ flattens the specificity of Malta and Gozo’s current urban problems and homogenises what should be an integrated study of the country’s urban elements beyond ‘land’ or ‘sea’ assets.

As such, the next, more detailed iteration of an urban planning chapter should rely on tested urban thinking, derived from a critical analysis of proven case studies, whilst ensuring its own self-sustenance through ideas that are rooted in place. In tandem, guidance on urban strategy should analyse problems and project solutions in a manner which places longevity and hybridism at core, moving away from goals that are singular in nature (e.g. “industrial space allocation”) and towards holistic aims under which such goals can nest (e.g. “sustainable land-use survey and allocation”).

Based on the extensive research our team has already published around urban strategic thinking for the Maltese islands, as well as in direct reaction to the listed goals of the *Malta Vision 2050*, this document suggests grouping the next iteration of the *Vision*’s urban strategy under five main pillars:

- Quality & Context-Driven Design
- Integrated, Long-Term Spatial Planning
- Public Realm, Green Infrastructure & Liveability
- Governance & Participation
- Sustainability, Resilience & Resource Stewardship



These may be edited and expanded and should involve extensive consultation with urban experts, consultation with stakeholders and community groups, and further research carried out within an appropriate time-frame. Indeed, the economic Vision for the country must perforce translate into a spatial plan that will not only accommodate such Vision and lay out the infrastructure to support it, but that must also in tandem incorporate the country’s social and environmental aspirations in physical form and the means to achieve them. The outcome of this Vision must, as a consequence, guide the formulation of a revised SPED (Spatial Plan for the Environment and Development) which is now well past its shelf date.

Within this document, we begin this process by broadening our explanation on the five key areas of focus we believe a forward-looking urban vision should be built on. Each is suggested as a pillar to a more detailed, phased, and realisable strategy that puts Malta and Gozo in good stead for an urban future that is climate resilient, socially and economically equitable, spatially just, and elicits nation-wide engagement and stewardship.

Finally, we underscore the importance of measurability in any urban planning strategy. Alongside our suggestion for five focused pillars on future urban development, we encourage a deliberate conversation around how to transparently and systematically track progress through an unbiased, independent road-mapping system – a tracker that can be both dynamic in adapting to evolving contexts, yet functionally robust in ensuring objectives are reached and quality objectively assessed.

Proposed five key focus areas:

Quality & Context-Driven Design

Design excellence, respect for context, and an understanding of urban impact must sit at the forefront of any successful urban vision for Malta and Gozo. This demands that urban and architectural development be rooted in a deep understanding of place, calling for design that is responsive to local character, history, and environmental conditions. The aim is for the vision to read entirely as a Maltese document, foregoing unstudied or universalised solutions that erode identity. It should emphasise moving away from purely quantitative planning criteria, toward qualitative assessment of spatial planning, and towards the setting of overarching objectives and a robust, coherent policy agenda with a focus on how significant improvements to the current urban condition can be achieved.. This should ensure that projects can then be judged on their contribution to the public realm, relationship with heritage, environmental impact and long-term societal benefit. Context-sensitive design incorporates detailed townscape and streetscape analysis, ensuring scale, form, materiality, density, mobility and land use. harmonise with surroundings while embracing innovation – therefore any urban vision should see heritage as a living asset that is key to the creation of civic ownership. Policies and design codes will need to guide development without stifling contemporaneity. The vision will advise that architecture, urban and masterplanning and place-making centre on creating environments that are locally distinctive, adaptable to change, and liveable – inspiring stewardship by the communities who inhabit them.

Governance & Participation

A new urban vision is also contingent on a planning system that is transparent, accountable, and equipped to serve the public interest in balance with preserving heritage and urban coherence. Strong governance ensures that decisions are guided by long-term societal benefit rather than short-term or sectoral interests. Guidance will need to stress the importance of inclusive participation, where citizens, communities, and stakeholders are actively engaged from the earliest stages of planning, able to have a hand in shaping their environments, and given the opportunity to grow in their awareness of how urban decisions can impact positively or negatively on their wellbeing. This requires accessible information, diverse consultation methods, and a shift from tick-box feedback to genuine dialogue. Guidance should also look at capacity-building – advising on ways to strengthen the skills, knowledge, and resources of planning institutions, local councils, and professionals on tackling urban challenges. This involves deep

investment in education, training, and cross-disciplinary collaboration. Partnerships between public bodies, academia, NGOs, and the private sector will need to be encouraged to expand innovation and problem-solving skills. The integration of data, research, and design excellence into decision-making will also be crucial. Ultimately, building trust, competence, intelligence of different forms and shared responsibility will ensure that urban change reflects collective aspirations and delivers lasting public value.

