LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT STUDY of THE MALTESE ISLANDS
REVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE PLAN FOR THE MALTESE ISLANDS

LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF THE MALTESE ISLANDS
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION.................................................................................................................................................... 7
  1.1 FOREWORD ....................................................................................................................................................... 7
  1.2 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT ....................................................................................................................... 9
  1.3 THE MALTESE CONTEXT ............................................................................................................................... 10

2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ........................................................................................................................................ 13
  2.1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................................ 13
  2.2 PHYSICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE MALTESE LANDSCAPE ........................................................................... 15
  2.3 ANTHROPOGENIC AGENTS ............................................................................................................................. 20
  2.4 METHODOLOGY OF DETERMINING LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS .............................................................. 21

3 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS OF MALTA ......................................................................................... 25
  3.1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................................................ 25
  3.2 MARFA PENINSULA (M1, M2, M53, M54, M55) ............................................................................................. 25
  3.3 GHADIRA ISTHMUS (M3, M52) .......................................................................................................................... 27
  3.4 MELLIEHA SLOPES (M4, M6, M52, M56, M57) ............................................................................................... 28
  3.5 MELLIEHA RIDGE (M5) ....................................................................................................................................... 29
  3.6 BAJDA RIDGE (M7) .............................................................................................................................................. 30
  3.7 PWALES VALLEY (M8) ...................................................................................................................................... 31
  3.8 ST. PAUL’S BAY-BUGIBBA-QAWRA (M9, M57, M58) ..................................................................................... 32
  3.9 MGARR-ZEBBIEGH-WARDIJ PLATEAU SLOPES (M10, M12, M13) ......................................................... 33
  3.10 WARDIJA PLATEAU (M11) .......................................................................................................................... 34
  3.11 MAGHTAB (M14) .............................................................................................................................................. 35
  3.12 BINGEMMA SLOPES (M15, M16) ....................................................................................................................... 36
  3.13 BARIJA PLATEAU (M17) ................................................................................................................................. 37
  3.14 QLEJGA CATCHMENT (M18) ............................................................................................................................ 38
  3.15 RABAT-DINGLI NORTH-EAST ESCARPMENT (M19) ...................................................................................... 39
### LANDSCAPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>Rabat-Dingli Plateau (M20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>Għargħur-San Gwann Hinterland (M21, M22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>West Mosta - Ta’ Qali (M23, M25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>Mosta - Naxxar (M24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>Siggiewi – Zebbug Foreland (M26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>North-East Conurbation (M27, M28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>Grand Harbour Industrial Area (M29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>Inner Harbours Historic Coastline (M30, M31, M32, M33, M34, M35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>North Airport Greenbelt (M36, M37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>South Airport Hinterland (M38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>Malta International Airport (M39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>Mqabba Quarry Area (M40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>Zejtun – Marsaskala Hinterland (M41, M61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>Xghajra Escarpment (M42, M60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>Marsaxlokk Bay Basin (M43, M47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>Kalafrana-Hal Far (M44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>Delimara Peninsula (M45, M46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>South-Eastern Coastal Cliffs (M48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>Southern Coastal Escarpment (M49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>South-Western Coastal Cliffs (M50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>Western Coastal Cliffs (M51, M52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>North-Eastern Rocky Coast (M58, M59)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS OF GOZO AND COMINO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Mgarr Harbour (G1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Ras il-Hobz Coast (G2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Ta’ Cenc – Sanap Coastal Cliffs (G3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Rdum tal-Wardija Coastal Cliffs (G4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>Qawra-Dwejra Coast (G5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>North-Western Coastal Cliffs (G6, G7, G8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>North Zebbug Coast (G9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>Marsalforn Basin (G10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 TRENDS AND ISSUES.............................................................................................................................................................................. 100

5.1 GENERAL - .................................................................................................................................................................................................. 100
5.2 EXISTING URBAN SETTLEMENTS (GENERAL) - ............................................................................................................................ 101
5.3 URBAN CONSERVATION AREAS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE - .............................................................................................. 104
5.4 TOURISM RELATED SETTLEMENTS - ........................................................................................................................................... 108
5.5 CONSTRUCTED MAJOR PROJECTS (GENERALLY NOT INCLUDING THOSE WITHIN PREVIOUSLY BUILT-UP AREAS) - .................. 112
5.6 DEVELOPMENT IN INDUSTRIAL AREAS - ....................................................................................................................................... 117
5.7 MINERAL EXTRACTION - .................................................................................................................................................................. 121
5.8 TRANSPORT - .................................................................................................................................................................................... 124
5.9 SERVICES - ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 127
## ASSESSMENT OF THE MALTESE LANDSCAPE

### 6. INTRODUCTION

### 6.2 THE LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT MODEL

### 7 CONCLUSIONS

#### 7.1 SUMMARY OF MALTESE LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

#### 7.2 MAIN EFFECTS OF CHANGE INDUCED BY MAN DURING THE STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW PERIOD

#### 7.3 STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE POLICY DIRECTION

*Appendices are included in a separate volume.*
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Foreword

The term landscape often has different meaning to different people. For some, landscape is closely associated with gardening and horticulture, to others; it is associated with areas of high scenic value. Other individuals interpret the term landscape to be interchangeable with the term “environment”, the only difference being that the term “landscape” applies to the “environment” as perceived by individuals. The European Landscape Convention defines landscape as “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”.

Landscape is perceived through the five senses. For example, the fragrance released by aromatic natural vegetation tends to augment the appreciation of a landscape. Similarly, the sound of gentle waves splashing on the shoreline is known to be particularly pleasant. However, the sense of sight is predominantly utilized by the vast majority of the population and in most instances tends to prevail over the others. In order to render the exercise more manageable, this study will concentrate on the visual aesthetic component of “landscape” and the term shall be used exclusively to address the influence of an area as perceived through the sense of sight. For the purpose of this study, perception through other senses is therefore not taken into consideration. Therefore, only the visual aesthetic experience derived through sight and interpreted by the human mind shall be addressed in this study.

For the purposes of this study, the term “Landscape” shall be taken to refer to the visual aesthetic component of the surrounding environment – that is, views as appreciated and interpreted through the sense of sight. This definition is compatible with that of the European Landscape Convention as it addresses the perception factor of a landscape through the human mind. The European Landscape Convention goes further by emphasizing on the fact that the “European Landscape” is a result of the interaction between natural and human agents.
This study shall focus on the macro elements of the Maltese landscape – that is those landscape elements which are relatively large components of the Maltese Landscape. Additionally, a large collection of small landscape elements are also considered to collectively constitute a macro element of the landscape. These are considered to be the essential character determinants and are ultimately utilized to develop the assessed landscape quality of an area. However, in the latter stance, the influence on a landscape is more difficult to quantify and analyse.

Landscape (as defined above) is one of the nation’s primary natural resources. The quality of the landscape and its uniqueness contribute heavily to:

- Giving a sense of place and identity - distinguishing an area from all others; therefore rendering an area special and worth caring for.
- Inspire relaxation – especially as a relief from the tensions of life; therefore contributing to a healthy body and healthy mind.
- An experience with immense recreational, inspirational and educational potential – landscape being the result of a wide range of natural and anthropogenic forces which instil a sense of awe and wonder especially in individuals with considerable appetite for knowledge.
- Employment – especially in tourism related activities: tourism is one of the largest industries in the world and it is heavily dependent on the landscape quality.

In common with other European landscapes, the Maltese landscape has been moulded over long years by natural and anthropological forces. In fact, in the Maltese Islands, there has been hardly a corner which does not bear witness to human endeavours over the past seven millennia. The Maltese Islands can therefore be described as having a cultural landscape.
1.2 The International Context

1.2.1 Human Influence in shaping landscapes

Over the years, there has been an increased awareness that attention needs to be given to the anthropological aspect of the landscape as well as the natural component. This is especially relevant in densely populated areas. The IUCN has to this effect developed the concept of Protected Landscapes whereby the continued action of man is deemed necessary to maintain an identified tract of landscape. This concept is seen to be more valid in a modern world where the interaction between man and the natural environment is becoming more intense as a result of technology, lifestyle and population.

However, the concept of Protected Landscapes needs to be taken a step further in order to cater for less sensitive landscapes (sometimes called “ordinary landscapes”) or damaged landscapes. These types of landscapes tend to occur either in urban or peri-urban sites, in industrial areas (including mineral extraction or processing sites) and on waste tips. There is ample scope to give the latter types of landscapes due attention in terms of upgrading or rehabilitation.

1.2.2 The European Landscape Convention

The Council of Europe has decreed through the European Landscape Convention (signed by Malta on 20th October 2000) that man and his interventions are an integral part of the European Landscape (to varying degrees according to the specific locality). The European Landscape is thus a cultural landscape. The aims of this Convention are to promote landscape protection, management and planning and to organize European co-operation on landscape issues. The Convention acknowledges that in certain instances, man has been instrumental in creating pleasant landscapes (e.g. Traditional historic centres, terraced fields on slopes etc.). In common with the concept of Protected Landscapes, the European Landscape Convention recognizes that human intervention is required in order to maintain the integrity of some landscape types. For example, if terraced agriculture is abandoned, there is a tendency for habitat colonization to take place. Over a long period of time, the character of the relevant landscape may change significantly. The European
Landscape Convention takes the concept further. It acknowledges that urban man tends to spend a considerable proportion of his/her lifespan within a landscape created by man. Therefore, it contemplates an approach whereby a culture has a mechanism to develop a vision for how it would like the surrounding landscape to be developed. This mechanism is not only applicable to urban or rural areas but seeks to achieve an integration between the two through a democratic planning context. Thus, whilst the development needs of an area are taken into account, these are planned in such a manner whereby the end result will either enhance the existing landscape through deliberate design or mitigation measures are applied in cases where negative impact is envisaged.

The European Landscape Convention also states that signatory countries should seek “to identify and evaluate landscapes in order to lay down a sound basis for long term action aimed at protecting them and improving them. Such action must be based on detailed knowledge of the characteristics of each landscape, the evolutionary processes effecting it and the value which the population concerned attached to it”...

1.3 The Maltese Context

1.3.1 The Landscape Issue in the Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands

The Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands indicates in many of its chapters, that there is a need to protect various aspects of the Maltese Landscape. However, there is no integrated approach of a vision for the whole islands in terms of guiding development requirements to achieve a desired landscape character for the Maltese Islands. This shortcoming is identified to be addressed in the revision of the Structure Plan. From a policy point of view, the “landscape experience” is most important as it is the most immediate and widely perceived influence that the tangible consequences of policy implementation leaves. The other influences of planning policy, being less evident, are given less immediate and widespread attention.
1.3.2 **Vision for a Maltese Landscape**

The development of a vision for the Maltese Landscape needs to take into account the proposals of the different topic papers so that the overall development and protection strategy are considered. Once a general strategic planning strategy is formulated, the landscape aspect needs to be integrated before a draft strategic policy context is proposed. In this manner, the resultant policy context takes into account the implications of the proposed interventions on the Maltese Landscape and thus to propose measures both to enhance the existing landscapes as well as to reduce the detracting aspect of certain types of development and to rehabilitate existing damaged landscapes. It is important to recall that the final outcome of the success or otherwise of the landscape strategy is judged by the man in the street mainly on the basis of what is perceived (mainly through the sense of vision as interpreted through the human mind). If society in general perceives that the quality of the physical environment has been improved through the implementation of the planning strategy, then this would be a measure of the success of the said planning strategy. Moreover, a vision for the Maltese Landscape would serve as a benchmark against which the success or otherwise can be directly measured. This constitutes an important component of the monitoring process envisaged to form part of the basis of the revision of the next Structure Plan.

1.3.3 **Compatibility with the European Landscape Convention**

The revision of the Structure Plan has an incorporated obligation to undertake an extensive public participation exercise. This obligation has been enacted through the Development Planning Act and its subsequent revisions. This obligation is fully compatible with the requirement of the European Landscape Convention to consult the population concerned on the planning of landscapes. The integration of landscape planning with the country's planning framework also satisfies another requirement of the European Landscape Convention.
1.3.4 The Landscape Study

The Landscape Assessment Study is mainly intended to address three main directions that will ultimately lead to the policy revision at a strategic level. These are:

- Identify the main character (areas) of the Maltese Islands
- Explore the changes on the landscape that have taken place during the review period
- Develop a model to direct policy formulation in the revised plan

These requirements were established through the terms of reference of the topic paper which is shown in a separate volume in APPENDIX 3.
2 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

2.1 Introduction

The Maltese Islands consist of an archipelago of three main inhabited islands and a number of smaller uninhabited ones. They lie roughly at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea some 100 km. due south of Cape Passero in Sicily. The islands cover a total area of 316 km$^2$ and are characterized by two main seasons; a wet cool season and a hot dry season. The natural landscape of the islands is dominated by karstic rock formations, nearby water bodies, Mediterranean flora and fauna which is predominantly rather inconspicuous. Humans have inhabited the islands for at least 7000 years and their impact has left hardly a corner uninfluenced.

Although natural processes do influence the Maltese landscape character over extremely long periods of time, the main determinants of changes in the Maltese landscape are the seasons, weather conditions, time of day and human activities. Natural disasters are rather infrequent and therefore dramatic sudden changes to the landscape tend not to occur in this manner. Man has therefore become the main agent introducing significant long term changes to the landscape.

Tables 1 and 2 indicate some of the main physical parameters of the Maltese Islands.
# TABLE 1
The Maltese Islands (1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARAMETER</th>
<th>VALUE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Cape Passero (Southernmost tip of Sicily)</td>
<td>96 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Cape Bon (Tunisia)</td>
<td>290 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Tunis (Capital of Tunisia)</td>
<td>346 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Tripoli (Capital of Libya)</td>
<td>392 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Rome (Capital of Italy)</td>
<td>704 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Gibraltar</td>
<td>1836 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Alexandria (Egypt)</td>
<td>1519 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latitude (Max.)</td>
<td>36°48’28&quot; N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latitude (Min.)</td>
<td>35°05’00&quot; N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitude (Max.)</td>
<td>14°34’37&quot; E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitude (Min.)</td>
<td>14°11’07&quot; E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submerged area (less than 100 m. deep)</td>
<td>1940 km $^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest point above sea level</td>
<td>253 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total length of coastline</td>
<td>189.6 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum distance between extremities of Islands</td>
<td>44.2 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (2000) estimate</td>
<td>390,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density (1995 Census)</td>
<td>1,200 persons per km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEPA
### Table 2

**The Maltese Islands (2)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Island</th>
<th>Area (km²)</th>
<th>Coastline (km)</th>
<th>Population 2000 (Persons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Malta</td>
<td>245.7</td>
<td>136.8</td>
<td>c. 260,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghawdex (Gozo)</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>c. 30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemmuna (Comino)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gzejjer ta' San Pawl (St. Paul’s Islands)</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>&lt;5.0</td>
<td>Uninhabited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemmunett (Cominotto)</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>&lt;1.0</td>
<td>Uninhabited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filfla</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>&lt;1.0</td>
<td>Uninhabited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il-Gebla tal-General (Fungus Rock)</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
<td>&lt;1.0</td>
<td>Uninhabited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MEPA

2.2 **Physical Determinants of the Maltese Landscape**

2.2.1 **Geomorphology**

The scenic qualities of a landscape are fundamentally determined by geo-morphology. The shape of the land and the geological features and structure do not only determine topography and the general structure of the terrain but also the viewsheds, the water courses (see MAP WCR1 and WCR2), the coastline profile, the type of vegetation, the depth of soil and even human activity. The stratigraphy of the cliffs, the location of bays, the gently rolling countryside of eastern Malta, the clay taluses of Gozo, the location of caves, the occurrence of wave cut platforms and other geological features are examples of the Maltese landscape having been and still being modified by natural forces.

The effect of geomorphology is also linked to the location size and distribution of water bodies within and around the Maltese Islands. Thus, the size of the Maltese Islands is determined by the mass of land which
occurs above the mean sea level, the rest of the surrounding landmass being submerged. Topography and small size determine that the sea is visible from many areas around the Maltese Islands and this leaves a general positive influence on the local landscape as the interplay between a landmass and nearby water bodies is judged to contribute positively to the quality of a landscape. The low bathymetric depth along the North East coast of Malta and in many of the Bays introduces shades of colour to the water body that enhances its visual aesthetic qualities. Islets off the main islands are also a result of geomorphology. Offshore islands tend to greatly enhance the quality of a coastal landscape, especially when these island lie within the visibility radius of an observation point.

The relationship between geomorphology and human activities in the Maltese context is best illustrated through a few examples. Carriageways are normally constructed along terrain which is relatively level and high gradients are as much as possible avoided. Airfields are almost invariably located on relatively large parcels of level terrain. Agriculture takes place on areas that have low to moderate slopes, the traditional rubble walls which are so characteristic of the Maltese countryside having been employed to reduce the threat of soil erosion which is exacerbated by steep slopes. In antiquity, fortified structures were located on high ground, preferably surrounded by steep sides and with considerable viewsheds. Even settlement location is usually determined by a preference towards more level ground: although high quality development is often located on more inclined terrain to utilize the benefits of spectacular views.

2.2.2 Climate and atmospheric conditions

Climate plays a very significant role in determining the geomorphology of a landscape. Meteorological forces acting over very long periods of time help to erode rocks of different consistencies and are determinant factors in shaping the land. Apart from the long-term consequences, there are effects which are appreciated over shorter periods of time. Temperature, hours and intensity of sunshine, availability of water, humidity, wind speed and direction and other meteorological phenomena have a determinant impact on the type of vegetation that occurs in a particular area. In the Maltese landscape, there is a very dramatic
variation between the countryside in summer that appears barren and dry and the lush green rural landscape in the wetter months.

The main attributes of the Maltese Climate are indicated in Table 3. The data clearly shows that the climate of the Maltese Islands is typical of that of the Central Mediterranean with hot dry summers and mild cool winters.

**TABLE 3**

The Climate of the Maltese Islands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>AVERAGE TEMP. (°C)</th>
<th>EXTREME MAXIMUM TEMP. (°C)</th>
<th>EXTREME MINIMUM TEMP. (°C)</th>
<th>AVERAGE RAINFALL (mm)</th>
<th>EXTREME MAXIMUM RAINFALL (mm)</th>
<th>EXTREME MINIMUM RAINFALL (mm)</th>
<th>AVERAGE NO. OF DAYS WITH RAIN</th>
<th>HOURS OF SUNSHINE</th>
<th>AVERAGE WIND SPEED m/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>225.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>164.4</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>187.9</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>176.5</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>144.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>225.6</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>118.4</td>
<td>trace</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>255.3</td>
<td>5.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>trace</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>303.6</td>
<td>4.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>337.2</td>
<td>4.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>375.6</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>155.5</td>
<td>nil</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>348.1</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>217.0</td>
<td>trace</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>270.7</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>89.7</td>
<td>476.5</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>225.3</td>
<td>3.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>297.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>183.8</td>
<td>4.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>112.3</td>
<td>302.6</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>158.2</td>
<td>5.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: MIA
The weather conditions at any particular moment also have an impact on landscape perception. For example, on a foggy day it is practically impossible to visually appreciate anything because features are obscured behind a veil of condensed water. A similar experience takes place during episodes of torrential rain. Conversely, on clear days, the views are perceived to stretch almost indefinitely and in spring, appreciation of the Maltese rural countryside has an almost therapeutic dimension.

