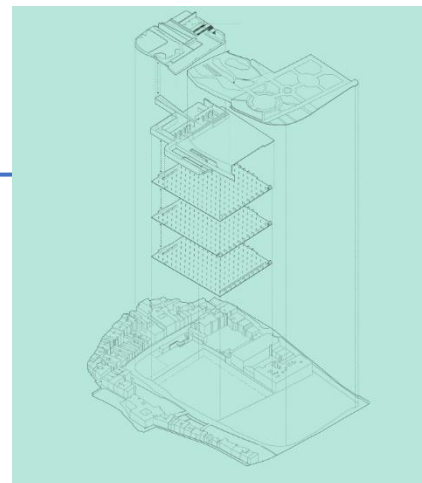


The Victoria Urban Upgrade Project

The Gozo Business Chamber's Feedback on the Consultation Process

Version: 1.0



Date:	01/09/23
Feedback compiled by:	Perit Edward Scerri, Council Member, and Daniel Borg, CEO of the Gozo Business Chamber



THE GOZO BUSINESS CHAMBER

1. Introduction

The Chamber notes with satisfaction the launching of the public consultation process by the Gozo Regional Development Authority on the Victoria Urban Upgrade Project. Last year the Chamber had advocated the need for a multistory sustainable underground car park in its budget document.¹ The Chamber has been advocating the need for a central parking facility in Victoria for a number of years. The Chamber is satisfied that the parking facility will be an integral part of the proposed project which would also see the creation of an ecological green park.

In fact the project will seek to:

to transform the existing parking area in Victoria (adjacent to the Villa Rundle Gardens and the Bus Terminus), including the adjacent football ground, into a green park. This entails relocating the parking spaces underground, with circa 800 car spaces being made available.²

As indicated in the same document, Victoria is bordered by six towns and villages, is the centre point for the island in terms of the road network and provides the only thoroughfare to commute between several localities in Gozo. This apart from the fact that it hosts some of the most important heritage sites on the island, and is the venue of various commercial enterprises, and government entities which are established there.

The reliance of both residents and tourists on the use of private vehicles have exacerbated traffic-related issues and congestion in Victoria. The current situation leads to several vehicles circling around Victoria for a parking space creating further congestion and pollution.

The Chamber while satisfied with the work undertaken by the Authority in this respect, would like to note again the strategic importance of the project, and its heightened priority in terms of implementation. Within this context the Chamber would like to provide the following feedback.

2. The Chamber's Feedback

Open spaces are essential for every town/city. Conserving the existing open spaces as unobstructed open spaces is essential for the well-being of residents and visitors and for the attractiveness of the locality. This is one of the reasons why past proposals such as constructing the new Victoria primary school within the gravel football ground near the playing field, or constructing the new law courts within Pjazza l-Assedju should never have reached the drawing board.

The Chamber would also like to point out that a project like the one proposed in the current consultation (re Victoria Urban Upgrade) necessitates a Traffic Impact Assessment which would study traffic flows and density in and around Victoria, thereby identifying any infrastructural upgrade necessary within the approach roads and the ideal parking capacity of the underground car park amongst others.

The role to be exercised by the park and ride facility at Ta' Xhajma in tandem with the proposed car park should also be assessed. While increasing the parking capacity of the Victoria site subject of the current consultation process is a necessity, and housing it underground is commendable, it may be desirable to have satellite park and ride areas outside Victoria (including the one at Ta' Xhajma) to ease car pressure on Victoria. This can only be assessed through scientific studies.

¹ The Gozo Business Chamber (2022), *Resilience Sustainability and Recovery. The Gozo Business Chamber's Budgetary Proposals*, pp. 13-14 (online) : <https://gozobusinesschamber.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/GBC-Budgetary-Proposals.pdf> [accessed 5 June 2023].

² Gozo Regional Development Authority (2023), *GRDA Vision for Victoria Urban Upgrading. An Introduction to the Concept*, p. 3 (online) : <https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/GRDA-Vision-for-Victoria-Urban-Upgrade-An-Introduction-to-the-Concept.pdf> [accessed 4 August 2023]

The Chamber would also like to highlight that geological studies had already been carried out some years ago by Ministry for Gozo, between the site and Pjazza l-Assedju. Assessing the position of the Globigerina limestone member in relation to the existing site level may also aid in determining the feasibility of the number of car park stories to be developed within the site.

Regarding the open pedestrianised space above the proposed car park, the creation of many shaded areas is important within a country subjected to months of uninterrupted sunshine and heat. Large trees within the site are important in this regard, however they offer a challenge in terms of the building's roofing structure. Nonetheless, the design of a well-thought landscaping scheme which includes large mature trees is imperative for the success of the project.

Temporary parking solutions during all stages of the project are also important. Victoria has been subjected to the loss of several parking spaces during the past years, including part of the GGH car park, many building sites, and new garage accesses. Removing the car parking facilities within the site, or parts thereof, during the construction stage without first offering temporary parking solutions would create unnecessary stressful situations, further increase air pollution and reduce the attractiveness of Victoria as a tourist destination.

While the project is commendable and the Chamber has been advocating for it throughout its existence, the Chamber augurs that the streets in Victoria near the site, including Triq Putirjal, Triq Giorgio Borg Olivier, Triq Ninu Cremona, Triq San Guzepp Labre', Triq l-Arcisqof Pietru Pace and Triq Santa Marta, Triq Salvatore Psaila, Triq l-Ghaxra ta' Gunju 1887 are given the necessary upgrade in terms of pavement condition and accessibility, maintenance to the street surface and cleanliness. These streets are used by thousands of pedestrians and commuters daily and should be kept in a condition similar to Triq ir-Repubblika and Triq Fortunato Mizzi.

Finally the Chamber would like to highlight that it agrees with the GRDA that this project which is estimated to cost around Euro 35 million should be supported through the Sustainable Urban Development Fund.³

3. Conclusion

The Chamber believes that if this project is done properly, also in relation to what is being proposed by the Gozo Regional Development Authority, it will be extremely beneficial to the whole Gozitan community.

The Chamber is also happy to note that this project will fall in line not only with national strategies aligned to make Gozo and Malta more sustainable, but also global strategies which prioritise the protection of the environment.

More than that the Chamber notes positively that this project is not being seen on a stand-alone basis but within a more comprehensive vision for the island of Gozo, specifically within the context of designing a long-term and holistic sustainable plan for the island of Gozo.

³ Gozo Regional Development Authority (2023), *V. Park Proposal. Potential Benefits, Projected Cost and Economic Impact*, p. 6 (online) : <https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/V.Park-Proposal-Note-09.07.23.pdf> [accessed 4 August 2023].