

## FOR &amp; AGAINST

## Is the increase in sites allocated for building development justified?



Yes, I agree that after a lapse of around 15 years and in the absence of approval of most of the Local Plans, the building zones had to be reconsidered and increased where it was felt necessary to fill in the existing voids and gaps within the existing schemes or to realign the irregular development boundaries.

Apart from helping to create an improved urban fabric, interesting streetscapes and regular street networks, this expansion will help to balance off the demand and supply of developable property. This, in return will help reduce the pressure on property prices, which are ever increasing.

I have not gone through all these additions, but from what I understand, these additional parcels of land are relatively small and are located on the periphery of the existing development zones. If one has to look at the existing development zone, one will realise that in certain zones, the development boundary lines are very irregularly defined and smoothing out this peripheral boundary seems to be the most logical solution.

The main reason for this irregular planning is the result of a Structure Plan, which when drawn up back in 1990, was based on the premise, that there was enough undeveloped land within the schemes which could sustain the demand for the following 20 years. Now that more than 15 years have passed, most of these parcels of land have been developed while others remained vacant for other reasons, either due to inheritance or legal problems.

The experience we all gained since the issue of the Structure Plan should help us project a better sustainable development in the future. In my opinion, MEPA should put more emphasis on designing energy efficient buildings and more importance should be given to the design of each individual project as part of the whole streetscape.

Because of our land limitations and because of the land use pressure, higher rise development should seriously be considered. Higher rise buildings developed on a plot ratio basis, having all rooms with direct sunlight and more open spaces between each block offer better planning solutions. Furthermore, we can create pedestrianization areas surrounded with attractive landscaping. Other aspects such as microclimate and social factors should also be assessed.

I do believe that the move towards a modest expansion of the development zone is a decision in the right direction, but let us hope that we have learnt from the past mistakes. Let us create a better living environment by planning a more sustainable development which encompasses a balance between development, land use, environment and social needs.

Angelo Xuereb is managing director AX Holdings

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FoE (Malta) are very concerned about this process of 'rationalisation' of development boundaries, not least because the term rationalisation effectively means an enlargement of the development zone by 2.4%. It is ironic that notification of this 'rationalisation' exercise comes a couple of weeks after a national conference on sustainable development organised by the Environment Ministry, where the issues of land use and over-development, as well as the environmental damage from the construction industry were the most discussed subjects. Clearly, sustainability is only a buzz word amongst our politicians.

Environment Minister George Pullicino acknowledges the fact that the zones within the existing development schemes already provide enough land for development for the country's future needs. Which answers your question as to whether there is any justification for increasing the land for development.

According to Minister Pullicino, the rationalisation process is meant to address anomalies and injustices created when the Temporary Provision Schemes were hurriedly drawn up in 1988.

However, FoE believes that this rationalisation process will (1) fail to address the injustices, and moreover, create more injustices and (2) set a precedent for subsequent Ministers/Governments to introduce or modify the criteria, leading to ever more land being given up for development.

To give one example, during a consultation meeting held between the Environment Ministry and representatives from the environmental NGOs, Minister Pullicino said that only applications from owners of plots of land who had submitted a request for their land to be included in the development scheme will be considered in the rationalisation process. Anybody who had missed on the opportunity of submitting a request (when there was no specific need to do so) has now lost the boat.

Asked whether there had been a call for these owners to submit a request at any stage, we were told that there had been a public consultation process and anybody who had an interest should have participated and submitted a request. Failing to do so is automatically understood by the Ministry to mean that the owners have no interest in developing the land. In a country where owning a field on one side of the development boundary instead of the other makes an incomparable difference in its value, it is hard to fathom whether there exists anybody in this country who would miss out of the opportunity of getting the land inside the development zone. This apart from the fact that the 90% of landowners who will not benefit from this rationalisation scheme will consider this process as yet another injustice and will now be piling up the pressure on this government (or a potential Labour government) to extend the scheme boundaries, or modify the selection criteria so that their land will also be included. All this regardless of the fact that our politicians admit that we already have enough land given up for development to meet our current and future needs, and that more than 40,000 dwellings are unoccupied, and that Malta has less than 50 years of building stone left at the current rate of construction, and the fact that all this needless development is destroying our tourism potential and affecting public health.