The strong Mediterranean sunshine plays a very important role in the scenic character of the Maltese Landscape. In winter, high solar angles coupled with episodes of clear weather imparts high contrast colour rendition to the landscape which renders it particularly attractive. In summer, the higher intensities impart strong shadows and contrast which emphasize details of form and massing. The mornings and evenings of summer are almost invariably characterized by spectacular sunrises/sunsets which paint the scenery in a delicate golden glow (especially on “franka” stone). The quality of light is best appreciated when contrasted with (for example) that of countries where long episodes of cloudy weather coupled with low solar angles tend to wash colour out of the scenery. However, in summer, visibility during the warmer hours of the day tends to degrade due to haze and shimmer and thus the contrast and colour of distant features tends to be washed out during the day.

The extensive periods of blue sky also tend to enhance the landscape as the azure colours tend to pleasantly complement the earth colours of the terrain in summer and the predominantly green rural landscape in winter. Long periods of cloud free days also enable the appreciation of the night sky on many days of the year.
2.2.3 Vegetation

There are two main types of vegetation that influence landscape character in the Maltese Islands. The first type is natural vegetation which has evolved and still occurs on the islands (especially in the more remote/inaccessible areas). Some species of vegetation are endemic to the islands and some are restricted to very small areas. The second type of vegetation is that which has been planted by man. Some plant species have been occurring before the advent of man to the islands but have been planted in a distribution pattern that would not have taken place through natural agents.

A considerable number of species have an indigenous origin but have been re-planted by man, therefore distorting patterns that would otherwise have occurred naturally. Other plant species have directly or indirectly been introduced through human activities. The Maltese rural countryside is for example dominated by the presence of the carob tree. This plant is especially prevalent in the countryside of eastern Malta. It is interesting to note that the presence of the carob tree tends to diminish towards the west of the islands and in the Gozitan countryside it is much less prevalent than in Malta. Man has also introduced grasses which are now prevalent throughout the countryside. The introduction of the plant Cape Sorrel (Oxalis pescaprae - (Haxixa Ngliza)) during the nineteenth century is a documented example of how an invasive species can (during a relatively short time) transform a landscape. This plant has now pervaded the whole Maltese countryside.

Woodland in Malta is very scarce and in many cases has been created or augmented through human intervention. Overall, wooded areas in Malta constitute less than 0.5% of the total land area of the Maltese Islands. With the exception of afforested areas, substantial tracts of maquis and steppe, most natural vegetation does not contribute significantly to long distance views. Garrigue vegetation tends to contribute to long distance views only during the wet season... imparting a barren rocky appearance during the dry season. Overall, vegetation is conspicuous during the wet season and inconspicuous through its visual absence during the dry season. However, the relative absence of extensive tracts of vegetation biomass has
an important implication on the Maltese landscape. Masses of trees tend to block access to long distance views and conversely, their relative absence tends to promote long distance views.

Agriculture (which supports vegetation through human intervention) still constitutes around 37% of the national territory (in 2000) but agricultural land is often the first casualty of urban development and a decrease in agricultural land has been registered over the years. From a visual aesthetic point of view, agriculture contributes significantly to the “greenery” of the rural scenery in the Maltese Islands.

2.3 **Anthropogenic Agents**

The Maltese Islands have been occupied for a number of millennia and anthropogenic factors have inevitably altered the physical landscape. The initial changes were probably related to changes in the local eco-systems (e.g. The introduction of new plant and animal species, over-hunting, grazing, clearing and felling of trees have undoubtedly occurred). Later on, new agricultural practices as well as construction practices continued to alter the landscape. The current settlement patterns are normally dominated by a large parish church and have developed through the latter half of the last millennium. In the newer settlements, the church tends to either be less dominant or absent from long distance views altogether. Significant tracts of land were urbanized after the second world war when a massive increase in residential, tourism related and infrastructural development has translated into around 25% of the national territory being developed to accommodate settlements and the related urban infrastructure.

Human interventions have transformed the landscape in a number of ways. The terracing of the fields has introduced a feature which has now become identified with the character of extensive tracts of the rural countryside. Rubble walled terraced fields are considered to give a distinctive character to the Maltese Landscape. The same applies to the parish churches which are so characteristic of the Maltese urban skyline. Without churches, the Maltese urban skyline would be radically different as these monuments create foci of interest in an otherwise rather unarticulated skyline. Fortifications around the Grand Harbour and other
fortified structures also create interest and add a distinctive character to the Maltese landscape especially through the extensive and judicious use of local stone whereby these artificial structures blend very well with the rest of the surrounding geomorphology. The traditional settlements have tended to consolidate skylines which complement the churches and other landmark buildings found within and around settlements. Unfortunately, in many areas, these charming skylines have tended to be engulfed by higher modern buildings. Therefore, although many traditional settlements still retain much of their original character, large proportions are blocked from being appreciated through long distance views. The only exceptions include Valletta and the Three Cities as well as those settlements where the traditional settlement lies at the edge of a development zone.

Human interventions do not always create landscapes which complement natural landscapes. Indeed there are many examples of development which tends to degrade landscape character. This is especially true where human intervention introduces clutter, when non-traditional materials are not used judiciously and when the massing of a structure adversely dominates the surrounding landscape.

The positive and negative influence of human activities on the Maltese Landscape is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

2.4 **Methodology of Determining Landscape Character Areas**

In order to facilitate the description of a landscape, it is useful to subdivide an area into landscape units. A landscape unit is identified upon a number of features that tend to occur throughout the selected tract of land. Physiography plays a determinant role in the characterization of a unit together with the interpolation of cultural landscapes. The landscape units have also been demarcated through easily identified permanent or semi-permanent features which occur at their boundaries.
For assessment purposes, the Island of Malta has been divided into 61 landscape character units (please refer to MAP LCM1), while Gozo has been characterized by 35 landscape character units (MAP LCM2).

Classification has been based upon the predominant landscape elements, topography and zones of visual influence. For characterization purposes, the main natural delineation features include the land-sea interface, elevation (MAP ELV1), topographic profile (MAP GRD1), break of slope (included in MAP WCR1 and WCR2) and visual basins (included in MAPS WCR1 and WCR2). Since the Maltese Landscape is greatly endowed with features originating through human activity, the macro-anthropogenic landscape elements have also been used for characterization purposes, e.g., development boundaries and major thoroughfares. The classification of landscape character areas is helpful to the understanding of the Maltese Landscape in terms of the natural physiographic components as developed through millennia of human occupation. For pragmatic reasons, only the macro-features have been selected (e.g. the larger settlements) as human influence is so heterogeneously distributed that it renders systematic categorization extremely unwieldy.

The following two chapters give an outline description of each character area together with features of special significance and the main problematic features. This description is useful to understand some of the main issues that characterize the landscape of Malta and is thus an important stepping stone to strategic landscape policy development.

FOR THE PURPOSES OF SUBSEQUENT SECTIONS REFER TO MAPS LCM 1 AND LCM 2, AS WELL AS THE TABLE OF AREA CODES FOR THE LANDSCAPE UNITS. For photographs depicting aspects of the various landscape character areas please refer to Appendices in a separate volume.
Map GRD 1
GRADIENT MAP
MALTESE ISLANDS

Key

0 - 3
3 - 10
10 - 25
25 - 40
> 40

SLOPE RANGES IN DEGREES.

Remarks:
Indicative only. Not to be used for measurement or direct interpretation.

Important:

Base Maps - 1988 Survey Sheets Copyright MEPA
L. D'Agostino, W. Cascio (Map and Tact, 1991)
Landscape Map/GRD 1

MARCH 2003
Map LCM 1
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER MAP MALTA

Key
- Character Area Boundary
- Character Area Code
- Contour Lines
- Developed Areas
- Industrial Areas

Remarks:
The character area codes are cross-referred to the Landscape Topic Paper document.

Important:
1. Indicative only. Not to be used for measurement or direct interpretation.
2. Maps to be used in conjunction with Policy Document
3. Built-up Areas based on 1988 Maps

Base Maps - 1988 Survey Sheets Copyright MEPA
/cdata/PLU/windows/mapps/pa/2ZLP_New/
Landscape Map/Landscape Character Malta A4
- newlogo.wor

JUNE 2002
Map LCM 2
LANDSCAPE CHARACTER MAP GOZO

Key
- Character Area Boundary
- Character Area Code
- Contour Lines
- Developed Areas
- Industrial Areas

Remarks:
The character area codes are cross-referred to the Landscape Topic Paper document.

Important:
1. Indicative only. Not to be used for measurement or direct interpretation.
2. Maps to be used in conjunction with Policy Document
3. Built-up Areas based on 1988 Maps

Base Maps - 1988 Survey Sheets Copyright MEPA
\data\LPU\windows\mapdata\GZLP\_New\Landscape Maps\Landscape Character Gozo A4\newlogo.wor

JUNE 2002
## Table 4

### Area Codes for Landscape Character Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Name of Landscape Character Area</th>
<th>Ref.</th>
<th>Name of Landscape Character Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Comino</td>
<td>G24</td>
<td>Xaghra Plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G1</td>
<td>Mgarr Harbour</td>
<td>G25</td>
<td>Pergla Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G2</td>
<td>Ras il-Hobz Coast</td>
<td>G26</td>
<td>Marsalfom Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G3</td>
<td>Ta’ Cenc - Sanap Coastal Cliffs</td>
<td>G27</td>
<td>Zebugg Circular Mesas Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G4</td>
<td>Rdum tal-Wardija Coastal Cliffs</td>
<td>G28</td>
<td>Kercem - Santa Lucija Plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G5</td>
<td>Qawra - Dwejra Coast</td>
<td>G29</td>
<td>Xlendi Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G6</td>
<td>Western Gharb Coastal Cliffs</td>
<td>G30</td>
<td>Sannat Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G7</td>
<td>Wied ir-Raheb Coastal Strips</td>
<td>G31</td>
<td>Wied il-Mans Basin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G8</td>
<td>Northern Gharb Coastal Cliffs</td>
<td>G32</td>
<td>San Lawrenz - Gharb Plain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G9</td>
<td>North Zebbug Coast</td>
<td>G33</td>
<td>Ras ir-Raheb Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G10</td>
<td>Marsalfom Basin</td>
<td>G34</td>
<td>Mielah Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G11</td>
<td>North Xaghra Coast</td>
<td>G35</td>
<td>Ghasri Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G12</td>
<td>North-east Nadur Coast</td>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Marfa Ridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G13</td>
<td>North-east Qala Coast</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>North Ghadira Slopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G14</td>
<td>South-east Qala Coast</td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Ghadira Isthmus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G15</td>
<td>South-eastern Qala Slopes</td>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Mellieha Slopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G16</td>
<td>North-eastern Qala Slopes</td>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Mellieha Ridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G17</td>
<td>Southern Nadur Slopes</td>
<td>M6</td>
<td>Southern Mellieha Slopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G18</td>
<td>Qala - Nadur Plateau</td>
<td>M7</td>
<td>Bajda Ridge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G19</td>
<td>Dahlet Qomot Valley</td>
<td>M8</td>
<td>Pwales Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G20</td>
<td>San Blas Valley</td>
<td>M9</td>
<td>St. Paul's Bay-Bugibba-Qawra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G21</td>
<td>Mgarr ix-Xini Valley</td>
<td>M10</td>
<td>North Wardija Escarpment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G22</td>
<td>Xewkija Plain</td>
<td>M11</td>
<td>Mgarr-Wardija-Bidnija Plateau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G23</td>
<td>Ramla Valley</td>
<td>M12</td>
<td>Wied Qannotta Basin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ref.</td>
<td>Name of Landscape Character Area</td>
<td>Ref.</td>
<td>Name of Landscape Character Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M13</td>
<td>Mgarr-Zebbiegh-Wardija Trough</td>
<td>M38</td>
<td>South Airport Hinterland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M14</td>
<td>Maghtab</td>
<td>M39</td>
<td>Malta International Airport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M15</td>
<td>North Bingemma Escarpment</td>
<td>M40</td>
<td>Mqabba Quarry Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M16</td>
<td>Bahrija Valley</td>
<td>M41</td>
<td>Zejtun-Marsaskala Hinterland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M17</td>
<td>Bahrija Plateau</td>
<td>M42</td>
<td>Xghajra Escarpment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M18</td>
<td>Qlejgha Catchment</td>
<td>M43</td>
<td>Marsaxlokk Bay Basin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M19</td>
<td>Rabat-Dingli North-east Escarpment</td>
<td>M44</td>
<td>Kalafrana-Hal Far</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M20</td>
<td>Rabat-Dingli Plateau</td>
<td>M45</td>
<td>Delimara/ Xrobb I-Ghagin Peninsulas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M21</td>
<td>Gharghur Valleys</td>
<td>M46</td>
<td>Delimara/ Xrobb I-Ghagin Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M22</td>
<td>San Gwann Hinterland</td>
<td>M47</td>
<td>Marsaxlokk Bay Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M23</td>
<td>West Mosta Hinterland</td>
<td>M48</td>
<td>South-eastern Coastal Cliffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M24</td>
<td>Mosta-Naxxar</td>
<td>M49</td>
<td>Southern Coastal Escarpment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M25</td>
<td>Ta’ Qali Plain</td>
<td>M50</td>
<td>South-western Coastal Cliffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M26</td>
<td>Siggiewi-Zebbug Foreland</td>
<td>M51</td>
<td>Western Coastal Cliffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M27</td>
<td>West Marsamxett Conurbation</td>
<td>M52</td>
<td>North-western Coastal Cliffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M28</td>
<td>South-east Grand Harbour Conurbation</td>
<td>M53</td>
<td>Qammiegh Coastal Slopes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M29</td>
<td>Grand Harbour Industrial Area</td>
<td>M54</td>
<td>Northern Marfa Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M30</td>
<td>Villetta</td>
<td>M55</td>
<td>South-eastern Marfa Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M31</td>
<td>Fort Tigne</td>
<td>M56</td>
<td>North Mellieha Bay Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M32</td>
<td>Manoel Island</td>
<td>M57</td>
<td>St. Paul’s Bay Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M33</td>
<td>Three Cities</td>
<td>M58</td>
<td>Qawra/ Baharic-Caghaq Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M34</td>
<td>Bghi-Kalkara</td>
<td>M59</td>
<td>Sliema-St.Julians-Pembroke Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M35</td>
<td>Fort Ricasoli</td>
<td>M60</td>
<td>Xghajra Area Coastal Strip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M36</td>
<td>North Airport Greenbelt</td>
<td>M61</td>
<td>Eastern Malta Bays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M37</td>
<td>Gudja-Ghargaq Hinterland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS OF MALTA

3.1 Introduction

The landscape of Malta is characterized by a series of low hills and the whole land mass being gently tilted towards the north-east (see MAP ELV 1). There are three major physiographic features which characterize the island of Malta, namely the horst-graben series due north-west of the island, the triangular Rabat-Dingli Plateau which dominates the southwest coast and the rolling landscape which characterizes the eastern flank of the islands. Long-term climatic influences have sculptured numerous pluvial valleys which generally have a south-west to north-east orientation. The north-eastern coast is indented by a number of shallow bays whilst the south-western coast is dominated by cliffs.

3.2 Marfa Peninsula (M1, M2, M53, M54, M55)

3.2.1 General Landscape Description

The north-western most part of the island of Malta is also one of its remotest areas. The longest dimension is around 5 km, linked to the rest of mainland Malta through the Ghadira Isthmus. The southern and western coast features cliffs with underlying taluses and boulder screees, rising to a maximum of around 150 m above sea level. The north-western coast dips gradually towards the sea and is indented by a number of shallow bays (see PLATE 1). The central part of the peninsula is a ridge which commands extensive views towards Gozo and Comino towards the north, and the rest of the Maltese mainland towards the south. There is some farmland, but garrigue and semi-natural woodland tend to predominate.

There are no large permanent settlements. Structures are mainly concentrated near the north-western coastal flank of the peninsula. Examples of built-structures include four hotels, the Ħal Far ferry terminal (see PLATE 2), caravan or boathouses, a number of farms and other rural structures. The historic red tower dominates the skyline of the peninsula. Carriageway density is relatively low and roads are generally arranged in an orthogonal manner.
3.2.2 **Enhancing Features**

Special features include two watch towers, one of which is the very prominent Torri Ta’ Santa Katarina (Red Tower); a number of other military structures, a chapel at the eastern tip of the peninsula; and a relatively substantial stretch of afforested area - a fairly rare feature in the Maltese Islands. The south-western ridge is dominated by a somewhat large and rich stretch of garigue which is relatively undisturbed. The western coastline is very rugged and is dominated by boulder screees with tiny pockets of cultivated land. The ridge edge at Qammiegh rises to around 120 m above sea level and commands very extensive views in all directions of the compass. The tiny sandy beach at Il-Bajja tac-Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay) is set in a very picturesque setting being encircled by natural rock formations and maquis as well as watercourse vegetation. A number of small sandy beaches also occupy most of the north-western coastline. The south-eastern and eastern coastlines are also dominated by boulder screees and are practically inaccessible. These stretches form a pleasant rugged foreground against the backdrop of the aquamarine colours of the sea. The composition is further enhanced through the presence of tiny sandy or pebble beaches as well as the growth of natural vegetation (esp. maquis vegetation) in pockets along the cliff edges and boulder screees. The ridge edges along this stretch of coastline rise to around 45 m above sea level and command extensive views. The north-eastern tip of the peninsula is particularly rugged and there are a number of caves and subsidence structures which are best appreciated from the seaward side. The top of the escarpment dips gradually towards the north-west and in parts of this area the rock surface is indeed very jagged.

3.2.3 **Detracting Features**

The woodland is a popular picnic spot, but in the absence of management, it is also used as a waste tipping site. Littering, barbeques and lack of attention to the building and maintenance of structures contribute to overall deterioration of its quality. The ferry terminal for Gozo is rather conspicuous as are the hotels in the area. Their external rendering makes them stand out more against a rural backdrop. The reverse osmosis plant is also conspicuous but at least it is encircled by a perimeter of soft landscaping. The caravan settlements in the north-east of the peninsula (see PLATE 1) play a major contribution to dereliction especially in view of the ad hoc manner in which they were developed and the wrong choice of colour for their
external facades. Beach facilities do not merge well with the rest of the natural coastline and this is especially true (in spite of some mitigation measures) of the facility at il-Bajja tac-Cirkewwa (Paradise Bay) which is conspicuous against the surrounding unspoilt backdrop. Hunting and trapping hides, farm buildings, disused quarries, illegal land reclamation, cloches and greenhouses contribute to additional dereliction. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marring to the landscape.

3.3 Ghadira Isthmus (M3, M52)

3.3.1 General Landscape Description

The isthmus connects the Marfa peninsula with the rest of the mainland. The distance between opposite stretches of coast is less than 2 km and thus it is the narrowest tract of land in the Maltese islands. It is a U-shaped valley that rises very gently towards west. There is little built-up area (consisting of some hotels, a caravan settlement and a holiday village) and only one major coastal road passing through. The eastern coast is almost level and is dominated by Malta’s largest sandy beach. Significant tracts are used for cultivation, but there is an expanse of garrigue on the western part of the isthmus.

3.3.2 Enhancing Features

The Ghadira sandy beach is one of the most popular in the Maltese Islands. Boats and yachts moored in the bay contribute to variety in the scenic composition. From higher ground, the Danish Village and the Ghadira Nature Reserve (see PLATE 3) dominate the inland areas. The reserve is a reconstructed saline marshland, one of the few remaining in Malta. It consists of a lake of brackish water with a number of sandy islands within. The surrounding shrubs and reeds shield the reserve from the main road. The Danish village has been very carefully integrated through creative design and soft landscaping and thus fits quite nicely in its context. The central-western garrigue area is relatively featureless when viewed from a distance but conveys a feeling of remoteness when experienced from close quarters. Il-Prajjet (Anchor Bay) is very picturesque but unfortunately was marred by development close by.
3.3.3 **Detracting Features**

The development at Tas-Sellum on the southern flank of il-Bajja tal-Mellieha (Ghadira Bay) has made a very negative contribution to the scenic qualities of the bay by virtue of its size, orthogonal massing and white colour. The hotel on the northern side of il-Bajja tal-Mellieha (Ghadira Bay) and the hotel at the end of Mellieha bypass are rather unsympathetic to its backdrop. The coastal road close to the beach is very busy with through-traffic going to the ferry terminal. In summer, apart from an increase in traffic, the carriageway also serves to accommodate a large number of parked cars. The Mellieha bypass is flanked by a trail of tipped construction debris. Tipping occurs near il-Prajjet (Anchor Bay) and near the western coast of this tract of land (known as Ic-Cumnija). A string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional maring to the landscape.