Sustainability, Resilience & Resource Stewardship

A call for embedding environmental responsibility into every stage of urban development is paramount to the successful urban recovery and futurity of the islands. It recognises that the built and natural environments are interdependent, and that climate change, resource depletion, and biodiversity loss demand urgent, coordinated action. Reducing carbon emissions, adapting to climate impacts, and protecting natural systems through integrated green and blue infrastructure is key to human comfort and liveability. Resource stewardship actually means minimising land take – so the proposal for land reclamation needs to be studied closely in this respect. Resource-stewardship also means reusing existing buildings and prioritising regeneration over greenfield development. It involves efficient water and energy management, sustainable material sourcing, and waste reduction. It also involves creating environments that encourage walking, cycling and public transport instead of the private car. Resilience is addressed not only in environmental terms, but also in the adaptability of urban areas to social, economic, and demographic change. Development should strengthen local ecosystems, safeguard heritage, and maintain the ecological services that in turn contribute to well-being. Investment must be directed toward projects that provide long-term benefits rather than short-term gain, ensuring that growth does not come at the expense of, but rather creates the conditions to create lasting improvements for future generations. In essence, this pillar promotes an urban vision that is regenerative, climate-ready and resource-wise, securing both environmental health and community prosperity over time.

Integrated, Long-Term Spatial Planning

Planning strategy for Malta and Gozo needs to ensure that environmental, social, and economic objectives are joined under one coherent national framework that endures beyond political cycles. A new urban vision should work to one clear vision, which is then underpinned by policy actions. It should call for a shift

Planning for the future requires integrating environmental stewardship, social equity and economic resilience into every decision. Only by aligning these goals can we create places —urban, rural and natural — that support well-being, adapt to change, and safeguard resources for generations to come.

The Urban Challenge, Kamra tal-Periti, 2007, p. 14.

from reactive, piecemeal decision-making on an urban level, prioritising instead proactive, strategic planning based on clear visions and measurable targets. This approach integrates land use, transport, housing, green and blue infrastructure, economics, health, welfare and public realm improvements so that policies across sectors can work in harmony towards tangible goals rather than in isolation. A new urban vision must recognise the need to address multiple scales — national, regional, and local — through nested plans that respond to distinct contexts (ODZ, UCA, residential areas, etc.) while supporting wider, nation-wide goals. Cross-sector governance, involving ministries, agencies, local councils, professionals, and communities must work with coordinated action. Spatial planning will need to become a crucial tool for climate resilience, biodiversity enhancement, and a step change towards sustainable mobility. A new urban vision will also need to avoid short-term expediency, ensuring resources are used efficiently and benefits are shared equitably.

Public Realm, Green Infrastructure & Liveability

A new urban vision must place people’s everyday experiences at the centre of urban development. It should recognise that the quality of streets, parks, public squares, and natural spaces profoundly influences mental and physical health, mobility and the independence of children and elderly, social interaction, and civic pride. The need to rebalance space away from car dominance, creating safe, attractive, and accessible environments

for walking, cycling, and public life is key. Green and blue infrastructure should be well-planned and interconnected. Priority should be placed on developing planning policies that no longer encourage ongoing redevelopment in established urban areas, forcing people to live in permanent construction sites. Through studied design, these measures should effectively enhance climate resilience, manage storm-water, reduce heat island effect, and support ecological health. Liveability is about comfort, safety, inclusivity, and the equitable distribution of public amenity. This means designing spaces that welcome all age groups, physical and mental abilities and social backgrounds, with particular attention to disadvantaged communities lacking private outdoor areas. Investment in the public realm should be strategic, coordinated, and sustained, ensuring it evolves alongside urban growth. By integrating environmental performance with cultural and social value, well-designed public spaces will create healthier, more vibrant, and more resilient overall urban life.