We do not believe that this rationalisation process is in the public interest. If rationalisation is the objective of this exercise, one would have expected government to remove an equivalent footprint of land of high scenic and ecological value from the development zones.

Martin Galea de Giovanni is a member of Friends of the Earth



## LETTERS

## Where are the forces of justice?

THE COUNTRY is riddled with thefts, burglaries and now arson! Everybody seems to agree that the police is not performing as it should. This is a fact which cannot be denied. How is it possible that each and every police inspector, in charge of a town or village in this country, does not know who is actually carrying out these thefts, never mind investigating them? How can the police perform as it should when you hear an officer giving evidence in court saying that after months of having discovered that a crime was serious, he has to go to his superintendent? In other countries, more often than not, it is the police sergeants who carry out major investigations, yet in Malta, you hear of three or more officers prosecuting one single case.

Admittedly, the police has been given a lot of tools to work with but even this should be held against the police force because they do not seem to know how to use them. How is it that in this country, no heads roll under these circumstances?

I come now to the arsons that are going on systematically with terrifying regularity and, yet again, no one is prosecuted. Can the police tell how many people who regularly attend the meetings of the fascist group led by Norman Lowell, have been arrested and investigated? As a layperson, I would have thought that, under the circumstances, the police would be filming these meetings. I say this, only because since the very beginning of these arson attacks, committed on the vehicles of the Jesuits, there was no doubt whatsoever as towards whom the finger should be pointed. And yet, we had other arsons, all clearly indi-

cating the culprits! I would like to remind the Maltese that the last reorganisation of the police force happened in 1956. Since then, only patchwork was carried out.

The next step naturally follows. What is happening in our Courts? How is it that everybody complains, talks about and deplores the sentences being meted out by the Courts every single day? Opinion leaders continue harping on this matter and yet nothing happens! The last straw that in my opinion should have broken the camel's back, was the recent sentence meted out to the bus driver who defiled a twelve-year-old. He was sentenced to seven months imprisonment by a magistrate who, until recently, was himself one of those Advocates General who were prosecuting these cases.

No wonder the police are not interested and lose heart!

I now come to the real culprit in all this: the Deputy Prime Minister Dr Tonio Borg. He is the minister in charge of this mess and yet, only silence, is his reply to all these complaints by everyone, I would like to ask him, what is he doing about this disaster but am also positive that he is doing absolutely nothing! He does talk about the successes of other ministers, but he never talks about his ministry. Is he still living on this planet? Or is that his only interest is in upholding Catholic morals and nothing else?

Should not the Prime Minister ask him to resign and appoint someone whoever has the gall to face these problems?

C. Borg  
Mosta

## Gratis publicity for Lowell

PICTURES OF Norman Lowell graced no less than two pages (page 1 and page 6) of MaltaToday last Sunday. I am sure our Norman, whose name barely deserves to be mentioned in public, was grateful for this free publicity. This newspaper even went as far as according him the importance of quoting verbatim from a written statement from this individual stating "(we) do not condone such acts" and so on. Well, that is truly reassuring. The famous riposte uttered in a London court some forty years ago by Mandy Rice-Davies, one of the society bed-hoppers involved in the Profumo scandal, has already been quoted in this sort of context: upon being

told that Lord Astor denied having had an alleged affair with her, she promptly replied to the judge "Well, he'd say that, wouldn't he?"

Margaret Thatcher has been quoted as saying that such people "should be denied the oxygen of publicity". This is particularly apt in the case of somebody who has achieved notoriety through repeatedly expressing vile racist views in public. In any case, apart from a few adherents of his bunch, nobody in his right mind is particularly interested in what this man looks like.

George Debono  
St Julians

## Too many ministers!

YOU WILL recall that I had written to you saying that 21 members of parliament would be more than enough and another of your readers had agreed with me to the extent that he reiterated that 13 would be more than enough.

To prove my point please note that yesterday Italian Prime Minister Romano

Prodi appointed 8 ministers with a portfolio to run the whole of Italy and an extra 8 without portfolio.

In Malta we have 18 of these useless self-created parasites!

Joe Aquilina  
Bahar ic-Cagħaq