3.4 **Mellieha Slopes (M4, M6, M52, M56, M57)**

3.4.1 **General Landscape Description**

The sloping land contiguous to the Mellieha ridge is bisected by a number of valleys on the northern front of Mellieha and by the Mizieb valley on the southern flank. The northern valleys consist of three main pluvial valleys and a number of smaller ones. It is a rather remote area, except for the area which forms part of the Mellieha settlement. Most of these slopes are dominated by cultivated or abandoned agricultural land. A few secluded pocket beaches are found along the north-eastern coast.

3.4.2 **Enhancing features**

The well-kept agricultural land, the eastern clay slopes, the wave cut platforms, the shallow cliffs, the cane growing along watercourses and a number of ex-military structures; all contribute towards enhancing the coastal scenery along the northern flank of Mellieha ridge. The agricultural land on the southern slopes together with the isolated tree stands and the bare rock escarpments delineating small valleys, all contribute towards magnificent scenery due south of the Mellieha settlement. The stands of pine trees along the serpentine road which links Xemxija to Mellieha contribute to roadside scenery. A number of historical and
archaeological remains occur in the area but their contribution to long distance views tends to be rather limited. A stretch of aqueduct can be found near the Ghajn Zhuber area (see PLATE 4). The area near il-Gżejjer ta’ San Pawl (St. Paul’s Islands) is especially picturesque and relatively unspoilt. The coastline is embellished by a variety of rock formations including coastal caves, rock platforms and low cliffs.

3.4.3 **Detracting Features**

Dilapidation, waste tipping, poor workmanship standards and abandoned agricultural land constitute major problems. Years of off-roading activities have scarred the clay slopes and barbeque activities in summer leave considerable amounts of rubbish along the foreshore. Fish-farming activities have also contributed to the dereliction on land and have degraded the seascape.

3.5 **Mellieha Ridge (M5)**

3.5.1 **General Landscape Description**

A plateau flanked by Ghadira and Mizieb and oriented south-west to north-east along its longer side. Its longest dimension is around 4 km long. Except for the Mellieha settlement, it is a rather undeveloped area, partly agricultural, partly garrigue. The northern area of the settlement has been developed along the pluvial valley system of Wied Ghajn Zejtuna. Modern development has developed around the original Mellieha settlement. Both the eastern and western flanks of the settlement are dominated by garrigue or mostly abandoned agricultural land.

3.5.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish church pleasantly dominates the skyline. Mellieha Fort, although fairly large, is not very visible as it is obscured by surrounding development. A number of chapels, the caves on the escarpment, the sanctuary, a number of historic buildings and the watercourses emerging from the settlement all contribute to enhance the scenic qualities of the area. Selmun Palace is a very conspicuous positive contribution to the skyline but its influence has been somewhat marred by nearby hotel development (see PLATE 5).
3.5.3 **Detracting Features**

The hard stone quarries on the southern and western flanks of the settlement represent an eyesore especially in instances where fine white dust smothers the surrounding areas. The development along the Mellieha bypass is visible for kilometres from the nearby ridges. Together with other development in the background, it imparts a negative scenic contribution to the Mellieha skyline, especially when viewed from the south. Dumping in the countryside also features as a predominant rural problem in this area. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marring to the landscape.

3.6 **Bajda Ridge (M7)**

3.6.1 **General Landscape Description**

A ridge (Horst) stretching from east to west for a distance of around 3 km. Manikata, Xemxija and a number of other small settlements can be found in this area but in general terms this tract of land is rather undeveloped. Considerable areas of the ridge are afforested. Pockets of cultivated areas and garrigue predominate near the western part of the ridge. Extensive views can be appreciated from areas close to the ridge edges.

3.6.2 **Enhancing Features**

In Manikata, the village church overlooks the rest of the settlement. On top of the ridge an extensive stretch of woodland has been planted. This is a beautiful stretch of semi-natural woodland which has been planted over former garrigue (see PLATE 6). There are also patches of garrigue which, apart from natural habitats, feature a number of historical and archaeological remains. Stands of carob trees and well maintained rubble walls, as well as pockets of fruit trees, enhance the surrounding rural landscape. The holiday complex near the north-eastern flank, is of a higher quality than most of the built settlement at Xemxija but some features at the perimeter of the settlement merit further attention to merge the development into the surrounding
landscape. The location of the complex is not ideal and is quite challenging as it occupies an area of former garrigue on the top of a ridge.

3.6.3 **Detracting Features**

Large areas of tipping are found near the western flank of this area. Smaller pockets of tipping and dereliction are also found scattered around the area. A significant proportion of the development at Xemxija is a definite eyesore with little mitigation by way of design, colour rendering and massing. Orthogonal features of the facades and the high contrast stands out against the rural backdrop. The fire-station at the eastern extremity of the plateau presents an eyesore when viewed from higher ground and there are no visual mitigation measures. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marring to the landscape.

3.7 **Pwales Valley (M8)**

3.7.1 **General Landscape Description**

A U-shaped valley that is around 4 km long when measured along its longest dimension. It is terminated at the south-western and north-eastern extremities by popular bays. The valley is predominantly cultivated although there are tourism related facilities at the south-western end. (see PLATE 7) A link road linking Il-Bajja ta’ San Pawl il-Bahar (St. Paul’s Bay) to Il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa (Golden Bay) transects the south-eastern flank of the valley.

3.7.2 **Enhancing Features**

A reconstructed saline marshland, is-Simar, lies close to the eastern coastline. It is similar to the one nature reserve at Ghadira. There are a number of historic buildings and structures scattered throughout the area. However, most of the features do not make a significant contribution to the visual composition of the area. The collage of agricultural field parcels presents a magnificent setting flanked by higher ground. The colourful boats moored in the bay add to the vibrancy of the scenery.
3.7.3 **Detracting Features**

The Xemxija side of the bay is flanked with modern hotels and holiday apartment complexes which detract from the atmosphere of the bay and impart an incoherent and overdeveloped urban appearance. Cloches and greenhouses (including a horticultural retail outlet at Ta’ Rkuplu) detract from the pleasant traditional cultivation setting. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marring to the landscape.

3.8 **St. Paul’s Bay-Bugibba-Qawra (M9, M57, M58)**

3.8.1 **General Landscape Description**

Formerly an un-built, predominantly agricultural area, it is now one of the most densely built tourist areas in the Maltese Islands. It is a peninsula flanked by Il-Bajja ta’ San Pawl (St. Paul’s Bay) and Il-Bajja tas-Salina (Salina Bay). Most of the development in this area consists of holiday flats, restaurants and hotels which are four storeys or higher. It is one of the most urbanized areas in the north-western part of mainland Malta. (For an aerial view of the area see PLATE 8.) The core of the settlement is relatively undeveloped but this area is not appreciated from long distance views (except from the air) as it is visually secluded by higher development. The whole settlement is encircled by a system of busy camageways (especially in summer).

3.8.2 **Enhancing Features**

The whole stretch of coast but especially that on the north-eastern tip of peninsula. A tract of coast near il-Mahruq is still fairly picturesque but is rapidly being consumed by encroaching development. The quasi-natural coastline near the Il-Ponta tal-Qawra (Qawra point) is also relatively unspoilt. The promenade is another enhancing feature of the area. The colourful boats moored along protected stretches of the coast contribute to the vibrancy of the scenery. The villas near the northern-part of the eastern coast provide a welcome relief from the mass tourism oriented development which suffocates the southern parts of the peninsula.
3.8.3 **Detracting Features**

The area in general suffers from over-development, lack of coherence and poor architectural quality. The coast is littered by construction rubble along considerable stretches. The coastline is predominantly subjugated to egg-crate architecture and the skyline is plagued by lift rooms, water tanks and antennae. Traffic congestion, rubbish pockets and marine contamination contribute to the further degradation of the scenic value of the area.

3.9 **Mgarr-Zebbiegh-Wardija Slopes (M10, M12, M13)**

3.9.1 **General Landscape Description**

A system of clay slopes girdling the Wardija uplands, being bisected by a number of V-shaped valleys which support watercourses during the wetter season. The slopes on the southern flank gradually merge with the Mgarr plains. The area is extensively cultivated, relatively undeveloped and not easily accessible. A number of scattered animal husbandry units can also be found in the area. There are no major roads passing through the area. For an aerial view of the village of Mgarr (see PLATE 9).

3.9.2 **Enhancing Features**

A number of historic buildings, chapels and archaeological sites found scattered in the area (e.g. Roman Baths). Patches of maquis found along patches of some of the valleys give respite from the harshness of the arid landscape. On the other hand, pockets of garrigue support the enjoyment of long distance views. The mosaic of cultivation imparts quite a pleasant picture, especially when viewed from higher ground.

3.9.3 **Detracting Features**

The southern slopes/plains are extensively cultivated and dotted by a number of unsightly animal husbandry farms. In winter and spring, extensive areas become clothed in cloches and greenhouses which impart an appearance of plastic landscapes especially when viewed from overlooking higher ground.
Isolated waste tips and dilapidation of rubble walls contribute to the localized dereliction in some areas. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional maring to the landscape.

3.10 Wardija Plateau (M11)

3.10.1 General Landscape Description

A system of low highland capped by a karstic environment but also extensively cultivated especially near the western part of the ridge. The edges are bisected through a number of pluvial valleys which are extensively cultivated. It includes the small settlements of Mgarr (see PLATE 9), Zebbiegh, Wardija (see PLATE 10) and Bidnija. A number of hamlets, farmhouses and isolated dwellings can also be found in the area.

3.10.2 Enhancing Features

The Mgarr church overwhelmingly dominates the rest of the settlement whilst the church at Zebbiegh does so to a much lesser extent. The historic centre of the settlement Mgarr (see PLATE 9) still retains some of the original charm but the other areas have been substantially changed by modern development. A number of historic buildings (e.g. Lippija Tower, Zammitello Palace) can be found in the area. Furthermore, there are a conspicuous number of small water reservoirs in the area. Well-maintained cultivated fields and stands of trees significantly determine the positive qualities of the rural landscape whilst the garrigue due west of the area imparts a sensation of remoteness and freedom. The area has a number of archaeological sites such as Ta’ Skorba and Ta’ Hagrat Temples but from a scenic point of view, these are not conspicuous.

3.10.3 Detracting Features

Newer development at the edge of the main settlements almost completely shrouds the more picturesque traditional part of the settlement. In late winter and spring, cloches and greenhouses multiply and transform the scenery into a reflective plastic landscape. Scrap yards at the edge of Mgarr and elsewhere contribute to dereliction. Lack of maintenance to rubble-walls or reconstruction in non-traditional materials, represent
localized eyesores. Concreting of some agricultural access routes and the pitiful state of the carriageway surfacing in many areas are a source of additional negative visual impact. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marbling to the landscape.

3.11 Maghtab (M14)

3.11.1 General Landscape Description

A relatively flat area close to the eastern coast, which is partly agricultural, partly garrigue, and a number of scattered buildings. Its eastern boundary is the coastal road, which is part of the main road linking north and south. A considerable number of farms and industrial units can be found in the area.

3.11.2 Enhancing Features

There are a number of churches, chapels, coastal towers and other historic features scattered throughout the area and these add character especially when viewed from close quarters. There are a number of archaeological remains but since these have a low profile, they do not stand out prominently in the landscape. Well-maintained agricultural land and stands of carob trees make significant contributions in terms of the positive qualities of the area.

3.11.3 Detracting Features

The whole area is dominated by the Maghtab waste disposal site (see PLATE 11). The mound visually influences the whole area and can be spotted from areas which are tens of kilometres away. It is possibly the worst eyesore in the Maltese Islands. Apart from being visually obtrusive, the waste tip generates obnoxious smells and choking fumes. The industrial concerns and the farms which are scattered along large tracts of the area, also contribute towards the scenic degradation of the area. In this respect, the concrete processing plant due north of the T'Alla w'Ommu escarpment is of particular significance and is absolutely visually offensive when viewed from higher ground. The active quarrying in the area is particularly visually offensive and the degrading visual influence can be perceived from long distance viewpoints to the north-west. There
are other construction related or garage industry concerns which stand out quite starkly against the surrounding rural area. The Maghtab Earth Station also contributes to the negative scenic impact due to the contrast presented through the white parabolic antennae. Pockets of localized tipping can be found all over the area (including near historic or archaeological features). In a significant number of instances, obnoxious organic matter is disposed of in areas close to the animal farms.

3.12 **Bingemma Slopes (M15, M16)**

3.12.1 **General Landscape Description**

An area dominated by cultivated land which slopes upwards towards the Bahrija plateau to meet it at the Victoria Lines. It is intersected by a number of picturesque valleys, many of which are traditionally cultivated. Apart from the cultivated areas, there are boulder screes, patches of garrigue and maquis stands. The area is not well accessed and is comparatively rather remote. No major thoroughfare passes through this area. There are a number of small hamlets and farm buildings in this area.

3.12.2 **Enhancing Features**

The most important features are the Victoria Lines on the area’s borders (see PLATES 12 and 13). This is a historical fortified structure which bisects Malta along the great fault that bisects the island from south-west to north-east. The valleys which transect this character area are very picturesque and feature a variety of archaeological and historical highlights. Most of these features do not have a significant influence on long distance views but there are exceptions (e.g. the Bingemma chapel, Bingemma catacombs). The valley at Bahrija is a splendid example of a fluvial valley marked by reeds along its watercourse. After episodes of heavy rainfall, a small waterfall drains directly over the Fomm ir-Rih coastal cliffs.
3.12.3 **Detracting Features**

The main problem in the predominantly rural landscape is presented through the greenhouses and cloches that mushroom during the wet season and in spring. Littering, dereliction and lack of or improper maintenance of field-walls disturb the rural landscape composition. The quarry at Torri Falka is visible from a wide area and is a veritable eyesore when viewed from north, especially from the Bidnija area.

3.13 **Bahrija Plateau (M17)**

3.13.1 **General Landscape Description**

A rather remote area, with only the settlement of Bahrija (see PLATE 14) together with a number of smaller hamlets and isolated dwellings. Garrigue dominates the area although it is interspersed with patches of cultivated land and natural vegetation along watercourses. The Wied Rini lattice towers dominate the skyline when viewed from a distance. The recently erected Bahrija church bell tower gives the settlement a focal point on the skyline.

3.13.2 **Enhancing Features**

There are a number of historical features such as lookout towers, military fortifications (esp. the Victoria Lines, Bingemma Fort and Nadur Tower). There are also numerous archaeological remains such as cart ruts, tombs and so forth, but these are normally less conspicuous. The Victoria Lines which flank the northern boundary, command breathtaking views of western Malta and Gozo. There are stands of small, afforested areas, the largest of which is a strip juxtaposed to the Dwejra Lines.
3.13.3 **Detracting Features**

Scattered littering especially near areas lying close to the vehicular carriageways. Damaged, unmaintained or improperly constructed field walls detract from the considerable scenic qualities of the area as do a number of garage industry concerns and animal farms. Improper road surfacing, damaged roads and concreted paths substantiate an added impression of dereliction.

3.14 **Qlejgha Catchment (M18)**

3.14.1 **General Landscape Description**

A system of pluvial valleys that convey fresh water towards the North after episodes of torrential rains. There are no sizeable settlements in this area but there are a number of hamlets, small clusters of buildings and farmhouses. Only one fairly busy vehicular carriageway intersects this. Agriculture predominates as the main land-use activity.

3.14.2 **Enhancing Features**

Wied il-Qlejgha *(see PLATE 15)* is part of one of the largest valley systems in Malta. It drains considerable areas of the Rabat-Dingli Plateau. In the late 19th century, a number of concrete dams were built to supplement the island’s scarce water resources. During winter, the water behind the dams forms small artificial lakes which support a variety of life forms. After torrential rain, the stepped dams create small artificial waterfalls that are quite rare in the Maltese Islands. The rest of the catchment basin is mostly cultivated with interspersed small patches of garigue. A number of hamlets are quite picturesque but are being threatened by dereliction and/or modern development.
3.14.3 **Detracting Features**

Scattered littering especially near areas lying close to the vehicular carriageways (see PLATE 16). Damaged, un-maintained or improperly constructed field walls detract from the considerable scenic qualities of the area as do a number of garage industry concerns and animal farms. Improper road surfacing, damaged roads and concreted paths substantiate an added impression of dereliction. The Fiddien Reservoir is a detracting feature by virtue of its mass but fortunately it does not lie close to an escarpment or a ridge.

3.15 **Rabat-Dingli North-East Escarpment (M19)**

3.15.1 **General Landscape Description**

This stretch of land consists of a system of cultivated areas underlain by clay slopes. The land front is traversed by a series of very fertile valleys. There are no major settlements in this area. There are two main thoroughfares which intersect this area. The rest of the terrain is criss-crossed by country lanes which provide access to fields.

3.15.2 **Enhancing Features**

A nationally important feature is Buskett Gardens, a woodland planted circa 250 years ago. It is a green oasis in the otherwise fairly barren looking landscape of Malta. The Verdala Palace, overlooking Buskett, is a landmark which crowns the semi-natural woodland (see PLATE 17). Numerous historic buildings and archaeological remains are found scattered throughout the area but these are almost never visually conspicuous from distant quarters. The terraced fields are retained by traditional rubble walls and contribute greatly to the picturesque setting of the area especially during the winter months.
3.15.3 **Detracting Features**

Scattered littering especially near areas lying close to the vehicular carriageways. Damaged, unmaintained or improperly constructed field walls detract from the considerable scenic qualities of the area as do a number of garage industry concerns and animal farms. Improper road surfacing, damaged roads and concreted paths substantiate an added impression of dereliction. Quarry activity is a major detracting feature. One of the worst offenders is the quarry which overlooks the Ghar Lapsi area and which is very visible from the eastern areas around the escarpment.

3.16 **Rabat-Dingli Plateau (M20)**

3.16.1 **General Landscape Description**

The highest plateau in the Maltese Islands it rises to a maximum height of over 250 m above sea level near the southwestern coast. The whole plateau is gently dipped towards north-east and is intersected by a number of valley systems that drain the area. It consists mostly of farmland but it includes the settlements of Mtarfa, Rabat, Mdina and Dingli. There are also a number of hamlets, rural house clusters, historic buildings and isolated dwellings as well as farms and greenhouses. There is one major road connecting Dingli and Rabat.