Setting up a construction platform

Resilient management of strategic human and natural resources to ensure adaptability and preparedness for future challenges.

Malta Vision 2050, p. 14



The vision document omits the need for resilient administrative systems specifically around construction and planning on the islands – an area of human activity and labour that is laden with bureaucratic gate-keeping, administrative redundancy and inefficiency. A centralised home for construction and built environment professional is needed.



Setting up a construction platform

For an urban vision to be effective, it must be managed through operational excellence from planning to execution in construction. Our second proposal and feedback point is to include a mandate for a ‘construction platform’, or ‘home’ for built environment stakeholders within a wider vision. This would be a space – either digital or physical or both – which gathers the country’s network of agencies involved in the physical development of our islands. It will have an overall aim to be a multi-service source for operational and administrative tasks involved in building the environment, creating a more consistent, comprehensive approach to its preparation, administration and enforcement.

This would naturally lead to the dissemination of best practice advice. Within the Kamra tal-Periti’s publication *The Urban Challenge*, where the idea for a construction platform was first introduced, the concept is outlined as follows: “the establishment of a ‘Construction Platform’ would provide a clearer reference point for developers, design professionals and the general public. Continual training and professional development, the certification of tradesmen and the licensing and classification of service

providers will help ensure that construction practice improves. An adequate level of protection and cover for all stakeholders will ensure clients’ interests are better protected. Likewise improved site management and project administration, and a greater awareness of Health and Safety issues will help to ensure that safety risks and inconveniences to neighbours are reduced”.

Breaking this down further, a platform or centralised ‘home’ for built environment stakeholders would ultimately serve to:

- Act as a reference point and data store for developers, professionals & the public
- Provide training & professional development
- Certify tradesmen, license & classify service providers
- Protect stakeholders & safeguard client interests
- Improve site management & project administration
- Promote health & safety awareness
- Reduce risks & inconveniences to neighbours

The platform would serve two sets of groups; primary groups consisting of developers, construction professionals, and design professionals, and secondary groups, consisting of the general public and project clients. It would be used by key built environment stakeholders (see p. 18, ‘Built Environment Stakeholder Entities’).

But why is a construction platform or home needed? What would it do that is not already addressed by existing structures in place in Malta’s ecology of built environment organisations and authorities?

The Problem

Malta and Gozo’s construction industry suffers from fragmentation, with different authorities, processes, and information sources scattered and disconnected. This creates inefficiency, process redundancy, and incremental frustration, making it difficult for professionals, developers, and clients to navigate the system. It also breeds knowledge gaps, with professionals – whether emerging or mature – frequently ill-informed on where to get the right information for what they need, or unable to navigate the access routes to doing so.

There are no unified reference points, and the dispersal of rules and procedural understanding breeds a culture of gate-keeping, bureaucratic hurdles, and fosters the possibility of malpractice.

On a human level, it impacts quality and innovation – both because of the time-theft that administration ambiguity creates, and because of its associated feelings of frustration and inertia. At present, there is little attention on the collective mental health of built environment professionals – for which a survey would be beneficial – yet through empirical and lived experience, the lack of cohesion that exists within the working world of urban development leads to work that can be unnecessarily stressful and anxiety-inducing.

On a legislative level, important data and regulations are difficult to access, often hard to find, outdated, or locked within the files and archives of individual authorities, rather than being integrated into one accessible, digital system. On a practice level, more streamlined, joined up data and advice would have a knock-on effect of improving quality in construction, releasing mental and time-related energy to efforts spent on design and finer construction.

A centralised data, process and regulation bank

A construction home would act as an accessible, transparent hub that simplifies access to information, reduces process redundancy, integrates fragmented entities, and facilitates smoother collaboration. Broadly, we envision it having three main functions:

To act as a data and regulation repository

The construction home would collect all essential information about the industry and hold it in one accessible location, creating both a digital and physical repository. This information would include building codes, regulations, policies, case law and any other relevant documentation that professionals, developers and the general public need to firstly interpret planning requirements, and secondly understand building construction requirements.

