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K A M R A T A L - P E R I T I

To support members of the profession in achieving excellence in their practice of architecture and engineering in the interest of the community

BLUEPRINT FOR MEPA REFORM – POSITION OF THE KAMRA TAL-PERITI PRESS RELEASE – 29th JULY 2009

The *Kamra tal-Periti* welcomes the release of the long awaited Blueprint document for MEPA Reform. Whilst acknowledging that the document contains a number of valid improvements, the Kamra is deeply concerned that the proposals fail to address the real issues facing the process through which development takes place in the Maltese built (and rural) environment.

The Kamra notes with regret that the document limits its scope to administrative changes, many of which had already been agreed upon between the Kamra and MEPA in the past, but have yet to materialise. Whereas 'consistency, efficiency, accountability and enforcement' are desirable for a just and effective administration of any public agency, the true measure of MEPA's performance and hence of the reform itself can only be more sustainable development and an improvement in the Quality of the built environment for the benefit of all its users.

The Kamra reiterates its call, as expressed in its March 2008 proposals for MEPA Reform for a change in the culture with which we address issues in the built environment, starting from the formation of a holistic guiding Vision for the transformation of the Maltese urban environment into a better place to live for all its citizens. This Vision, which must have Quality development at its heart, must underpin the whole approach to planning policy and to urban governance in general.

The Kamra notes with regret that the notion of a better quality environment is absent in the document which makes no tangible proposals for an improvement in policy-making or in the quality of development. In this respect the Kamra renews its call, as expressed in its 2007 position paper *The Urban Challenge: Our Quality of Life and the Built Environment*, and in its MEPA Reform proposals of March 2008 for a system of Design Review which offers the opportunity for the quality of development (particularly, that of scale or importance) to be assessed. The Kamra notes the success of Design Review panels in promoting better quality design elsewhere in Europe, and their increasing popularity with the private sector. The work of the CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) in the UK is one notable example and indeed the practice of design review is well disseminated in many European countries.

The Kamra has always argued for Government's role in planning to become clearer and it welcomes the formulation of a strategic policy unit at the heart of government. It augurs that this will drive, coordinate and harmonise policy direction across all sectors of government and not planning alone. It also notes that the roles and responsibilities of this unit must be clearly defined and government needs to ensure that the necessary checks and balances in the planning process are retained and enhanced.

The Kamra also notes that many of the proposals within the current Blueprint for reform are still vague and continued consultations and discussions will be necessary to ensure that the measures themselves as well as the way in which they are implemented achieve positive results and do not undermine rather than strengthen the planning process. The Kamra ensures government of its disposition for further talks in this regard.

The Kamra will be making formal submissions on the proposed document to Government in the coming days.