3.16.2 **Enhancing Features**

The historical city of Mdina (see PLATE 18), crowned by the Cathedral (see PLATE 19), is a jewel that characterizes the traditional Maltese landscape with its fortification walls and churches. It is set close to an escarpment which rises rapidly over the Qattara foreland due east and Wied il-Hemsija due west. The skyline at Mdina is synonymous with the identity of the Maltese skyline and its qualities can be appreciated from substantial tracts on mainland Malta. The historic areas of Rabat, Mdina and Dingli ooze with history and constitute a cultural experience through the narrow winding street layouts, the traditional facades, the numerous churches and chapels, the monasteries, palaces, administrative buildings, town-houses and other traditional buildings which give the area a special quality. The skyline is further enhanced by the occasional...
punctuation created by the domes and spires of the various churches. The ex-military town of Mtarfa, dominated by the clock tower, although more recent, has a different kind of charm which can still be appreciated. The Salib Ta’ L-Gholja (Laferla Cross), overlooking Siggiewi, is a landmark. The Girgenti Palace, the Verdala Palace, the Church and Tower at Tal-Virtu’, the Mater Admirabilis complex and other historical buildings border the escarpment and elevate its picturesque qualities. The settlement at Dingli still retains many of the positive traditional settlement features in its older quarters. The traditional cultivated areas greatly contribute to the qualities of the area, as do the patches of garrigue and the escarpments at the edges of the plateau. Pockets of vegetated or afforested areas provide a welcome relief from the rest of the arid or cultivated landscapes. Ridge edges also command extensive views depending on the vantage point topography. There are a number of subsidence structures such as the one at Hofret ir-Rizz but these features can generally be appreciated only from close quarters. The Rabat-Dingli Plateau is also one of the richest in terms of archaeology but again, these can mostly be appreciated from close quarters. An exception to this general rule is Clapham Junction where the complex of cart ruts can be easily seen even from relatively medium range viewpoints. The main visual contribution to such features are however best appreciated from low flying aircraft.

3.16.3 Detracting Features

Some of the area, especially the south of the plateau, is disturbed by a number of quarries. Apart from creating a scar in the topography, mounds of graded aggregate present a stark contrast to nearby cultivated fields. Batching plant machinery, general dereliction and indiscriminate dumping and smothering by the dust generated, greatly degrade the quality of the surrounding landscape. There are other quarries in the area but these are generally less conspicuous than the ones at Ta’ Zuta area. The area is cluttered by a number of farms, rural farmhouses and hamlets, some of which are characterized by dereliction. A number of animal farms occur in the area between Dingli and Rabat. Most are rather unsightly by virtue of haphazard construction, surrounding dilapidation and dumping in close proximity. Greenhouses represent another problem but fortunately, most of the greenhouses are situated in such a manner that they seldom affect sensitive locations of long distance views. The Radar station at Dingli is a negative intrusion into the landscape and stands out amongst the surrounding karstic environment. It can be seen from areas which are tens of
kilometres away from the site. The Hotel at Tal-Virtu is a bland blot on this sensitive stretch of skyline. The structure is particularly offensive when viewed in silhouette against the setting sun.

3.17 Gharghur-San Gwann Hinterland (M21, M22)

3.17.1 General Landscape Description

An elevated area which has its north-western flank dominated by the escarpment of the great fault which dips suddenly on the north-western portion to merge with the Bahar ic-Caghaq area. The northern part is still relatively undeveloped with Gharghur and Madliena as the only settlements of relevance. There is also a system of very picturesque valleys which flank the settlement of Gharghur. Considerable areas of moderate slope (e.g. Madliena and Iklin) have been developed for detached or semi-detached dwellings. The area of San Gwann is rather flat and is an area of former soft stone quarrying. The area is currently predominantly cultivated with the exceptions of the settlement of San Gwann. The elevated terrain has been utilized to accommodate a number of transmission lattice towers for radio, TV and telecomms facilities. A number of valleys originate from the higher areas and predominantly drain towards the Bahar ic-Caghaq area and the St. Julians area.

3.17.2 Enhancing Features

Gharghur still retains many of the picturesque features and is surrounded by splendid scenery. There are a number of historic buildings including a number of military fortifications (e.g. Madliena Fort, Victoria Lines). Caves of various shapes and sizes can be found along the escarpment, especially near the Victoria Lines. A number of country chapels and country houses can also be found in the same area. The terraced fields in this area are normally interlaced with carob trees of considerable size. These fields also adorn the valley sides (e.g. Wied id-Dis, Wied Anglu, Wied il-Faham, Wied Ghomor) which intersect the great fault escarpment along the north-western flank of this character area. A number of archaeological sites can also be found in the area but these can only be appreciated from the immediate vicinity.
3.17.3 **Detracting Features**

Modern development at the edge of Gharghur and at Madliena contrasts sharply with the predominantly rural character of the valleys. Dereliction occurs in the rural areas as well as near the newly constructed sites. The new settlement edges generally add little in terms of amenity and the edge of the development schemes is often girdled by a string of construction debris. There are areas which accommodate industrial plants which are normally associated with the construction industry or relatively large storage depots. A number of greenhouse complexes can also be found in the area but given the absence of nearby higher ground, the impact is slightly mitigated. Some of the former quarries have been converted to accommodate small-scale industry, warehousing or other service industries. Although the facilities inside the quarries tend to be invisible to long distance views, overspill dereliction is commonplace and the entrance to these facilities is almost invariably unsightly. A hard stone quarry operates in Wied Ghomor and stands out sharply against the surrounding rural areas. A large derelict farm building and a number of other structures in Wied Ghomor, impart an adverse scenic impact. It is difficult to mitigate against the telecomms antennae (see PLATE 20).

3.18 **West Mosta - Ta’ Qali (M23, M25)**

3.18.1 **General Landscape Description**

A rather flat area mostly occupied by an ex-military airfield. Ta’ Qali currently accommodates a National Recreational Centre. However, activities ranging from vine cultivation to industrial development take place in the area. The National Recreation Centre has an area of around 1 square km and accommodates extensive parking areas. The highest structures are those ancillary to the National Football Stadium which include the spectator stand and cover as well as the floodlighting supports. Other recreational (esp. sports related) facilities also occur in this area. The Ta’ Qali National Recreation Centre is frequented by thousands of people, especially on winter afternoons, and has recently become a popular open-air market. For an aerial view of the area (see plate 21). The area due west of Mosta is mostly dry cultivated land.
3.18.2 Enhancing Features

The expanse of flat land presents a welcome relief from the nearby built-up area which generally lack in open spaces. The flat areas are ideal for informal recreation although these areas are becoming more restricted. The afforested areas are also popular with the public and are often favourite picnic sites. The Formal Garden and Greek Theatre represent another attraction and the use of local stone and soft landscaping make a positive intervention to the context. The vineyard is another visual positive intervention although it cannot be enjoyed by the public as it is in private ownership. There are a number of countryside chapels in the area as well as other historic buildings (e.g. Cumbo Tower). Sites of archaeological interest do not significantly contribute to long distance views.

3.18.3 Detracting Features

Industrial concerns within the recreational area are an eyesore. Some roads in certain parts around the National Recreational Area are in a veritable sorry state. Patches of littering occurs in certain areas especially at the perimeter of the area and these often include construction rubble. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marring to the landscape. A medium wave antenna lies at il-Bezbejja.

3.19 Mosta - Naxxar (M24)

3.19.1 General Landscape Description

The settlements of Naxxar (see PLATE 22) and Mosta are located on a stretch of land which rises gently towards north-east. Significant tracts of the area have been urbanized, the predominant land-use being residential development. Areas along the perimeter of the settlements are dominated by villa development in the case of Naxxar and industrial development in the case of Mosta (see PLATE 23). Naxxar and Mosta are dominated by the respective parish church. In both cases, the historic cores have been girdled by modern development that has eventually linked the two settlements together. Blocks of higher public housing development dominate the skyline when viewed from certain angles.
3.19.2 **Enhancing Features**

The church at Mosta is a monumental landmark whilst the one at Naxxar, although small in scale, is conspicuous to long distance views by virtue of its elevated position. The historic core of the urban settlement has retained many of the original features although sporadic modern development has introduced variable level of detraction. There are numerous features of interest ranging from churches, chapels, military structures, palaces, piazzas, gardens, historic buildings and a wealth of other cultural heritage. There are also a number of archaeological features but these are mostly visible only from very close quarters.

3.19.3 **Detracting Features**

The modern development at the edge of the settlement is of variable quality, but in the ensemble, does not have the rich urban quality of the historic cores. The situation deteriorates at points along the perimeter of Mosta that are allocated to industrial development (especially small garage industries and construction related plant). Unfortunately, this tract of land overlooks the very picturesque Wied il-Ghasel which traverses Mosta. Apart from the low quality architecture of the industrial buildings, all sorts of littering takes place outside these garages. A similar situation occurs in an area at Naxxar overlooking Iklin valley, although by virtue of its position, this latter situation is much less conspicuous. The roofscapes are often cluttered by numerous T.V. antennae, water tanks and other unsightly structures. Apart from poor architectural design, most of the modern camageways lack focal points of interest, surface treatment of public areas (esp. road surfaces) is given little attention and the facades abound in haphazard cabling. A significant proportion of signage or lighting poles suffer from a verticality problem.

3.20 **Siggiewi – Zebbug Foreland (M26)**

3.20.1 **General Landscape Description**

A predominantly agricultural area dominated by the settlements of Siggiewi (see PLATE 24) and Zebbug. It is an area of gently rolling hills bisected by a number of v-shaped pluvial valley systems which drain significant areas of western and central Malta. Both settlements have originated around a historic core, with the newer
areas girdling the older. The parish church of Siggiewi dominates the whole village whilst the one at Zebbug does so to a much lesser extent.

3.20.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish church at Siggiewi is an imposing feature which gives character to the L-shaped piazza on its south-western flank. The parish church of Zebbug is smaller but it too gives a special character to the surrounding urban spaces. There are numerous historic features scattered in the two settlements as well as in the rural areas that surround them. The mosaic character of the fields is not well positioned to be appreciated from close quarter but can be well appreciated from the higher ground of the Rabat-Dingli plateau. Mt. Carmel Hospital, a large institutional building, is conspicuous by virtue of its size but it blends quite well with the surrounding countryside. The nearby Wied Incita government nursery adds a welcome touch of greenery which can be appreciated from Mdina Road.

3.20.3 **Detracting Features**

The area due east of Siggiewi is predominantly occupied by quarrying activity and considerable dumping activity. This area suffers from considerably more dereliction than other rural areas in Malta. A similar problem occurs due south of Qormi especially near the Industrial area at Tal-Handaq. Here the level of rural dereliction is one of the worst found in the Maltese Islands. The valleys surrounding Siggiewi, Zebbug and Qormi have received a special dose of blemishes ranging from indiscriminate construction waste rubble and other forms of tipping to all sorts of unsightly development ranging from animal farms and garage workshops to horse training tracks. A notorious eyesore is the construction related plant which is situated at Hal Farrug. To exacerbate matters, a large shed within the plant complex has been painted a dark shade of blue and this renders everything even more obtrusive. Parts of the historic centres in Zebbug and to a lesser extent in Siggiewi have suffered at the hands of modern incongruous development. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional maring to the landscape.
3.21 North-East Conurbation (M27, M28)

3.21.1 General Landscape Description

The area immediately around the harbours' historic centres is the most densely built area in the Maltese Islands. The whole area is practically one large almost uninterrupted conurbation broken up only by the Kordin-Marsa industrial area. It is situated on a tract of rolling landscape intersected by V-shaped pluvial valleys. (For an aerial view of the area see PLATE 25). On the western side of Valletta, it incorporates a number of local councils including Swieqi, Pembroke, Sliema, St. Julian’s, San Gwann, Msida, Gzira, Pieta’, Gwardamanga, Hamrun, Marsa, St. Venera, Qomni, Birkirkara, Balzan, Lija, Iklin and Attard. The eastern side of Valletta incorporates the local councils of Tarxien, Paola (Rahal Gdid), Fgura and Zabbar. The conurbation is also the most populated area in the Maltese Islands. The individual cities have grown into each other, and from higher ground in the south and the west, appear as one metropolitan area. From viewpoints in the inner harbour area (e.g. the city walls of Valletta or Fort St. Angelo in Birgu (Vittoriosa) ) the built-up area stretches almost as far as the horizon. The area is crossed by several valleys, some of which have been built-up. Other tracts have been retained as agricultural islands within the built-up areas. The range of urban development is predominantly residential but many other forms of development occur on this stretch of land. The individual settlements are usually centred on a main parish church which often dominates the surrounding areas and is frequently encircled by the historic centres. The Island’s University, main hospitals, industrial areas, commercial development, tourism facilities and recreational centres are also found in this area. Higher building tends to occur around the Sliema - St. Julian’s area (see PLATE 26), the highest of which is the recently constructed Hilton tower which dominates the whole of St. Julian’s area. On the western side of Marsamxett, the only substantial open spaces within the conurbation occur near the vicinity of Tal-Qroqq and to a much lesser extent in the Pembroke area. On the eastern side of the conurbation, there are three pockets of agricultural land outside the Margherita Lines. The sheltered bays and creeks of the coastal areas are dominated by the presence of marine craft, with the larger craft being mostly confined to the grand harbour and yachts being mainly confined to Marsamxett Harbour.
3.21.2 Enhancing Features

The promenades along the coastal stretches of the area provide long distance views out towards the horizon. In recent years, these coastlines have been upgraded and additional facilities introduced. The harbours and bays constitute another attraction. Some of the most notable public gardens are found in this area, the largest of which is San Anton Gardens. Parts of the urban historic centres have retained many of the original characteristics and constitute a positive scenic asset to their immediate surroundings. The churches, chapels, military and other historic buildings which occur in this area are too numerous to be mentioned. The punctuation of the skyline through the numerous domes, spires and belfries imparts a distinctive mark to the Maltese urban landscape. There are also pockets of agricultural land and here the carob tree tends to predominate. There are only a few partially undeveloped valleys in this character area. These include parts of Wied Ghomor, Wied Mejxu, Wied Ghollieqa, Wied il-Balluta, Wied il-Kalkara, Wied tar-Rinella.

3.21.3 Detracting Features

From short to medium distance viewpoints, the conurbation is rather unsightly with generally few clear points of reference (with the exception of churches) and little coherence. (The situation tends to improve with longer distance views). Greenery is conspicuous through its virtual absence and the roof-scapes are littered with antennae, water-tanks and other roof-scape paraphernalia. The higher development has enveloped the traditional historic centres especially in the areas around Marsamxett Harbour, Balluta Bay and St. George’s Bay. Considerable stretches of open land are quite rare and the western areas suffer chronic episodes of traffic congestion. Buildings flanked by a featureless party wall look very unsightly, especially if painted in a white colour and the paint starts flaking off. These party walls leave a considerable adverse visual effect even seen from long distance viewpoints (see PLATE 27). On a more local scale, most of the modern carriageways lack clear focal points of reference, surface treatment of public areas (esp. road surfaces) is given little attention and the facades abound in haphazard cabling. Most signage or lighting poles suffer from a verticality problem. Industrial estates and garage industry areas make little contribution to the positive qualities of the urban landscape; indeed in many instances the impact is quite adverse.
3.22 **Grand Harbour Industrial Area (M29)**

3.22.1 **General Description**

Located on the south-western coastal stretch of the Grand Harbour, this area is predominantly industrial (see PLATE 28) with a significant stretch allocated for warehousing. There are two main industrial estates (i.e. Marsa and Kordin). The area is bisected by some of Malta’s busiest thoroughfares. Various shipbuilding and ship repair facilities as well as storage facilities are also found in this area.

3.22.2 **Enhancing Features**

Although the area is predominantly industrial, one can still encounter enhancing features. One such feature is the Turkish Cemetery which is found just due north of Marsa Industrial Estate. Sports facilities located due east of Kordin Hill, although not of particular scenic interest, provide a welcome respite from the industrial development. The newer showroom flanking Triq Dicembru Tlettax along Albert Town also mitigates against the rest of the industrial development as do patches of greenery near the entrance to Albert Town opposite the entrance to the Marsa Sports Complex. The water drainage ditch is also of historic significance.

3.22.3 **Detracting Features**

From long distance views, the industrial area is rather unsightly with buildings of little architectural merit and no cohesion in design. Cranes tower over the industrial roof-scape and exacerbate the scenic cacophony (see PLATE 29). Greenery is conspicuous through its virtual absence and the predominantly metallic roofs contrast sharply with the traditional residential rooflines. The effect is accentuated when the serrated roofs of the factory north-lights in Marsa reflect the light from low solar elevations.
3.23 Inner Harbours Historic Coastline
(M30, M31, M32, M33, M34, M35)

3.23.1 General Description

Dominated by the fortified city of Valletta on the Xiberras Peninsula, the inner harbours are crowned by a spectacular system of fortifications. The capital city and Floriana are based on a grid-iron street pattern whilst the settlements of Bormla (Cospicua), Isla (Senglea) and Birgu (Vittoriosa) are based on a quasi-orthogonal planimetric system but profiled to accommodate topography or major buildings. These latter three settlements are collectively known as the Three Cities. Fort Manoel and Fort Tigne’ give the historic context to the Marsamxett Harbour whilst the Three Cities and Fort Ricasoli (together with Valletta) impart a celebrated girdle to the Grand Harbour (for an aerial view see PLATE 30). The skyline of Valletta is overwhelmingly dominated by the dome of the Carmelite Parish church and the pointed spire of the Anglican Cathedral (see PLATE 31). Ship repair facilities and a tank cleaning facility can be found in the creeks and all sorts of marine craft are moored along areas designated for this purpose. There are pockets of open spaces which become prominent from long distance viewpoints through the presence of mature greenery. With the exception of Fort Manoel, Fort Tigne and Fort Ricasoli, the fortifications around the harbours accommodate residential settlements within the Inner Harbour Historic Coastline. All these settlements have a high population density. Some of Malta’s busiest thoroughfares and largest parking spaces occur in this area.

3.23.2 Enhancing Features

The historic settlements and the military fortifications crown the harbours with an urban skyline of international significance. The majestic fortifications provide a unique cultural experience in addition to the urban experience within the settlements. The various auberges and palaces in Valletta provide focal points to the urban context, as do the number of open spaces and numerous churches and chapels. Public squares also attract crowds during the day and especially during special occasions. The public gardens in Valletta and Floriana are among the best in the Maltese Islands whilst similar gardens in or near the Three Cities provide a welcome relief from the narrow spaces in the built-up areas. Many points along the fortifications
are accessible and provide breathtaking views of one of the main harbours (depending on the position of the vantage point). All the historic settlement areas are endowed with numerous plaques and monuments which add character to the area. The skyline is pleasantly punctuated by the church domes and spires as well as the difference in levels accentuates the interplay of the massing. The proximity of the coast, the short inter-coastal distances and the coastal indentations considerably ameliorate the scenic composition. The afforested area on the glacis of the Floriana Fortifications and the Manoel Island glacis give an added touch of greenery although there are concerns that the trees diminish the historical merit of these military structures. Unlike many other historic centres in the Maltese islands, the inner harbour historic centres were left relatively unscathed in terms of being girdled by modern incongruous development. Various points along the coastline have been upgraded to enhance the enjoyment of strolling near the coast of these historic areas.

3.23.3 Detracting Features

The industrial areas as well as the ship-repair facilities close to the Three Cities contrast sharply with the generally monochromatic mellow character of the historic areas. Cranes and large metal clad structures are particularly visually offensive. The skyline of Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities is littered with roof structures such as roof-tanks, water tanks and other rooftop paraphernalia that collectively contribute to the maring of the majestic skyline. At a lower level, boathouses have been constructed at the foot of some of the fortifications. A state of general dilapidation and abandonment exists in the proximity of Fort Manoel, Fort Tigne and Fort Ricasoli and these three forts are in a serious state of disrepair. At Manoel Island, the presence of the yacht repair yard degrades long distance views especially when seen from across the creek. Certain quarters in Valletta, Floriana and the Three Cities lie in a general state of abandonment and detract from the streetscape experience in certain areas. Some of the edifices which replace buildings demolished during World War II, contrast sharply with the quality of adjacent architecture. However, given that the replacements have been built in “franka” stone, they do not always effect the long distance view composition. On a local level, traffic congestion and parking are omnipresent and visually obtrusive.
3.24 North Airport Greenbelt (M36, M37)

3.24.1 General Landscape Description

This trifurcated predominantly un-built area is dominated by escarpments on its north-western side and low rolling hills on its eastern side. The main features on the northwestern side are the Marsa Sports Complex, the Ghemmieri Experimental Farm and the Addolorata cemetery (see PLATE 32) whilst a substantial proportion of the southeastern side is dominated by dry agricultural farmland. Three disjoint settlements of significance (Luqa, Gudja and Ghaxaq) occur near the southern perimeter of the area. In each case, the germane settlement is dominated by the parish church. Sporadic development ranging from warehousing to scrap-yards occurs mainly near the Tal-Barrani traffic artery. The ex-military facilities on the northern apex of the airport have been converted into residential, small industry and airport related facilities. (For a general aerial view see PLATE 33).