Enabling process integration & introducing a multi-service source

A core aim would be to streamline fragmented construction processes into a single, readable work-flow. Currently, planning, environmental, and construction approvals often operate individually, creating repetition of procedure, delays, and confusion around the steps involved in designing and constructing a building or space. An integrated, multi-service home could serve as a space to unify these functions, allowing stakeholders to submit applications, track approvals, and receive coordinated responses from multiple authorities through one place. This integration would cut down on unnecessary bureaucracy, eliminate submission repetition, and make all processes connected with planning and construction approval and compliance more transparent. It is envisaged that a more collaborative approach may lead to a more qualitative process, rather than one that is primarily governed by a ‘tick-box’ approach, deadlines, and a legalistic mindset that detracts from what is more essential to ensure the betterment of our urban environment.

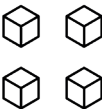

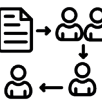
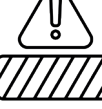






Quality and industry-wide trouble-shooting

A centralised construction home would also help strengthen regulation rigour, accountability for mistakes, and quality assurance in construction. It would establish clear frameworks for certifying tradesmen, licensing service providers, and classifying companies according to their qualifications, skills and capabilities. It could inform industry standards for professional development, aiding on the required continual personal training mandated by the architectural profession. It could also help to embed awareness on construction safety and rights, improve site management practices, and safeguard the interests of clients by ensuring proper protections are in place.

The fragmentation of building and construction regulation in Malta is perhaps not widely appreciated outside the industry. The effects of this fragmentation are: excessive bureaucracy, significant delays, scope for conflicting prescriptive regulations, lack of clarity on responsibility and liability, and diminished consumer rights.

A Modern Building Construction Framework for Malta, Kamra tal-Periti, p. 4

Construction platform: problems to solutions

Key existing obstacles	Platform / home solutions
 Fragmentation: multiple authorities (planning, environment, construction, safety) are working with no cross-over or shared resources.	A centralised home will integrate data and ongoing decisions and processes from all authorities, providing unified guidance and decisions.
 Inaccessibility: legislation, policies, case law, and technical data are hard to find and inconsistently available to both professionals and general public alike.	It will provide a single repository of up-to-date legislation, policies, and standards, making them accessible to all stakeholders in a transparent way.
 Complex bureaucracy: current systems require repetitive paperwork, repeat information on varied approvals, and lack of clarity around sequence of tasks.	Streamlined digital processes with standardised forms could replace multiple processes, creating a one-stop submission and reducing duplication.
 Gatekeeping and barriers: information around regulation and due process is often difficult to access.	A transparent, open-access system would devolve administrative power to professionals, developers, and the public.
 Compromised quality: time and money wasted on bureaucracy instead of tangibly improving construction standards.	More efficient processes will free up resources to focus on improving construction quality.
 Reduced innovation: complex, fragmented systems eat up mental energy and distract professionals from design and construction rigour.	Easier processes and integrated data will free up energy, time and resource for greater focus on innovation in design and building.
 Inhospitable work: current lack of synergy creates stress and anxiety for both project clients and professionals, mainly caused by lack of clarity of requirements and uncertainty over regulations.	Clearer, simpler, and more predictable pathways will reduce stress and improve user confidence.
 Disconnected authorities: conflicting priorities and lack of coordinated responses.	Unified platform will ensure authorities provide joint feedback and aligned decision-making.
 Risk of malpractice: opaque and overcomplicated systems create opportunities for misuse.	Transparency and accessibility will reduce loopholes and help to eliminate significant malpractice risks.
 Outdated and/or inaccessible digital systems: land records, planning layers, and safety data are not integrated or searchable.	An integrated mapping software provided through the home would increase efficiency and accuracy (see Centralising an integrated spatial data platform).

Within the Kamra tal-Periti document, *A Modern Building Construction Framework for Malta*, the need to create a universal resource rests on consultation with built environment stakeholders – outlined as follows: “An independent Building and Construction Regulator must be established to manage the processes relating to building and construction regulation and control in Malta. This regulator must consult with stakeholders in the built environment, and in particular the professions and industries represented within it, to ensure effective oversight”. Our proposal echoes this emphasis, ensuring more visible and pronounced cohesion amongst entities.

Built Environment Stakeholder Entities

Building and Construction Authority
Planning Authority
Environment and Resources Authority
Superintendence of Cultural Heritage
Occupational Health and Safety Authority
Civil Protection Department
Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability
Environmental Health Directorate
Malta Tourism Authority
Regulator for Energy & Water Services
Energy & Water Agency
Commissioner of Police
Masons Board
Local Councils
Professional Chambers
Warranting Boards

Leveraging cutting-edge digital technologies to enhance efficiency, connectivity, and sector-wide competitiveness. [...] Integration between public and private through tailored services as enabler to lower bureaucratic hurdles.



Within the ‘Digital’ section of the *Malta Vision 2050* document, plans for broad-stroke ‘digital enhancement’ and ‘integration’ to overcome bureaucratic hurdles are listed. Mention of ‘hubs’ for centralisation is also made reference to. However there is no specific reference made to applying similar efforts towards the current fragmentation of planning and construction policies, processes and industry-wide

Centralising an integrated spatial data platform

A real estate development that prioritizes renovation while incorporating vertical expansion in strategic areas and multi-purpose buildings for new constructions, reducing land consumption, safeguarding urban historic areas, making them more livable and providing required utilities and transport infrastructures.

The Malta Vision 2050, p. 65



The vision document lists ambitious proposals for ‘smart construction’, highlighting the need for reduction of land consumption. The first step to enabling this is investing in an integrated spatial planning system that can exhaustively scan the islands’ land division, allocation, pending permits, and all associated geo-specific regulation. The Vision also places emphasis on land reclamation, which runs counter to the intention to “reduce land consumption”. This further emphasises the need for a digital spatial data platform – a tool that could better inform whether the islands should dedicate more land to development, and if so, where that land should be claimed and for what specific uses.

Centralising an integrated spatial data platform

Our third feedback point and proposal is the idea to test the validity of a centralised spatial data platform. Malta’s ecosystem of spatial and planning policy mapping tools is fairly vast, yet as with construction administration, fragmented. The introduction of a tool that would layer all existing data and mapping capability could radically improve the built environment profession’s knowledge of the urban physiognomy of the islands, as well as its ability to more accurately and rapidly plan for its improvement.

The collection of digital tools dedicated to surveying and recording spatial and planning policy includes the PA’s interactive MapServer/GeoPortal and mobile app, national data-sharing infrastructure via MSDI, specialised environmental tools including SEIS-Malta, and advanced projects such as SIntegraM with real-time 3D maps. These platforms aim to support transparency, spatial planning, environmental monitoring, and citizen engagement in planning. They exist as follows:

Planning Authority MapServer / GeoPortal

The Planning Authority (PA) offers an interactive MapServer (now evolving into a GeoPortal) accessible through their website. It is powered by GeoServer technology and enables viewing, querying, and overlaying layers such as planning applications, constraints, development areas, and enforcement cases. The Planning Authority’s new GeoPortal (ESRI-based) replaces earlier MapServer layers, integrating various data, improving transparency, and offering mobile adaptability.

PlanningMT Mobile App

This official mobile app, also created by the Planning Authority, gives on-the-go access to dynamic planning data: applications, enforcements, ortho-photos, and map layers. It includes functionality for reporting illegal developments directly from phones with the ability to attach photos.

Malta Spatial Data Infrastructure (MSDI)

Part of Malta’s national implementation of the EU’s INSPIRE Directive, MSDI delivers spatial datasets via web services (including WMS) to promote sharing among public and private sectors. Users can view, discover metadata, and download geospatial datasets like environmental or planning-related information.

Interoperable Europe Portal

This platform uses open-source software (GeoServer, GeoNetwork, MapServer, etc.) and supports data discovery, overlays, and publication work-flows.