3.24.2 Enhancing Features

The Addolorata cemetery provides a welcome visual respite from the north-eastern conurbation and the development. Mediterranean mature trees dominate the western flank of the cemetery, with the neo-gothic style spire providing a majestic focal point. It is ironic that the solemn designated land-use precludes enjoyment of this space. By contrast, the Marsa Sports ground (see PLATE 34), whilst offering another visual respite from mass development, is predominantly dedicated to formal recreational activities. The central part and perimeter of the area are afforested, further contributing to the irrigated green of the golf course. The parish churches at Luqa, Gudja and Ghaxaq define the focal points of the respective settlement and pleasantly crown the skyline. On a local scale, the historic centres of these settlements have retained some of the original features and many of the original streetscape alignments. There are also some pleasant spaces near the ex-military barracks which although modified, have still retained an element of their original attraction. Scattered countryside chapels and other historic buildings (e.g. Palazzo Dorell) also occur within this area. Carob trees on agricultural land dominate the rural landscape in this area.
3.24.3 **Detracting Features**

The main detracting features occur near the pockets of development within the rural areas. The predominantly industrial buildings stick out of the surrounding landscape like a sore thumb and there are virtually no mitigation measures to soften the adverse impact on the scenery. The treatment of the settlement edges was such that those were often reserved for the tasteless architecture of modern residential or commercial buildings. Other forms of dereliction such as un-maintained rubble walls, indiscriminate dumping, dilapidation and lack of attention to detail of structures, further contributes to the problem. The string of high-tension power line lattice towers, which transects the area, presents additional marring of the landscape.

3.25 **South Airport Hinterland (M38)**

3.25.1 **General Landscape Description**

This predominantly level area alternates between farmland and settlements (Qrendi, Mqabba, Kirkop, Zurrieq, Sai). A significant proportion is dominated by dry farmland. A number of smaller hamlets and isolated built structures are also found in this area. Most of the rural buildings are related to cultivation or animal husbandry but the range is quite wide varying from rural dwellings to micro-industry. A number of operating, abandoned or reclaimed quarries are found in the area. All the major settlements are dominated by the parish church (*see PLATE 35*). Historic heritage is found scattered all over the area. A number of large water reservoirs are also found in this region.

3.25.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish churches of the larger settlements present long distance reference points for each settlement. Substantial areas within the historic centres of each settlement have retained many characteristics in terms of facades and streetscapes. In Zurrieq, the Xarolla Windmill presents a unique feature as the only windmill on mainland Malta which has wind-sails installed. The farmland, when cultivated in a traditional manner, imparts a positive scenic contribution to the landscape and in common with other Maltese rural areas, the carob tree predominates. Fortunately, greenhouses and cloches are still rather absent from this area. A number of
wayside chapels and other buildings or structures of historic importance can also be found scattered around the area. One of the more conspicuous structures, in terms of long distance views, is the aqueduct that traverses the area near Tal-Providenza. There are also a number of archaeological features but these can only be appreciated from close proximity. Furthermore, a number of natural features occur in this area, the most notable of which is the doline at il-Maqluba (see PLATE 36). Although this feature is around 100 m across, it cannot be appreciated from long distance views (unless the viewpoint is from the air.)

3.25.3 **Detracting Features**

In common with various other settlements, external long distance views of many parts of the historic centres have been obscured by a girdle of higher modern development at the perimeter of the settlement. Dereliction in rural areas in terms of indiscriminate littering, lack of maintenance and lack of attention to detail, is also found in this area. The disrepair of rubble walls is especially problematic near the abandoned fields, especially those in the close proximity to the coast. The ex-dumping area at Wied Fulija, although no longer in operation, has left its legacy of littering in the contiguous areas. The area proximal to the Wied Moqbol quarry has been similarly smothered in a blanket of white limestone dust. The redundant lattice towers at Bubaqra represent an unattractive intrusion into the rural landscape. The large aircraft hangar at Il-Karwija represents an eyesore by virtue of its mass, colour and incompatibility with the surrounding landscape. Fortunately, this impact has been softened through the mature trees in its close proximity.

3.26 **Malta International Airport (M39)**

3.26.1 **General Landscape Description**

This relatively large expanse of almost level land accommodates airfield related activities. The absence of built structures on the runway and the close proximity of girdle roads to the runway permit the access to long distance views that from certain locations around the runway perimeter reach as far as the Bingemma escarpment. The airfield is criss-crossed by two runways, the longest of which is around 4.5 km long and oriented in a north-west-south-east direction. The most prominent features are the aircraft hangars near the
Hal-Farrug area. The terminal building and the adjacent car parking area occupy quite an extensive area but in view of their being located in a relative depression, their long distance visual footprint is relatively limited. Similarly, the location and design of the old terminal building, the number of reservoirs, the various military and various other related airport structures have a relatively limited visual footprint.

3.26.2 Enhancing Features

The airfield itself presents an enhancing feature in terms of permitting access to long distance views and being practically free of built obstructions. The areas adjacent to the runways are green in winter thus contributing to the overall wetter month greenery. The terminal building is quite attractive and the parking area on its north-eastern flank has been well landscaped (see PLATE 37). At night, the parking area offers a different sort of attraction in terms of the luminaries employed in this area although the levels of light pollution are considerable. The coloured navigation lights employed on the runways and other areas of the airfield offer something which is different to that found in other built up areas. The Armed Forces of Malta headquarters between the old terminal building and the Gudja terminal offer quite an interesting composition of buildings and spaces which unfortunately can only be appreciated from close quarters.

3.26.3 Detracting Features

The main obtrusions within the airfield perimeter are the large metal clad aircraft hangars. These are visible from considerable distance and stand out like a sore thumb in close proximity to the Luqa skyline. The newly constructed radar dome contrasts sharply with the settlements of nearby Kirkop and Mqabba when the latter are observed. Various other navigation and illumination support structures interrupt the relatively open space in the area. On a smaller scale, the various Nissen huts which can be found in close proximity to the north-western aircraft aprons, are also slightly obtrusive. The design of the airfield perimeter wall, although being low and permitting long distance views, has been constructed so shabbily that it presents an eyesore. Later interventions on sections of this wall have slightly improved the situation.
3.27 Mqabba Quarry Area (M40)

3.27.1 General Landscape Description

This relatively flat area is dominated by numerous “franka” stone quarries and interspersed with pockets of agricultural land (see PLATE 38). A main thoroughfare linking the airport tunnels to the Mqabba area intersects the area. A micro-electronics plant occupies the eastern extremity of this tract.

3.27.2 Enhancing Features

There are very few enhancing features in this area, however, the fact that the quarrying takes place on a relatively level stretch of land which is not overlooked by nearby high ground, mitigates heavily against the negative visual impact of the quarrying activity. Some of the abandoned quarries have been tastefully converted into orange groves, fruit orchards or agricultural lands.

3.27.3 Detracting Features

The quarrying activity, although being carried out on level ground, represents a veritable eyesore which is compounded by the shabby nearby constructions, the indiscriminate littering and the smothering of nearby areas in a blanket of fine white limestone powder. The microelectronics plant and its ancillary mechanical plant installations represent a massive intrusion to the area and aesthetically cannot be considered to make a positive visual contribution to the area. However in this latter case, the nature of the problem is definitely not one of dereliction but rather one of not employing more visual mitigation measures.

3.28 Zejtun – Marsaskala Hinterland (M41, M61)

3.28.1 General Landscape Description

An area of gently rolling hills, mostly occupied by dry agricultural land and intersected by a number of shallow valleys. There are two main settlements (Zejtun and Marsaskala) together with a number of scattered hamlets or agglomerations of built-structures; Tal-Barrani Road on its southwestern flank and a number of busy
thoroughfares intersect the area. In common with other agricultural areas on the eastern part of Malta, a
number of farm buildings can be found in this area. Warehouses, small and garage industries, agricultural
stores and other built structures can also be found. The largest settlements of the area are located at those
bays - Marsaskala (see PLATE 39) and Marsaxlokk. The villages blend into the landscape quite well, even
though a number of buildings are modern, as the buildings are generally not very high. Inland there are some
more settlements - Gudja, Ghaxaq and Zejtun; the rest of the area is mainly agricultural. There is one main
operating hard stone quarry and a sewage treatment and waste recycling plant. The eastern flank is
demarcated by the coastal area. There are two coastal indentations, namely Marsaskala Creek and St.
Thomas Bay. This stretch of coastline is a predominantly rocky coast with wave cut platforms along some
stretches.

3.28.2 Enhancing Features
The parish church at Zejtun dominates the skyline. The belfry of the Marsaskala parish church only locally
dominates the settlement as the church is back-dropped by residential development along the nearby
slopes. The historic centre of Zejtun, although modified by modern development, has still retained many of
the traditional characteristics. The historic centre of Marsaskala is smaller and less prominent. Other chapels
and historic buildings can also be found scattered in the rural areas. Marsaskala creek is fairly picturesque
and the promenade encourages appreciation of the area. The immediate foreshore is mostly accessible and
provides a pleasant land-sea interface in this area. Picturesque rock-cut traditional saltpans can be found on
relatively extensive areas near Il-Gzira. A natural cultivated subsidence structure known as Ic-Cirku (Latnija
area) can only be observed from within the structure or from the air as the surrounding rubble are generally
higher than two metres. The white plunging cliffs due south of Il-Munxar Point are quite spectacular especially
when viewed from the Xrobb l-Ghagin area. The multi-coloured shallow water collage is quite pleasant when
viewed from the elevated areas which are as yet fortunately quite undeveloped.
3.28.3 Detracting Features

The encirclement of modern development around the historic settlements is problematic as are the rooftop accretions that characterize the majority of Maltese roofscapes. The characterless egg-crate architecture that is almost synonymous with tourism dominated areas has not spared Marsaskala. The boathouse area at St. Thomas Bay is characterized by dereliction and considerably degrades the surrounding predominantly rural landscape. Various coastal structures dot the immediate foreshore and detract from its enjoyment. Rural areas suffer from the same problems of dereliction and abandonment that are found in other rural areas with the difference that the problem is much more acute in the northern comer of this tract of land (near Fort San Leonardo). The level of dilapidation in the area is compounded by a higher level of dumping especially near a number of animal farms in the area. The area near the Sant Antnin sewage and solid waste treatment plant is also visually detracting and the presence of the large composting shed and the nearby operational quarry causes further scenic degradation. The only redeeming factor is a stretch of soft landscaped area near the entrance of the plant which decrements visual impact from the Marsaskala bypass. The level of rural development is slightly higher than in other rural areas. Apart from agricultural storage facilities and farm buildings, there are numerous structures ranging from retail outlets, stores, warehousing facilities, stables and other pockets of non-agricultur e related structures.

3.29 Xghajra Escarpment (M42, M60)

3.29.1 General Landscape Description

Stretching from Rikasoli to Zonqor, this coastal strip is predominantly occupied by abandoned or dry agricultural land. The main developed areas include Xghajra (see PLATE 40), a number of forts and batteries, an industrial estate, film facilities, Xghajra and a number of farms. The northern flank is defined by a linear stretch of rocky coast.
3.29.2 **Enhancing Features**

A number of historic structures including batteries and forts occur close to the foreshore. The best kept is the Rinella battery which also accommodates the 100 ton cannon. Pleasant long distance views towards the sea and towards Valletta and Sliema can be enjoyed from a number of vantage points along the eastern areas of this tract.

3.29.3 **Detracting Features**

The coastal area along this stretch is probably the most dilapidated in the Maltese Islands. Littering and abandonment as well as dereliction and dilapidation prevail along almost the whole stretch. To exacerbate matters, a sewage outfall is located due north of Fort St. Rocco. The Rikasoli industrial estate also conveys a sense of abandonment (see PLATE 41). The factories have been shabbily constructed, are not maintained and there is an almost total lack of attention to what happens to the intervening spaces between the factories. The estate entrance is defined by two redundant lattice towers which do not ameliorate the already ill-treated scenery in the area. The depression which bisects this industrial estate is practically a mini-dumping site. The stretch of coast occupied by the Mediterranean Film Facilities is often littered with film props and other ancillary facilities. Considerable stretches of carriageway, which link Rikasoli to the Mediterranean Film Facilities, are often littered with rubbish.

3.30 **Marsaxlokk Bay Basin (M43, M47)**

3.30.1 **General Landscape Description**

A basin with a general dip towards Marsaxlokk Bay. It is intersected by a number of pluvial valleys which also drain into the Bay. A large proportion of the basin is dominated by farmland fringed by the coastal settlements of Marsaxlokk and Birzebbuga. Marsaxlokk (see PLATE 42) is Malta’s largest fishing village whilst Birzebbuga is predominantly a tourism related residential area. A number of industrial concerns and fuel storage facilities are situated quite close to the residential areas. Various historic sites can be found in this basin, the most conspicuous of which is Fort San Lucjan which in recent years has been used as a fish-farming
base. Various farms and residential dwellings as well as garage industries and commercial outlets can be found scattered in the rural areas.

3.30.2 Enhancing Features

The fortified tower of San Lucjan near il-Ponta l-Kbira, dominates Marsaxlokk Bay by virtue of its mass, design and composition. The parish churches at Marsaxlokk and Birzebbuga also rise above the surrounding settlement. However, in both cases the effect is diminished because the church is not situated at the highest part of the settlement. Development backdrops each respective church, especially in the case of Marsaxlokk. In Birzebbuga, the higher apartments which girdle the coastline and the fuel tanks, compete with the dominance of the parish church. In Marsaxlokk, the coastal residential area has retained some of its traditional charm and has in most parts not been replaced by modern apartments. The multi-coloured traditional fishing vessels impart on Marsaxlokk a unique character through the interplay of colour on a shimmering water surface (see PLATE 43). The marine craft at Birzebbuga, also convey a lively atmosphere to the coastal scenery albeit to a much lesser degree than Marsaxlokk. The upgrading of the promenades at Marsaxlokk and Birzebbuga has enhanced the experience of strolling along the coast (except for instances in Marsaxlokk where these areas are occupied by the open air markets). A significant number of historic buildings and features are found scattered both in the historic centres of the larger settlements as well as in the rural areas. The area is particularly rich in archaeological remains but these can only be appreciated from their immediate surroundings and are not conspicuous as far as long distance views are concerned. The v-shaped valleys that drain into Marsaxlokk Bay are quite picturesque and represent a welcome relief from the nearby developed areas. The as yet undeveloped coast around Fort San Lucjan is equally picturesque except for the area near the fuel storage tank just below the Fort. The gently dipping shorelines are also quite attractive as are the pocket beaches. The reclaimed beach at Birzebbuga has furthered the coastline from the camageway and has been buffered through the construction of a beach garden. This garden has introduced an additional element of greenery to an otherwise unimpressive developed area.
3.30.3 **Detracting Features**

The scattered industrial concerns (e.g. batching plants, scrap yards) in rural areas represent a veritable eyesore and visual mitigation measures are almost absent. In many such cases, there is also an overspill of littering in the areas around the relevant industries. The fuel tanks at Birzebbuğa dominate the surrounding areas and contrast sharply with them. A number of piers and pipelines ancillary to the conveyance of fuel do not make a positive contribution to the scenery. The fuel pipes which pass through Wied Dalam are rather unsightly although they are partially masked by surrounding vegetation and the steep sides of the valley. The tasteless architecture of most apartments in Birzebbuğa has both degraded the scenic value of the coastline as well as obscured the traditional historic settlement of Birzebbuğa from long distance views.

3.31 **Kalafrana-Hal Far (M44)**

3.31.1 **General Landscape Description**

An industrial stretch of land which rises gently towards the western fringe. The eastern fringe has been partially reclaimed and is occupied by the Malta Freeport (see PLATE 44) and the ancillary breakwater. The western part of the area is occupied by the Hal-Far industrial estate (see PLATE 45), an ex-military airfield which has been converted to accommodate industrial buildings. Until recently, significant proportions of this former airfield were accessible for public informal recreation, however much of this land has now been designated for industrial purposes. The farmland between Hal-Far and Kalafrana accommodates a hamlet and a number of farms.

3.31.2 **Enhancing Features**

Fort Benghisa overlooking the low plunging cliffs at il-Mara, is one of the few enhancing features although its current use is rather incompatible with the historic value of the monument. The fort lies in a rather dilapidated state. The head-office of the Malta Freeport and the landscaped area adjacent to the building, represent one of the better examples of modern architecture in Malta.
3.31.3 **Detracting Features**

The operational area of the Freeport (container terminal) at the southern tip of Marsaxlokk Bay, with its accumulation of massive cranes, is a very prominent feature which has a visual impact on the whole of Marsaxlokk Bay. An antenna farm lies between Tal-Papa and Kalafrana. The excavated area immediately due south-west of the Freeport is a veritable eyesore, however, the impact is not visible from long distance views as there is no adjacent high ground and the excavation has taken place on fairly level land. The ex-quarry, which has been used as a disposal site for pulverized fuel ash, is a veritable eyesore especially when observed from the sea or from the air. It is quite ironic that most of the visitors arriving to Malta by air usually get their first impression of the island by flying low over this industrial area.

3.32 **Delimara Peninsula (M45, M46)**

3.32.1 **General Landscape Description**

Delimara Peninsula is a relatively pleasant rural area. There are no settlements of significance and it is defined by low upper globigerina cliffs especially on the southern and north-eastern areas. The power station dominates the eastern flank (see PLATE 46) whilst Fort Delimara and the lighthouse define the skyline for the southern tip of the peninsula.

3.32.2 **Enhancing Features**

The rural character of Delimara is one of the most pleasant in the eastern part of Malta. The elevation of its ridge (rising to an average of around 30 m above sea-level) permits fairly long distance views that cover practically the whole of the Marsaxlokk Bay Basin but extending as far out as the Rabat-Bingemma escarpment. Delimara Fort is a low-lying military structure guarding the entrance of Marsaxlokk Bay. The nearby lighthouse is one of the few found in the Maltese Islands and enhances the attention towards the tip of Delimara. A number of intimate small inlets are found on the eastern side of the peninsula whilst the almost circular bays (il-Hofriet) defined by steep escarpments are very picturesque. The shallow clear waters on the eastern side of Delimara peninsula and the fact that they convey the shimmer to the Xrobb l-Ghagin area,
greatly enhances their contribution to the general scenery. The islet between Ras il-Fenek and Xrobb l-Ghagin is another contribution to the landscape. The removal of the transmitting masts from Xrobb l-Ghagin has cleared the skyline from a feature that was introduced in the seventies. The terraced fields sloping down towards the fishing village frame the northern part of the peninsula whilst the Tas-Silg church and nearby monastery fit nicely into the surrounding farmland. The salt pans on the eastern part of the Delimara peninsula are complementary to the wave cut platforms and the caves in the area. The area is rich in archaeology but in common with most of the archaeological features in the Maltese Islands, this heritage does not feature prominently as far as long distance views are concerned.