SIntegraM Geoportal

Under the EU-funded SIntegraM project, Malta developed a geoportal offering real-time 3D mapping and spatial data integration, using drones, car-mounted cameras, and bathymetric surveys. Aimed at enhancing spatial planning and emergency readiness, it made rich spatial data available via an online portal.

So why do we need another platform – does the collection of existing tools not aptly address the needs of the built environment industry?

The problem

Malta’s current planning and construction digital and physical mapping tools are held by different authorities such as the Planning Authority, the Environment and Resources Authority, and the Land Registry, each of which maintain their own maps and datasets. These systems do not share a common base map, which is a problem that leads to inaccuracy, inconsistencies and inefficiencies. Access to important spatial data — such as arterial roads or land ownership — within the software and archives that already exist is either restricted, outdated, or only available through in-person visits to disparate repositories.

This lack of integration makes it unnecessarily difficult for professionals and the public to understand planning rules, such as permissible building heights or local plan requirements. This should be information that is attainable at the touch of a button, in one place. The consolidating of data layers that already exist as part of the collective national data-bank connected to planning policies, local plans, road networks, land ownership, and safety considerations will reduce time and money overall for anyone wanting to ascertain policy around their site or sites for development. A single searchable system could allow quick access and accurate information on what is permissible on any given site.

Integrated solutions

An open-source, integrated spatial data platform would serve to:

Unify fragmented systems across authorities
Fix inconsistencies in maps and datasets
Improve access to planning and ownership records
Simplify site checks by centralising sources

Eliminate time-consuming manual processes
Increase transparency and reduce gate-keeping
Support innovation by easing bureaucracy
Strengthen decisions with accurate shared data

This would become an enabling and central tool for the industry, serving as a digital bastion of information that promotes consistency and speed. This exists elsewhere — different countries have developed unique spatial data tools for mapping and layering land and planning information, setting precedent for what we can achieve locally.

International precedents

We surveyed a selection of existing national spatial planning tools, including the European platforms used in the Netherlands, Germany, France and Switzerland. Switzerland and France’s portals were shown to excel in high-resolution topography and rich thematic layers, making them ideal for heritage, tourism, and environmental mapping. These are features that would best suit the needs of a mapping system portal for Malta and Gozo.

The Netherlands’ system is strong in regulatory zoning and integrated planning, while Germany’s Brandenburg tool specialises in statistical spatial analysis and land-use monitoring. For the Maltese islands — which are densely built and heritage-rich — a fine-scale mapping tool that can provide detailed historical overlays, public access tools, planning integration and a functionality to highlight protected land and protect cultural landscapes is best suited.

Creating an integrated spatial data platform:

Building an integrated tool of this level of functionality will require significant investment – both financial and developmental. Breaking its starting implementation goals down into a 10-step, high-level workflow begins to give substance to the possibility of creating a spatial planning digital platform in Malta:

1. Review existing systems (Planning Authority, Lands Authority, ERA, MSDI).
2. Collect and harmonise data from maps, registries, and surveys (LiDAR, 3D, aerial).
3. Adopt common standards to ensure datasets align and are interoperable.
4. Build a unified data repository as the backbone of the platform.
5. Develop a geoportal system to serve and visualise spatial information.
6. Enable 3D and analytical tools for planning, modeling, and simulations.
7. Design a user-friendly interface for desktop and mobile access.
8. Add participatory features for feedback, community input, and transparency.
9. Set up governance and oversight through MITA and Planning Authority.
10. Maintain and update continuously with fresh data, training, and user support.

Smart construction methods will be promoted to enhance efficiency, reduce waste, and improve sustainability. The development of a software portal for the construction industry to facilitate the use of Building Information Modelling (BIM) and to centralise permits, inspections and related processes will be a priority.

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Mention of a portal to centralise data is outlined in the Malta Vision 2050. Our proposal suggests emphasising this goal more strongly, learning from foreign examples how to best incorporate refined mapping, integrate zoning, and include cultural overlays to shape a system that suits local needs. In doing so, a national portal could have the potential to set its own international standards in data centralisation and interactive functionality.