3.32.3 **Detracting Features**

The main problematic feature in this area is the power station complex. The main chimney stack is visible from kilometres away whilst the rest of the plant and the disturbed area convey an industrial context to an otherwise relatively undeveloped area. The smoke issuing from the chimney exacerbates the scenic impact. There are pockets of dilapidation especially on the fields facing the eastern coast and the area near the lighthouse. The fields on the eastern side of the peninsula are mainly used for hunting and trapping and are littered with bird-cage supports. Most of the field-walls in this area are in a general state of disrepair and the bird hides are shabbily constructed. The Fort, although an attractive feature, lies in a dilapidated state as its use is totally incompatible with its status as an important representative of British colonial period military architecture. A number of tasteless coastal structures are found near the foreshore along the peninsula.

3.33 **South-Eastern Coastal Cliffs (M48)**

3.33.1 **General Landscape Description**

A fairly linear stretch of coast around 8 km long that extends between Kalafrana and Wied iz-Zurrieq. This coastline is characterized by very steep or plunging cliffs interrupted by pluvial valleys. The whole coastline is practically inaccessible from land (only determined abseiling and difficult trekking through some of the
valleys can provide access to the waterline). There are no residential settlements in the area and the less steep areas are generally dominated by garrigue or marginal agricultural land.

### 3.3.2 Enhancing Features

The cliff edges rise gradually from around 20 m near the Benghisa area to around 400 m at Il-Munqar. Splendid scenery is provided by the coastal cliffs and the intervening pluvial valleys against the backdrop of the shimmering deep blue sea. The watercourses along the pluvial valleys are demarcated by a line of cane reed. The cliff faces and ledges support a wide variety of natural vegetation, albeit exposed rock surfaces visually dominate. The coast is even more breathtaking when seen from seaward areas where a multitude of geomorphological features (including sea-caves) are revealed (see PLATE 47 – Blue Grotto). Viewpoints along the cliff edges command extensive views out towards the southern horizon with a glimpse of Filfla in the distant south-west. Although close to development the experience within the relatively unspoilt edges and along the steeper escarpments is one of remoteness. The main conspicuous feature of significance is Fort Benghisa, although unfortunately, this Fort lies in a dilapidated state. A number of other features of historic or scientific importance can be found along this coastline but their contribution to long distance views is insignificant. The Blue Grotto is probably the most conspicuous geomorphological feature on this stretch of coast. It attracts thousands of tourists annually who appreciate this natural feature by boat.

### 3.3.3 Detracting Features

The worst eyesores are undoubtedly the breaches in the cliff faces by the Il-Mara (subsequently filled with pulverized fuel ash and covered in a thin layer of soil and litter) and Wied Moqbol quarries. The redundant Wied Fulija waste tip is still an eyesore. In all the three cases, the degradation is worse when viewed from the seaward side. Patches of rubble, tipping, birdcage supports, unsightly bird trapping hides and trapping clearances can be found scattered throughout the area. The un-maintained rubble walls and spalls introduced in the area, add to degradation to this otherwise splendid landscape. Most of the previously cultivated land is now abandoned.
3.34 Southern Coastal Escarpment (M49)

3.34.1 General Landscape Description

A tract of coastline stretching from Wied iz-Zurrieq to Ghar Lapsi. This coastline is slightly more indented than the southern coastal cliffs and is characterized by moderately steep escarpments. Most of this stretch of coastline is accessible (with difficulty) to pedestrians but it is only accessible to vehicular traffic from Wied iz-Zurrieq and Ghar Lapsi. There is a small settlement at Wied iz-Zurrieq (see PLATE 48) and one at Ghar Lapsi (see PLATE 49).

3.34.2 Enhancing Features

Two of the most important archaeological remains are found due north of the Ras il-Hamrija area. The temple of Hagar Qim rises slightly above the surrounding landscape and can be spotted from moderately distant viewpoints. The temple at Mnajdra lies at a lower elevation and from most viewpoints is backdropped by higher ground. The most visible feature is incidentally the footway that links Hagar Qim to Mnajdra. Its linearity renders it very conspicuous against the rest of the marginal agricultural land or garigue. There are a number of towers along this stretch of coast as well as other archaeological or historical remains which are less significant as far as contribution to long distance scenic composition. The higher parts of the escarpment (which rise to around 30 m above sea-level) command extensive views towards the indented coastal rock platform as well as towards the southern horizon and Filfla. The coastline is rich in terms of geomorphology (see PLATE 47). A number of small coastal caves and intimate pocket beaches, can be found along this coastline. The most popular is the beach at Ghar Lapsi. The backdrop of the rocky escarpment greatly enhances the considerable picturesque qualities of these areas. Most of the coastal geomorphology is best appreciated from the seaward side.

3.34.3 Detracting Features

The developed areas at Wied iz-Zurrieq (see PLATE 48) and Ghar Lapsi (see PLATE 49) degrade an otherwise fairly unspoilt landscape. There was not even an attempt to emulate traditional architectural features in order
to integrate more with the surrounding sensitive scenery. The presence of a large number of cars during the warmer months add to the visual degradation. Littering and dumping are problematic especially in the vicinity of the nearby hard stone quarries. The high-pressure mains, which rise from the reverse osmosis plant, contrast sharply with the surrounding rugged escarpment. The Ghar Lapsi reverse osmosis complex is another relatively unsightly feature, especially when viewed from higher ground (see PLATE 49). The quarry immediately outside this character area is particularly unsightly and fine white dust from operations smothers considerable tracts of surrounding land. Patches of rubble, tipping, birdcage supports, unsightly bird trapping hides and trapping clearances can be found scattered throughout the area. The un-maintained rubble walls and spalls introduced in the area, add to degradation to this otherwise splendid landscape. Most of the previously cultivated land is now abandoned.

3.35 **South-Western Coastal Cliffs (M50)**

3.35.1 **General Landscape Description**

This coastline defines the southwestern edge of the triangular Rabat-Dingli Plateau and is characterized by a two-tier system of vertical cliffs separated by moderately steep clay slopes (see PLATE 50). The coastline is practically inaccessible along the whole stretch and a carriageway close to the coastline is only found in the Migra-I-Ferha area. The top of the cliffs near Dingli are the most elevated areas in the Maltese Islands rising to a maximum of around 250 m above sea-level. Some areas on the clay slopes are extensively cultivated. There are no large settlements in this area although there are a number of hamlets, especially in the vicinity of Mtahleb.

3.35.2 **Enhancing Features**

This is one of the most spectacular stretches of coast in the Maltese Islands. The cliff edges command considerable long distance views especially towards the southern horizon. The area underneath the higher tier of cliffs is often traditionally cultivated or dominated by stretches of uncultivated clay taluses. The area is rich in geomorphological features and karstic vegetation. The imposing character of the cliffs is best
appreciated from seaward viewpoints. These are also the best viewpoints to observe the geomorphology of the lower cliff tier. Archaeological and historical remains can also be found in this area but these do not significantly effect the visual composition of the area.

3.35.3 **Detracting Features**

Patches of rubble, tipping, birdcage supports, unsightly bird trapping hides and trapping clearances can be found scattered throughout the area, especially along the clay taluses. Fortunately, the clutter is partially camouflaged by the agricultural land, the boulders and the maquis vegetation found in the same area. However, when trapping activities occur in garrigue areas or near the top of the cliffs, the adverse visual effects are greatly exacerbated. The un-maintained rubble walls and spalls introduced in the area, add to the degradation of this otherwise splendid landscape. Some of the previously cultivated land is now being abandoned and thus falling into a state of disrepair.

3.36 **Western Coastal Cliffs (M51, M52)**

3.36.1 **General Landscape Description**

This stretch of coast runs from Fomm ir-Rih to Ic-Cumnija. The higher tier of cliffs is interrupted by a number of U-shaped valleys that often terminate in coastal beaches. This stretch of coast is more indented than the other stretches of coastal cliff areas. With the exception of Gnejna Bay and il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa (Golden Bay), the whole stretch of coastline is practically inaccessible to vehicular traffic. There are no significant settlements in this area and the only relatively conspicuous development is the Golden Sands Hotel at il-Bajja Tal-Mixquqa.

3.36.2 **Enhancing Features**

This is another splendid stretch of coast with scenery which is appreciated even from distant higher area. Significant stretches of the waterline are dominated by boulder screes which add to the ruggedness of the area. The headlands and bays enhance the visual composition of the scenery as does the rise and fall of the
cliff crests corresponding to the horst and graben physiography characteristic of northwestern Malta. Clay taluses often reveal gulleying features and banding which enhance the picturesque qualities of the area. The clay slopes are predominantly not cultivated although it is still possible to find pockets of cultivated land on the clay slope. There are also pockets of cane reed, garrigue and maquis vegetation which occur along the cliff systems. The beaches are splendid, the most spectacular being the Ghajn Tuffieha Bay backdropped by the Karraba talus (see PLATE 51). A number of tiny pocket beaches set amongst the boulder scree also occur in this area. They are difficult to access from land but relatively easy to access by boat. A number of archaeological or historic remains are scattered along the area but these do not significantly contribute to the long distance views.

3.36.3 Detracting Features

The hotel at Il-Bajja Tal-Mixquqa (Golden Sands) stands out in the rural landscape by virtue of its mass, orthogonal design and glaring white colour (see PLATE 52). It is visible from long distance views and is the most prominent man-made feature on this part of the coast. The Popeye Village film set does not enhance the landscape and the addition of a concrete platform at the waterline has further degraded the otherwise picturesque setting (see PLATE 53). Kiosks on the sandy beach at il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa have attempted to visually integrate in the landscape but have done so at the expense of the natural landscape. Large numbers of visitors and vehicles to the accessible bays significantly alter the peaceful setting found during the winter months. Patches of rubble, tipping, birdcage supports, unsightly bird trapping hides and trapping clearances can be found in various areas especially those close to country lanes. The un-maintained rubble walls and spalls introduced to the area, add to degradation to this otherwise splendid landscape. Most of the previously cultivated land is now abandoned. Water in the vicinity of il-Prajjiet is often contaminated with sewage from the outlet in the area.
3.37 **North-Eastern Rocky Coast (M58, M59)**

3.37.1 **General Landscape Description**

This low-lying, gently sloping stretch of coast extends from Bugibba to Tigne point. The coastline is punctuated by a number of shallow bays, some of which terminate in a sandy beach at the head of the bay. The coastal strip is flanked by some of the most intensely developed areas in the Maltese Islands near the Pembroke-St.Juliens-Sliema area but the stretch near Baharic-Caghaq (see PLATE 54) is still relatively free from permanent residential settlements. Some of the natural coastal rock formations such as those near Salini and Ghallis are rather rugged whilst others such as those at Ghar id-Dud are much smoother.

3.37.2 **Enhancing Features**

The as yet undeveloped stretch of coast is still quite pleasant even in areas like Qawra and Sliema and presents a welcome respite from the mass on nearby development. The bays are quite splendid in terms of the colours created by the shallow underwater features as well as the movements of small marine craft. The upgrading of promenades at Qawra, Sliema and St. Julians has also enhanced the coast. The creation of Gnien l-Independenza at Sliema has also enhanced the appreciation of the coastal area. The development of facilities near the coast such as those in St. George’s Bay have also generally created an attractive setting (except in areas where debris left over from previous construction was left to clutter the area). Unfortunately, a number of beach facilities (although relatively attractive) have precluded enjoyment to the public. There are a number of historic features (including a number of fortifications and towers) but most of them are either dilapidated or have fallen victim to the ravages of surrounding development. The quality of the more recent major projects near the coast (and the emphasis on surrounding landscaping) is superior to development that has occurred in the early part of the 1990’s.

3.37.3 **Detracting Features**

The mass of development at Sliema, St. Julians and Paceville, generally presents a very detracting backdrop to the coastal stretch and in recent years considerable stretches near or on the Paceville-St.
George’s Bay coastline, were, until the late 1990’s, occupied by construction sites. Apart from obstructing public coastal access, some beach facilities constitute an eyesore. The reverse osmosis plant at Pembroke and the ancillary pipeworks stand out amongst the surrounding garrigue (or disturbed garrigue). Stretches of construction rubble are a very common occurrence in areas along the Pembroke coast and other coastal stretches right to the area near Tigne’ point. Other coastal stretches in the same area are relatively free from the unsightly construction debris but are often degraded by littering that occurs as a result of bathing activities or barbeques. The Caravan site at Bahar ic-Caghaq has introduced another degrading feature together with the less organized caravan site at Qalet Marku.

The stretch of coast near Qalet Marku is adversely influenced by the presence of the nearby Maghtab Landfill.
4 LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AREAS OF GOZO AND COMINO

4.1 Introduction

The island of Gozo occupies an area of around 67 km² and is the second largest island in the Maltese archipelago. The general terrain is predominantly agricultural but interspersed with a number of settlements which generally occupy the more level areas of the island. From a topographic point of view, the terrain in Gozo is in general steeper than that in Malta. The western coastline is dominated by plunging cliffs whilst the eastern coast is generally overlooked by clay taluses which dip towards this stretch of coastline. The coast of Gozo is only slightly indented with the majority of the pocket beaches occurring on the northern coastline. The inland areas are dominated by the northern ridges which are heavily indented by contiguous valleys. Quasi-circular mesa structures occupy a significant proportion of the western part of Gozo and these topographic structures contribute greatly to the unique picturesque scenery of rural Gozo. In common with Maltese settlements, the settlements in Gozo are generally dominated by the parish church. Gozitan farmland is generally in better shape than its Maltese counterpart and areas of dereliction are rather more localized.

4.2 Mgarr Harbour (G1)

4.2.1 General Landscape Description

The harbour is the first area to be appreciated by the visitor using the ferry service. It is a semi-artificial harbour surrounded by higher ground (see PLATE 59). The settlement of Ghajnsielem is visible through Wied I-Imgarr which leads to the harbour. The activity within the harbour gives character to the area through the movement of marine vessels, some of which are brightly coloured. Older buildings occupy the area flanking the only road which leads to the rest of Gozo, these have been added to in more recent years. The eastern slopes underlying Fort Chambray are occupied by a semi-natural afforested area. Apart from the harbour
facilities (including the poles and berthing/ marshalling areas) the skyline is adorned by a fort and a number of churches. The skyline is also punctuated by two hotels.

4.2.2 **Enhancing Features**

Chambray Fort crowns the clay slopes overlooking Mgarr Harbour. The clay slope immediately due east represents one of the few sizeable afforested areas in Gozo and provides a welcome backdrop to the visitor. The church of Ta’ Lourdes fits perfectly in an already splendid skyline whilst the more distant Ghajnsielem spire complements the backdrop. The low greensand cliffs add to the charm of the area as does the natural vegetation that manages to find root in these inaccessible places. The marine vessels in the harbour add to a sense of movement and colour.

4.2.3 **Detracting Features**

The modern development which has encroached on the skyline of Mgarr Harbour represents a detracting problem to an otherwise idyllic setting. A hotel has been built too close to the escarpment, thereby diminishing the intimate scenic value of Mgarr Harbour. Modern development tends to architecturally clash with the traditional settlement by virtue of inappropriate use of design, colours, materials and texture. The marshalling area and the large amount of vehicular traffic that passes through (or is parked on the marshalling area) constitutes another detracting feature.

4.3 **Ras il-Hobż Coast (G2)**

4.3.1 **General Landscape Description**

A stretch of coast ranging from ix-Xatt L-Ahmar to the Mgarr ix-Xini. It is generally a low-lying coast with a gentle dip towards south. The coast is generally dominated by a predominantly linear rocky beach but there are sand and pebble pocket beaches at the head of the inlets. For an aerial view of the area (see PLATE 60), Mgarr ix-Xini and Ix-Xatt L-Ahmar are popular bathing areas. There are very few structures along the coast.
and the area is still predominantly undeveloped. A significant portion of the coast is accessible by foot. An islet (il-Gebla tal-Fessej) lies some 300 m due south-east of the mouth of Wied Mġarr ix-Xini.

4.3.2 Enhancing Features
The relatively undeveloped atmosphere of the area contributes to the enjoyment of this stretch of coast. Furthermore, there is a sense of remoteness because only glimpses of Ghajnsielem can be observed from many points along this coastline. The presence of the il-Gebla tal-Fessej, the view of the nearby Fort Chambray and the underlying clay slopes, the sinuous enclosure of the sides of Wied Mġarr ix-Xini greatly enhance the landscape of this area. A number of historic features such as the Torri ta’ Mġarr ix-Xini can be found in this area.

4.3.3 Detracting Features
The main visual offending feature is the infrastructure related to the sewage outfall at Ras il-Hobz. The pipes are rather unsightly as are the supports that convey them towards the sea. A number of structures scattered in the vicinity of the coast (e.g. boathouses) do not make positive contributions to the scenery and the limited vehicular access road to the area lies in a very dilapidated state. The presence of considerable amounts of cars, especially near the head of Mġarr ix-Xini creek, detracts from the more tranquil setting of the area.

4.4 Ta’ Cenc – Sanap Coastal Cliffs (G3)

4.4.1 General Landscape Description
The area due west of Mġarr ix-Xini is dominated by cliffs which run for a distance of more than 6 km (see PLATE 61). The plunging cliff brow rises from a few tens of metres to a maximum of around 140 m above sea-level and then dips down again to almost sea level near the Ras il-Bajda area l/o Xlendi.
4.4.2 **Enhancing Features**

Ta’ Cenc-Sanap Cliffs are amongst the most spectacular in the Maltese Islands. View points along the brow of the cliffs command extensive views towards Comino and the West of the Island of Malta as well as out towards the southern and western horizon. The plunging cliffs demonstrate many geomorphological features including stratigraphic differential erosion, fault lines, dipping, caves and other karst related features. The cliffs also support important plant and bird colonies, however these are visually insignificant when compared to the mass of the cliffs. A number of archaeological and historic features can also be found along this stretch of coast, but again, the contribution of these features to long distance views is practically insignificant.

4.4.3 **Detracting Features**

This stretch of coast is rather remote and littering is rather limited. However, pockets of dereliction can be encountered near Sanap Cliffs. Hunting and trapping structures also tend to be problematic in some areas.

4.5 **Rdum tal-Wardija Coastal Cliffs (G4)**

4.5.1 **General Landscape Description**

The coastline along the south-west of Gozo is dominated by another stretch of cliffs (*see PLATE 62*). These rise gradually from il-Wied Tax-Xlendi towards il-Ponta tal-Wardija but then the coastline veers suddenly towards north and the brow of the cliffs dips gently towards il-Bajja tad-Dwejra. The area of il-Ponta tal-Wardija represents the highest plunging cliffs in the Maltese Island rising almost vertically from sea level to a height of 150m.

4.5.2 **Enhancing Features**

A string of spectacular cliffs with steep or nearly vertical profiles. The only break is a pluvial valley that is terminated at the mouth of the bay and a perpendicular creek known as Il-Kantra. Geomorphology is similar to the Ta’ Cenc but the stratigraphic features are less conspicuous along some stretches. In some areas the
incline may be very steep rather than perpendicular. This stretch of cliffs is also intersected by a number of small depressions. A number of small dolines structures can be appreciated along a number of points but these are mostly visible from the seaward area. Terraced agricultural fields tend to occupy a considerable extent and these visually enhance the setting. There is an absence of a break of slope along some stretches. Views along the higher parts of the cliffs are invariably outstanding. There are a number of archaeological and historic features (e.g. It-Torri Tax-Xlendi) along the coastline but their contribution to the visual composition is rather insignificant.

4.5.3 Detracting Features

Xlendi is the only coastal stretch which is developed. This mass of tourism related development is totally incongruous with its natural setting. The only redeeming fact is that the higher terrain presented by the sides of the valley limits the zone of visual influence. Some dilapidation also occurs along the coastlines especially near the more frequented area. Other areas are characterized by trapping hides and clearances which are rather visually detracting.

4.6 Qawra-Dwejra Coast (G5)

4.6.1 General Landscape Description

A rocky stretch of the coast dominated by steep cliffs and enclosing two main dolines. There is a natural seawater conduit at il-Qawra (Inland Sea) which fills the shallowest part of the basin. A notable geomorphological structure (It-Tieqa) projects from the cliffs and almost proposes a natural post and lintel rock formation (see PLATE 63). A number of boathouses straddle the inland water body and a relatively flat stretch of land due south of the boathouses is used as an informal parking area. Il-Gebla tal-General, a steep sided islet dominates the mouth of Dwejra Bay, leaving two relatively narrow bodies of water on either side to link the circular bay to the open sea.
4.6.2 Enhancing Features

This is one of the most picturesque areas of the Maltese Islands and most of the geomorphological features can be appreciated from a landward viewpoint. The interplay between the majesty of the cliffs and the special karst features (including the almost circular structures of the two main dolines) with the sea creates a very dramatic ambience which is enhanced by the direct backdrop of the setting sun over the distant horizon. The intersecting Wied Ilma contributes to the composition as do a number of terraced fields that adorn some of the moderate slopes in the area. Natural vegetation tends to dominate the watercourses in the area and this imparts a welcome touch of greenery contrasting with the rather harsh surrounding landscape.

4.6.3 Detracting Features

The “boathouse” settlement and the ancillary accretions stand out as an eyesore in this otherwise undeveloped stretch of coast. The situation is exacerbated by the activity generated by visitors especially during the warmer months. Cars, vans and coaches tend to be obtrusive even from relatively long distance views. The inland water body has been pierced by a number of slipways and the area immediately skirting the water body lies in a fairly derelict state. The parking area is not organized and the surfacing does not do justice to the surrounding scenery. The small chapel which overlooks the built-structures is of little architectural significance and the various accretions were not complementary to the surrounding natural landscape. Pockets of dereliction can be found in various areas. The visual impact of nearby soft stone quarries is very significant especially when viewed from the higher points along this stretch of coast.

4.7 North-Western Coastal Cliffs (G6, G7, G8)

4.7.1 General Landscape Description

This area comprises the westernmost tip of the Island and is also the most remote area in the Maltese Islands. This stretch of coast is only accessible through rough country roads. Very steep or plunging cliffs characterize the coastline. The brow of the cliffs tends to dip gradually downwards towards the east. Part of the cliffs are interrupted by pluvial valleys (Wied ir-Raheb, Wied il-Mielah (see PLATE 64) and Wied il-Ghasri).
4.7.2 **Enhancing Features**

The geomorphological features on the cliffs render this area quite spectacular from a scenic point of view. However, the full splendour of this stretch of coast is only revealed from the seaward side. A number of spectacular sea caves are also found in this area. The area conveys a feeling of remoteness and commands extensive views out to the horizon. The mouths of the pluvial valleys are very picturesque when viewed from the brows of the cliffs at the head of the valley. Historic and archaeological features tend to be comparatively limited in this area.

4.7.3 **Detracting Features**

Even in this remote area, there is still evidence of littering, spent cartridges and trapping sites. However, the extent of the problem is rather contained when compared with other coastal areas.

4.8 **North Zebbug Coast (G9)**

4.8.1 **General Landscape Description**

A coastline characterized by a rock platform which is overlooked by a number of discontinuous escarpments. The flat part of the coastal platform is occupied by hundreds of salt pans. With the exception of part of Xwieni area, this stretch of coastline is rather undeveloped. A coastal carriageway runs parallel to the coast along a higher shelf of the coastal rock formation.

4.8.2 **Enhancing Features**

Salt pans have been carved into the rock in this area and these give a special character to the coastal rock platform. The area is practically undeveloped and there are a number of geomorphological features (il-Qolla l-Bajda) which greatly enhance the visual composition of the area. Differential erosion in the globigerina ledge as well as patches of phosphate nodules render the areas even more picturesque. Stands
of Tamarix have been planted in this area. The pebble beach, the wave cut platform and the aquamarine colours of the shallow bed at Xwieni Bay provide a splendid setting to the whole area (see PLATE 65).

4.8.3 Detracting Features

Derection near il-Qolla l-Bajda as well as tracts of construction rubble along the concrete coastal carriageway have greatly detracted from the scenic beauty of the area. Patches of concrete have been laid to enhance access to the coastal areas in order to aid salt gathering operations as well as to facilitate access for the divers. Vehicular access to the rock surfaces as well as oil leakages from vehicles leave unsightly patches that contrast sharply with the generally smooth rock texture and are visible from a considerable distance. Construction debris and gravel carried by surface runoff contribute to additional dereliction in the area.

4.9 Marsalforn Basin (G10)

4.9.1 General Landscape Description

A shallow stretch of coastline which is mostly accessible and dominated by two Bays. This is one of the most developed coastal areas in Gozo and is very popular with bathers and people undertaking other marine related activities. A coastal carriageway flanks the whole stretch and a ring of predominantly tourism related dwellings girdles Marsalforn. The coastal stretch between Marsalforn and Qbajjar has been developed into a promenade which is heavily frequented especially in summer.

4.9.2 Enhancing Features

The bays of Marsalforn and Qbajjar are excellent for bathing activities and attract thousands of visitors. Some stretches of the rocky coast have retained a number of the original features. A number of small coastal caves can be found along the low coastal cliffs. The shallow sea reveals a multitude of aquamarine colours
during still and bright weather. The promenade at Qbajjar presents a welcome open space relief from the adjacent mass of development. The marine craft in the two bays contributes to a dynamic seascape.

4.9.3 Detracting Features
The mass of incongruous development along considerable stretches of Marsalforn stands out in the foreground against the rural hills in the backdrop (see PLATE 66). Qbajjar suffers from the same problem to a much lesser extent. The rocky shore is littered in some areas. Construction debris litters the northern flank of the Qbajjar promenade and is especially unsightly from the seaward area.

4.10 North Xaghra Coast (G11)
4.10.1 General Landscape Description
A gently concave stretch of coast between Ghajn Barrani and ir-Ramla. This stretch of coast dominated by clay slopes underlain by boulder screes. The only exception occurs at Ramla Bay where a sandy beach demarcates the mouth of the valley (see PLATE 67). With the exception of ir-Ramla, this part of the coastline is relatively inaccessible and practically undeveloped.

4.10.2 Enhancing Features
The scenery of this part of the coastline is very picturesque, especially when viewed from the surrounding higher ground. The golden red colour of the sand, the watercourse defined by the reeds, the terraced fields and the shallow blue-green sea combine into an exceptionally picturesque setting. The coastal area around ir-Ramla is also rich in history although (with the exception of the Roman Villa) the features do not significantly contribute to long distance views. A statue complements the otherwise undeveloped area on the sandy beach. The harsh topography created by the boulder screes constitutes a very rugged landscape which adds to the perception of remoteness. Pockets of cultivated land can be found in the area due south of the Sandy beach at ir-Ramla as well as in pockets amongst the boulder screes and along the clay slopes.
4.10.3 **Detracting Features**

The main detracting features arise from the popularity of ir-Ramla especially in the summer months. Masses of visitors temporarily displace the tranquillity of the winter months. Littering on the beach constitutes another problem although regular cleaning diminishes the problem. The presence of a large number of parked cars is visible from long distance views. The kiosks at the western corner of the beach can improve upon fitting of the design with the otherwise relatively unspoilt landscape.

4.11 **North-east Nadur Coast (G12)**

4.11.1 **General Landscape Description**

Another remote stretch of coastline interrupted by two main valley systems. Clay slopes predominate considerable stretches of the coastline and in most cases these are underlain with boulder screes. Two pocket beaches can be found at San Blas and Dahlet Qorrot. Vehicular access is restricted to each beach.

4.11.2 **Enhancing Features**

The rugged boulder screes and the pocket beaches complement the picturesque scenery created by the water-land interface. Patches of agricultural land are found even amongst the boulders. Cane reeds delineate the watercourses and add a touch of greenery especially in the summer months.

4.11.3 **Detracting Features**

The boathouses at Dahlet Qorrot represent an eyesore which is visible even from long distance views (see PLATE 68). Some littering and dereliction occurs near the beaches.
4.12 **North-east Qala Coast (G13)**

4.12.1 **General Landscape Description**

A predominantly rocky gently sloping stretch of coast which defines the eastern extremities of the Island of Gozo. Although no settlements are found in this area, a considerable proportion of the coast is occupied by a hard stone quarry.

4.12.2 **Enhancing Features**

There are a number of interesting geomorphological features such as pop-up features, faults, caves and other features which contribute positively to the setting. The area is also rich in features of paleontological interest but these make only modest contributions to long distance views. The Qala redoubt, fits perfectly in its otherwise undeveloped setting (see PLATE 69). However, this feature lies in a dilapidated state.

4.12.3 **Detracting Features**

The quarrying activities represent a veritable eyesore. Fortunately, the topography reduces the adverse impact to the immediate vicinity of the area but the impact is very visible when viewed from the seaward side. Apart from the disruption on the topography, quarrying plant and other buildings lie in a state of disrepair. Furthermore, dust arising from the operations tends to smother the surrounding landscape. Gravel litters significant tracts along the coast.

4.13 **South-east Qala Coast (G14)**

4.13.1 **General Landscape Description**

A predominantly rocky stretch of coast, which is mostly defined by step gradients and low escarpments. With the exception of the Hondoq ir-Rummien area (see PLATE 70), this coastline is practically inaccessible and undeveloped.
4.13.2 **Enhancing Features**

A number of islets (e.g. il-Hnejja, il-Gebel Tal-Halfa, il-Gebel Tac-Cawla) lie very close to the shoreline. The geomorphology of the area is quite varied and includes features related to erosional, stratigraphic as well as tectonic forces. The pocket beach at Hondoq ir-Rummien enjoys good views of Comino on the opposite side of the channel.

4.13.3 **Detracting Features**

Hondoq ir-Rummien is dominated by the ex-desalination plant as well as by the disused hard stone quarry. The area lies in a dilapidated state and the situation is exacerbated in the summer months when the area is frequented by hundreds of visitors including those alighting from boats which berth next to the jetty.

4.14 **Eastern Qala Slopes (G15, G16)**

4.14.1 **General Landscape Description**

An area of moderately sloping land due east of the Qala-Nadur Plateau. Substantial tracts include terraced farmland but there are patches of garrigue or abandoned agricultural land. There are no major roads or settlements in this area.

4.14.2 **Enhancing Features**

The terraced agricultural land gives a distinctly rural character to these slopes. Long distance views of Comino as well as the Northern Malta coastline are especially pleasant as are the rock formations and the islets in the foreground.
4.14.3 **Detracting Features**

Patches of abandoned farmland and dilapidated rubble walls detract from the pleasant scenery in this area. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape.

4.15 **Southern Nadur Slopes (G17)**

4.15.1 **General Landscape Description**

Moderately sloping land between Nadur and Ghajnsielem. There are no major settlements in the predominantly cultivated area. A number of farms or other buildings are scattered mainly around the thoroughfares which criss-cross the area.

4.15.2 **Enhancing Features**

The terraced agricultural land gives character to the area, especially during the winter and spring months. There are a number of historic features in the area (e.g. chapels) albeit these impart only a moderate influence on long distance views. Wied Biljun is another enhancing feature in the area.

4.15.3 **Detracting Features**

Abandoned agricultural land is the main problem in this area as it lowers the quality of the landscape. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape. A number of incongruous buildings and structures which flank the carriageways also impart a detracting visual influence.
4.16 **Qala-Nadur Plateau (G18)**

4.16.1 **General Landscape Description**

The plateau with a palmate edge rises to an altitude of around 130 m above sea level. The settlements of Nadur and Qala (see PLATE 71) occupy significant tracts along the southern edge of the plateau whilst the northern areas are predominantly either farmland or garrigue.

4.16.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish church of Nadur dominates the surrounding settlement whilst the smaller church at Qala similarly influences the surrounding settlement but to a much lesser degree. Areas within the historic cores still retain much of their original character and two windmills give additional character to the skyline. A number of other churches, chapels and historic buildings add to the charm of the settlements. The edges of both settlements command extensive long distance views. The stretch of garrigue near il-Qortin Ta’ Isopu presents an interrupted stretch of natural open space. There are some archaeological remains and areas of ecological importance on the plateau but these tend to be somewhat insignificant as far as long distance views are concerned.

4.16.3 **Detracting Features**

The quarry in the area represents an eyesore and the influences of operation include smothering of surrounding vegetation through airborne dust. There are pockets of littering and dereliction in the farmland. Tasteless apartments that represent an eyesore even to long distance views dominate areas along the southern edges of both settlements. Derelict farm buildings make a negative contribution to the rural scene as do the few greenhouses which are found scattered in the area. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape.
4.17 **North Nadur Valleys (G19, G20)**

4.17.1 **General Landscape Description**

This system of coastal valleys is generally intensely cultivated (see PLATE 72). Narrow coastal strips join the mouths of the main valley systems. The terrain is generally moderately steep. No major settlements are found in this area.

4.17.2 **Enhancing Features**

Pleasant stretches of cultivated landscape where watercourses are demarcated by reed canes, contribute positively to the scenic quality. The patched agriculture and the terraces greatly enhance the landscape value. Agricultural stores are few in number, small and widely scattered. Dry cane screens to protect agricultural products from fierce northerly winds are widely used in this area.

4.17.3 **Detracting Features**

Abandoned patches of agricultural land, incongruous countryside development as well as littering and dumping of construction debris constitute the main visual problems in this area. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape.

4.18 **Mgarr ix-Xini Valley (G21)**

4.18.1 **General Landscape Description**

A very sinuous and steep sided valley (il-Wied Ta’ Mgarr ix-Xini) bisects the area (see PLATE 73). The western side is dominated by the Ta’ Cenc escarpment whilst agricultural land predominates along the moderate slopes of the eastern sector. A number of villas are scattered around the lower reaches near il-Kantra Ta’ Mgarr ix-Xini. Only a limited number of local roads cross the area.
4.18.2 **Enhancing Features**

The terraced fields make significant contributions to the positive visual qualities of the area. Stretches of relatively undisturbed garrigue and the rugged valley sides are very picturesque. The watercourses are demarcated by stretches of cane reed. A stand of olive grove lies due south of the settlement of Xewkija. The most visually significant feature of historic importance is the coastal watchtower which guards the entrance to Mgarr ix-Xini. The elevated areas enjoy spectacular views towards Comino, western Malta and the horizon.

4.18.3 **Detracting Features**

Pockets of dereliction and littering are predominantly near the carriageways, close to the animal farm, near Ta’ Lambert and along some stretches of agricultural land. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape.

4.19 **Xewkija Plain (G22)**

4.19.1 **General Landscape Description**

The largest relatively flat area on the island of Gozo. Parts of Rabat and Ghajnsielem as well as the whole of Xewkija are found in this area. The non-built-up areas are predominantly cultivated. The area is intersected by some of Gozo’s busiest carriageways and development in rural areas includes the Gozo stadium, the Maltese Islands’ largest conglomeration of greenhouses, industrial buildings, the heliport, cemeteries and other smaller buildings.

4.19.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish church of Xewkija rises majestically over the settlement and dominates the whole area ([see PLATE 74](#)). The main churches at Ghajnsielem have a similar but more localized visual influence. The historic parts of the settlements have retained many aspects of their former character. The historic area of Central Rabat is especially attractive although the contributions to long distance views are limited by surrounding
development. Rundle Gardens contributes to the Rabat skyline through the taller trees and represents one of the few open spaces in Rabat. The terrain which rises gently towards Rabat and is overlain by the Gozo General Hospital imparts a soft transition between the rural areas and the Gozitan Capital. The afforested area due north of the Xewkija industrial estate also imparts a transitional effect. Cultivated land on this plain is a significant enhancing feature. There are a considerable number of historic buildings in rural area. These include chapels, towers, hamlets and other smaller features of historic significance. The area is also rich in archaeology but the visual signature of these features is invariably limited to contiguous areas.

4.19.3 Detracting Features

The most significant scenic problems occur within or near the urban area. The factories at the Xewkija industrial estate do not make positive contributions to the scenic character of the surrounding areas. The modern development within or near the edges of the respective settlements, degrades the urban skylines. The showrooms and commercial establishments along the main routes are not especially attractive. The lattice tower near the Maltacom exchange detracts from the skyline of the surrounding area. The Gozo racecourse track is not especially offensive from close quarters but represents a veritable visual intrusion when viewed from the surrounding higher ground. Farm buildings, especially those between Xewkija and Sannat represent another visually degrading feature. A number of isolated or grouped industrial concerns (especially the construction industry related ones) are particularly offensive on the surrounding scenery. A significantly large area of construction debris and littering is found immediately due west of the Gozo Heliport (for aerial view of Heliport see PLATE 75). Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape.
4.20 **Ramla - Pergla Valleys (G23, G25)**

4.20.1 **General Landscape Description**

This valley system is predominantly dominated by terraced farmland. The terrain is generally moderately steep. Most of the area drains onto the spectacular sandy beach at Ramla. Pockets of garrigue also occur in this area. There are no major settlements and the main carriageways border the southern edges of this character area. The main access to Ramla closely follows the path taken by the main watercourse (see PLATE 76).

4.20.2 **Enhancing Features**

A very picturesque valley system especially when viewed from surrounding higher ground. Most of the land is still cultivated and the higher areas also enjoy long distance views towards the sea. The cane reeds that demarcate the watercourses, snake along the lower reaches of the valley. This string of greenery is especially conspicuous during the summer months by virtue of the contrast with the drier terrain. In-Nuffara stands out as a low mesa on the southern edge of this area. This area is also moderately rich in archaeology but the visual signature of this heritage is very limited in extent.

4.20.3 **Detracting Features**

Occasional littering and dilapidation occur in rural areas. The development overlooking Ramla Bay is definitely out of place. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape.
4.21 Xaghra Plateau (G24)

4.21.1 General Landscape Description

A plateau with palmate edges and rising to an altitude of around 140 m. Most of the southern half is occupied by the settlement of Xaghra. The rest of the area is mainly agricultural and partly garrigue (see PLATE 77).

4.21.2 Enhancing Features

The parish church at Xaghra dominates the whole settlement. A windmill on the eastern sector also locally dominates the skyline. There are other smaller churches and chapels within Xaghra. The historic core has retained many of the original features and includes a number of historic buildings. A geological feature known as Calypso’s Cave commands splendid views towards the Ramla and Nadur areas. The area is quite rich in archaeological remains. Close to Xaghra there are two Neolithic sites, the most conspicuous of which is Ggantija Temple. This a World Heritage site.

4.21.3 Detracting Features

The unsightly development which girdles many of the edges at Xaghra, greatly detracts from the visual qualities of the traditional part of the settlement. The waste tip at Ghajn Damma is a veritable eyesore. The area around it also suffers from overspill effects. Dereliction and tipping also occurs on agricultural land. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.
4.22 Marsalforn Valley (G26)

4.22.1 General Landscape Description

This is a valley system which terminates on the northern sector with the coastal settlement of Marsalforn. The terrain is generally moderately steep. The main carriageways are mainly confined to the southern part of this character area but the link between Rabat and Marsalforn is a busy route especially during the summer months. This access closely follows the path taken by the main watercourse.

4.22.2 Enhancing Features

A very picturesque valley system especially when viewed from surrounding higher ground. Most of the land is still cultivated and the higher areas enjoy long distance views towards the sea. The cane reeds that demarcate the watercourses, snake along the lower reaches of the valley. This string of greenery is especially conspicuous during the summer months by virtue of the contrast with the drier terrain. Dams help to retain water which creates a micro-waterfall effect when it overflows over the dam after episodes of rainy weather. This area is also moderately rich in archaeology but the visual footprint of this heritage is very limited in extent.