Conclusion

As the consultation process for Malta Vision 2050 closes, we present this feedback and expansion manifesto as a companion to what the Vision is setting out to do. In its ambition to guide Malta and Gozo toward long-term, multi-faceted resilience, the Malta Vision 2050's relevance and effectiveness will need to constantly self-scrutinise. Above all, it will need to underpin any improvement strategy with a commitment to reflecting Malta and Gozo's identity – a commitment to rootedness and a willingness to both redefine yet protect our country's sense of place and character.

In an urban context, this means positioning the protection of both built and natural heritage at the fore of any discussion on development. It also means constantly questioning, evaluating, and seeking out new knowledge on what heritage means – and more importantly – what it means in a Maltese context. When we discuss the protection of heritage, we can no longer constrict its parameters to monumental buildings and spaces. As we move into a future that demands greater environmental resilience, we need to understand heritage as the protection of everyday fabric – of the fabric that can be reconstituted into new, re-imagined systems; re-used spaces that bring new utility through re-invention and not new invention.

We believe that before this can happen, the foundational tools that our design and construction industry needs to better survey and understand our land must be shored up. This constitutes the core of our feedback on strategy related to design, architectural, urban and construction within the *Malta Vision 2050*.

Futhermore, while we recognise the value of the Vision's ambition, we believe there remains scope for greater precision, embedding of measurable targets, and clearer implementation pathways. Our response therefore has focused on the three proposals that as architectural, heritage and urban design professionals, we believe are vital building blocks to a workable national strategy.

To recap: the first relates to the foundations of an urban vision. The Malta Vision 2050 currently treats planning through a series of isolated themes, such as industrial space allocation, greening, and land reclamation. We have recommended that future iterations be organised under a

coherent set of guiding pillars, namely: design quality and context, integrated long-term planning, the public realm and green infrastructure, governance and participation, and sustainability and resource stewardship. These are not detailed prescriptions, but rather organising principles that champion more systematic and phased policymaking.

The second proposal is the creation of a 'home' for built environment professionals. At present, construction and planning in Malta are characterised by fragmented authority, haphazardly organised regulations, and uneven access to data. This consistently results in duplication, inefficiency, and day-to-day frustration for professionals and project clients alike. A centralised home — both digital and physical — would consolidate regulations, streamline approval processes, provide training and licensing, and act as a reliable and reachable reference point. It would reduce administrative waste and raise the standards of our national practice.

Our final proposal addresses spatial data. Although Malta already is equipped with mapping and planning tools, these remain dispersed across institutions and are not integrated. Without a common base map and usable system, professionals face inconsistencies and delays in accessing essential information. The development of a single integrated spatial data platform would combat these issues, bringing together land use, ownership, planning, infrastructure, and environmental records and data. This would not only support more efficient professional practice but also increase transparency for the wider public.

Combined, these three feedback points would provide the Malta Vision 2050 with more nuance and the grounding for more detailed implementation strategies, ensuring that the ambitions of the document and its eventual roll-out can be translated into measurable progress.



Conclusion: in five points

Across all our feedback, we emphasise that the proposed commentary and recommendations work in full support of the existing ambition of the Malta Vision 2050. Our overall message is for it to be strengthened by clearer targets, structured planning, and practical implementation. The recommendations we have made are intended to bolster the core mission of the Vision, with an added aim to improve efficiency, transparency, and the translation of its initial mandates into more nuanced, measurable, and long-term progress.

The following are five key conclusion points, highlighted separately for clarity and practical reference. These points summarise this manifesto’s scope and the overall emphases of our Malta Vision 2050 feedback.



Measurable evaluation – long-term impact will depend on consistent evaluation, precise and named targets, an agreed metric system, and clear implementation pathways.



Value-driven urban strategy – urban strategy should convert from isolated themes to guiding pillars: design quality, integrated planning, public realm & green infrastructure, governance & participation, and sustainability/resource stewardship.



Centralised construction platform – A ‘home’ for built environment stakeholders should be established to consolidate regulations, streamline approvals, offer training, and reduce inefficiency.



Integrated spatial data portal – A single, unified platform for land use, planning, infrastructure, and environmental data should be built to improve efficiency and transparency.



Actionability – All proposed plans should be accompanied by phased implementation strategies, with clear timelines and resource needs.



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