4.22.3 Detracting Features

The settlement at Marsalforn is the most conspicuous scenic problem in the area. The impact is exacerbated by the prevalent use of white colour on the facades and the orthogonal features on the same facades (see PLATE 78). These contrast sharply with the surrounding agricultural land. The rooflines of the buildings are cluttered with unsympathetic water tanks and other roofscape paraphernalia. The older part of the settlement has been literally buried in a mass of unsightly apartments. There are only isolated examples of good architecture. In rural areas, there are a number of unsightly farm buildings and other built structures (including parking area) that detract from the rural qualities of the area. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.
4.23 **Zebbug Circular Mesas Area (G27)**

4.23.1 **General Landscape Description**

Mesas predominate in this part of north-west Gozo. A sizeable settlement (Zebbug) in fact lies on one of the mesas whilst the Cittadella lies on another. The smaller settlement of Ghasri lies at the foot of another mesa (Ghammar). This is one of the most picturesque inland areas of Gozo. Most of the area is agricultural, and the tops of the undeveloped mesas are predominantly garrigue.

4.23.2 **Enhancing Features**

The most important mesa is Cittadella Hill. This is the most renowned man-made feature in Gozo and the bastions together with the Cathedral spire crown the Rabat skyline. The parish church of Zebbug dominates over the rest of the settlement whilst the parish church at Ghasri achieves the same effect but to a lesser degree. Tal-Ghammar hill is endowed with a number of marble statues which line the path to the summit. An amphitheatre that is used during special religious functions crowns the top of Tal-Ghammar hill. Another statue adorns the frustrum shaped hill of Tas-Salvatur overlooking Marsalforn (see PLATE 79). The lighthouse overlooking Ghasri lies on Tal-Gordan Hill (see PLATE 80). This mesa also has a number of dilapidated barracks but these are mostly invisible to long distance views and can only be well seen from the air. The hill at Ta’ Dbiegi is the highest natural feature in Gozo rising to a height of 175 m. above sea level. A number of chapels and traditional farmhouses as well as other historic features fit into the rural landscape. The spaces between the mesas are often occupied by picturesque pluvial valleys. The sides of the mesas are either cultivated land, abandoned agricultural land or clay slopes.

4.23.3 **Detracting Features**

The apartments at the edge of Zebbug are totally incongruous with the character of the settlement and the surrounding rural areas. Their visual footprint extends to a considerable area and the negative impact is exacerbated through their mass, design, and use of white colours. A hard stone quarry, operating at Ghajn Abdul, scars the scenery. Off-roading activities have gullied the clay slopes at it-Taflija due south of Zebbug. A
tarmac plant due north of Cittadella also scars the landscape but fortunately its position near the valley bottom restricts the extent of the visual influence. Other structures such as farm buildings and residential development create localized eyesores. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.

4.24 **Kercem-Santa Lucija Plain (G28)**

4.24.1 **General Landscape Description**

This stretch of fairly level terrain is smaller than the Xewkija Plain. The settlement of Santa Lucija lies wholly within this area whilst parts of Kercem, Rabat and Ghasri also lie with this plain. The area is predominantly agricultural.

4.24.2 **Enhancing Features**

The main churches of Kercem, Santa Lucija and Ghasri dominate their respective settlement. These settlements have retained much of their original charm (see PLATE 81) although modern development at the edges has slightly impaired long distance views. A number of chapels and other historic features are found scattered in the countryside. These include an aqueduct and a windmill which are found due west of Rabat. An excavated pond at Ta’ Sarraflu (see PLATE 82) is surrounded by natural and planted vegetation but given its located on the brow of the ridge, its effect on long distance views is rather limited. The area is also rich in archaeological heritage, however the contribution to long distance views is rather negligible.

4.24.3 **Detracting Features**

A number of animal farms detract considerably from the value of the surrounding cultivated landscape. A concentration of such activities occurs on the plateau due south of Kercem overlooking Wied ix-Xlendi. Littering and dumping in agricultural areas is also problematic. Some agriculture reclamation practices have
resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.

4.25 Xlendi Valley (G29)

4.25.1 General Landscape Description
A pluvial valley system which extends from Fontana to Xlendi. The valley system drains onto Xlendi Bay. The area is predominantly agricultural whilst the steeper sides of the valley are dominated by natural rock inclines (see PLATE 83). Xlendi is the second largest tourism related coastal settlement in Gozo. The area is crossed by one major route which links Fontana with Xlendi and which runs roughly parallel to the watercourse.

4.25.2 Enhancing Features
The dramatic steep valley sides as well as the dense cane reed impart a picturesque quality to the area. The coastal tower at the mouth of Xlendi Bay dominates the Ras il-Bajda area. The chapel of Sant’ Andrija graces the access road to Xlendi. The terraced fields overlooking Wied il-Kantra are spectacular when viewed from the Ta’ Sarraflu area. A number of archaeological and historic features can also be found in this area but their contribution to long distance viewst tends to be confined to the immediate surroundings.

4.25.3 Detracting Features
The settlement at Xlendi is a modern mass of development which has totally engulfed the tiny traditional settlement at the head of the bay. The discotheque complex on Xlendi road has spilled onto the valley side and contrasts sharply with the surrounding natural areas (see PLATE 84). Littering and dumping in agricultural areas are also problematic. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores on the cultivated landscape. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.
4.26 **Sannat Area (G30)**

4.26.1 **General Landscape Description**

An elongated tract of plateau that is gently inclined upwards towards the south. The centre of the northern flank is dominated by the settlement of Sannat (see PLATE 85) and the Ta’ Cenc Hotel Complex whilst the north-western corner is occupied by the settlement of Munxar. The rest of the area is predominantly agricultural.

4.26.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish churches of Sannat and Munxar dominate the respective settlements. In each case, the settlements have retained much of their former character and the Ta’ Cenc hotel complex has merged pleasantly into the landscape. Agricultural land in the area generally enhances the typically rural character of this tract of land. Former shallow quarrying areas have in some places been pleasantly converted into agricultural areas.

4.26.3 **Detracting Features**

A number of animal farms are rather unsightly as are some built structures that accommodate small enterprises. Two water reservoirs dominate the Ta’ Cenc Hotel area (see PLATE 116). In spite of their mass, they are not particularly unsightly because parts of low-lying hotel development and soft landscaping has surrounded them. Pockets of littering and dereliction can be found in some of the farmland areas. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.
4.27 **Wied il-Mans Basin (G31)**

*4.27.1 General Landscape Description*

A tract of land which is dominated by agricultural land, patches of garrigue and quarrying activities. There are no settlements of significance and the only major structure is the San Lawrenz Hotel.

*4.27.2 Enhancing Features*

Tracts of the watercourses as well as the agricultural terraces make positive contributions to the scenery. The historic tower overlooking Dwejra dominates the surrounding predominantly rocky landscape.

*4.27.3 Detracting Features*

The worst visually offending features are the quarries which scar the otherwise picturesque landscape ([see PLATE 86](#)). Mounds of construction debris also flank many of these quarries whilst airborne dust tends to smother surrounding vegetation and cultivated land. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores within a predominantly traditional terraced agricultural landscape. Pockets of littering and dereliction can be found in some of the farmland areas. Hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.

4.28 **San Lawrenz-Gharb Plain (G32)**

*4.28.1 General Landscape Description*

This is predominantly agricultural plateau. The main settlements are Gharb and San Lawrenz but there are a number of smaller settlements, mainly on the outskirts of Gharb. The south-western part of this character area is dominated by quarrying activities.
4.28.2 **Enhancing Features**

The parish churches of San Lawrenz and Gharb, dominate the surrounding settlements. The historic centres of the main settlements have retained many of their former picturesque qualities and the backs of many traditional buildings can still be enjoyed through long distance views. There are a number of historic features in the settlements (see PLATE 87) as well as in rural areas which locally enhance the quality of the landscape.

4.28.3 **Detracting Features**

The main scars in the landscapes are created by the quarries operating in the area. Mounds of construction debris also flank many of these quarries whilst airborne dust tends to smother surrounding vegetation and cultivated land. Some agriculture reclamation practices have resulted in eyesores within a predominantly traditional terraced agricultural landscape. Pockets of littering and dereliction can be found in some of the farmland areas. A singular narrow lattice antenna dominates the Birbuba area but its effect on long distance view is rather limited. Some hunting and trapping hides and clearances have a locally degrading effect on the scenery.

4.29 **Ras ir-Raheb Valley (G33)**

4.29.1 **General Landscape Description**

This small pluvial valley with rather steep sides (see PLATE 88) is a rather remote part of the island and practically inaccessible.

4.29.2 **Enhancing Features**

This valley conveys a feeling of remoteness and is generally quite picturesque.

4.29.3 **Detracting Features**

Local dereliction and littering especially related to trapping activities detract from the scenic quality of the valley.
4.30 **North Ghammar Valley system (G34, G35)**

4.30.1 **General Landscape Description**

It consists of two main pluvial valley systems which drain into Wied il-Ghasri and Wied il-Mielah. There are no settlements or roads of significance in this area.

4.30.2 **Enhancing Features**

Quite picturesque valley systems with sides which are predominantly agricultural land. The church at Ta’ Pinu’ is a national shrine and pleasantly dominates the surrounding countryside (see PLATE 89). A number of chapels and other features of historic significance are found scattered around the area.

4.30.3 **Detracting Features**

There are a number of mostly redundant “franka” quarries in this area but their detracting effect on the landscape is still visible. The quarry at Tal-Ksajjem has been used to dump inert waste and remedial works to mitigate visual impact have not been undertaken. The valley floor at Wied il-Mielah has been disturbed by pipe-works related to the sewage outfall.
4.31 Comino

4.31.1 General Landscape Description

Comino is a small island located between Malta and Gozo. It covers a total area of slightly more than 2.8 km². Sheer cliffs dominate the western and eastern flanks whilst the topography in other areas tends to dip more gradually towards the sea. Low rolling hills prevail over much of the inland terrain. There are two small bays on the northern coast of the island and a shallow channel between Comino and Cominotto. For an aerial view of the island (see PLATE 55).

Comino is also renowned for its crystalline iridescent and aquamarine waters as well as for its coastal caves which are mostly found in the north-eastern and south-western areas of the Island as well as on some of the surrounding smaller islets. Apart from small patches of cultivated land, garigue covers a large proportion of the island although extensive areas have been disturbed to various degrees through past cultivation and other human activities.

Tree cover is almost absent save for small patches of afforested areas near the bays and near the south of Comino. There are also scattered patches of afforestation near the paths and other inland areas. Rubble walls are not as prevalent as on the larger islands, however there are rubble walls demarcating cultivated and abandoned land on Comino and some of the larger islets. In many cases, these have fallen into disrepair.

The island has virtually no permanent residents - there is only one hotel (see PLATE 56) and a settlement of holiday villas. The most conspicuous artificial landmark is the Comino tower (see PLATE 57) whilst other important archaeological and historic sites also occur on Comino. There is also a pig farm (see PLATE 58). From the higher parts of the island, extensive views towards Malta and Gozo can be appreciated.
4.31.2 **Enhancing Features**

The landscape at Comino is still largely undisturbed. Cliffs and islets dominate substantial parts of the coastline. The north-eastern and south-western coastlines are also dominated by a large number of coastal caves. The shallow channel Bejn il-Kmiemen (Blue Lagoon) is spectacular in terms of the interplay of blue-green colours against the backdrop of the islands. Similar colours occur in the il-Bajja Ta’ Santa Marija and il-Bajja ta’ San Niklaw. The Torri Ta’ Kemmuna dominates the whole of Comino and is clearly visible from Malta as well as Gozo. There are extensive stretches of garrigue on Comino and these impart a sense of unobstructed open space and a relief from the mass of development (especially that in the inner harbour area on mainland Malta). Even a small (practically uninhabited) island like Comino has a number of historic highlights. These include the medieval chapel of St. Marija at the head of il-Bajja ta’ San Niklaw, Ic-Cimiterju ta’ Kemmuna, the redoubt near the southern coastline of Comino, and the old isolation hospital (due north-east of it-torri ta’ Kemmuna).

4.31.3 **Detracting Features**

The most unsightly feature is the Comino pig farm which was constructed as an animal quarantine station. It is clearly visible from mainland Malta and the nearby areas have suffered from overspill of littering. Power poles and cables dominate certain parts of the Comino centre. An electricity distribution centre was constructed in the 1990’s due south of the Hotel and visual mitigation measures were not implemented. In the same area, there is a boat repair yard which represents another degrading influence on the picturesque qualities of Comino. Areas near the hotel, the villa complex and the main country lanes have suffered from the effects of surfacing with loose gravel. This was eventually washed off during torrential rain with the result that substantial areas of Comino are littered with loose gravel. Most of the rubble walls are in a state of disrepair. Other degrading features on the island include the concrete berthing areas, badly surfaced paths, and patches of littering.
5 TRENDS AND ISSUES

5.1 GENERAL -

In the period between 1990 and 2000, the Maltese Islands have experienced considerable influences arising from anthropogenic activities. There were three basic types of activities namely extension of previous activities (e.g. traditional agriculture), intensification of previous activities (e.g. greenhouses in lieu of traditional agriculture) and new projects (e.g. new hotels).

Changes in the landscape generated by forces of nature (save for those associated with the change of seasons) were by comparison rather inconspicuous. Natural forces tended to continue with eroding soil from the fields and exacerbated the degradation of un-maintained field walls. In several areas, chunks of cliff have fallen over but again this is an ongoing natural process. Although unusually heavy rainfall was recorded in several instances, the resulting destruction was not on a scale that dramatically changed the landscape. A number of tremors also occurred within the same period but again these were very limited in magnitude.

Interventions within the settlement tended to impart an influence on the internal characteristics of the Maltese settlements. Major interventions, a large number of smaller ones and interventions at the edges of settlements or in visually prominent positions tended to impart their influence on long distance views. Impacts were not entirely negative; indeed there were some impacts which made a positive contribution to the landscape.

The main influences on the scenic qualities of the Islands are indicated in the following sections. Emphasis is placed on outlining the changes that took place in the period between 1990 to 2000, rather than expounding on the situation that existed before 1990.
5.2 EXISTING URBAN SETTLEMENTS (General) -

5.2.1 Introduction

A significant proportion of built-up areas is occupied by residential dwellings. These are very broadly categorized into new residential areas and Urban Conservation Areas (which are dealt with separately in SECTION 5.3). Land-use within residential areas is not clearly defined in the Maltese Islands as in areas earmarked for terraced houses anything from retail outlets, small industry, showrooms, offices and other commercial or assembly related land-use can be found. Newer residential development is generally characterized by two to three storey buildings, often with a garage and a small front garden. There is normally lack of coherence in terms of architectural grammar or focal reference points within the more modern streets and the carriageways are often rectilinear in nature. The ratio of the facade height to the horizontal distance between opposite building facades is in the region of 1:1 (in parts of some village cores this could even exceed 5:1). Although the facades of residential dwellings are generally built in “franka” blocks, there is a tendency to use render, paint or whitewash on the external facades with the result that the beautiful appearance of the weathered local stone is hidden from view.

5.2.2 Features of the Urban Fabric

The commercial outlets interspersed within the residential fabric have in general introduced more alien features into the Maltese streetscape than new residential dwellings. The need for the demonstration of products, differentiation, advertisement and novelty has introduced a cacophony of designs which is normally relatively discordant when juxtaposed to vernacular architecture. A concentration of commercial outlets tends to occur along the busier thoroughfares and the more prominent open spaces within the settlement (concentrations or commercial outlets also tend to occur along the routes which link one settlement to another). The proliferation of garages to accommodate internal vehicular parking spaces has also taken place during the review period and this has had considerable influence on the design of the domestic facades.
Whereas in traditional urban settlements the village is dominated by the church and a number of other focal points which give the settlement a sense of place and aid orientation, the modern settlement tends to be without focus. In tourist areas, higher buildings tend to predominate but there are generally no major focal points that are easily distinguishable from the rest. Whereas former settlements tended to be dominated by the church, the more lively modern settlements tend to be dominated by prominent commercial buildings and/or hotels. Open spaces, which together with the urban architecture help to define the spatial hierarchies, are often altogether absent from the newer urban areas. Where the latter occur, they are often dominated by indiscriminate parking with the vehicular presence visually overwhelming in the local perspective.

Landscaping (hard and soft) is often limited to the more prominent carriageways and larger open spaces. The direction set by PA policies and the setting up of local councils has fortunately led to more attention being given to the open spaces within settlements. However, these initiatives need to be supplemented by a closer look at detail (which could contribute to enhancing the environmental quality of settlements) in implementing day-to-day decisions by the various Government and statutory agencies. For example, poles and signs are often installed in a position that deviates from the vertical (see PLATE 92). Pavement surfaces and kerbs bear witness to hasty and unskilled execution. It is not unusual to find the covers of inspection chambers which are not level with the tarmac surface, and debris (especially construction related) from heavily laden trucks can be found on many road surfaces with uncomfortable frequency. Oil and diesel patches can be observed with a similar regularity. The road surfaces (where a surface is actually given) are generally in a pitiful state with the surface bearing witness to countless excavations, subsidence and worn surfaces.

The situation is only slightly better on the facades. There are modest attempts to hide wires and cables or at least to organize them neatly. (see PLATE 90) All kinds of attachments ranging from hooks to support festa decorations to supports for flag supporting masts can be found on a significant number of facades. Attachments and supports for flagpoles are amongst the few elevational elements which prevail in some of the newer settlements and which can be considered as a positive contribution to the townscape. The more
recent custom of attaching a coloured luminaire at the top of the flagpole gives an added special flavour to the nocturnal townscape especially when viewed from a vantage point some distance away from the settlement.

The roofline is even more penalised with structures ranging from discordant pigeon lofts to lift shafts and air-conditioning plants. At a level higher than built structures one finds the ubiquitous unscreened water tanks and television reception masts which in some poor reception areas rise to more than 10 metres above the finished roof level and are supported by a myriad of steel guy wires which are extremely evident when viewed in silhouette from close range (see PLATE 91). In some commercial buildings, there has been a tendency to add small lattice towers (e.g. On telephone exchanges), and link microwave dishes and commercial repeater stations (some are even erected on churches and other historic areas). The introduction of cellular telephony has also implied the erection of a number of UHF antennas but fortunately these tend to be erected to share pre-existing masts and facilities and are physically relatively small. The liberalization of Citizen Band radio has seen a dramatic increase in CB antennae. Amateur radio antennae tend to be even more visually obtrusive but a dramatic increase in these types of antennae has not been noted during the review period.

Most of the development within the residential settlements has taken place within areas schemed for development in 1988. There were no significant extensions and no new towns were constructed save to a major extension to the Mtarfa settlement. The impact of this development has significantly changed the skyline in this area especially the development which was undertaken in the south-western flank of Mtarfa which unfortunately has been built too close to the escarpment and with no mitigation measures save for the fact that facades were constructed in “franka” stone although if these are not rendered or painted, they will weather in due course. The settlement on the north-west flank of Mtarfa lies in a visually more critical position. However, better architectural treatment of elevations and massing, the use of terracing, the juxtaposition of the various architectural elements and spaces as well as the fact that local stone was extensively used on the facades and that the escarpment is an afforestation area, have all contributed to mitigate the impact of such a major development on a visually very sensitive site.
5.3 URBAN CONSERVATION AREAS AND CULTURAL HERITAGE -

5.3.1 Introduction

In the early 90’s, following the introduction of the “Temporary Provisions Schemes” in 1988, the construction industry turned its focus on the existing building fabric. During that period, a lot of construction activity was taking place within Building Development Areas (B.D.A.’s) and Home Ownership Schemes (H.O.S.’s) with the result that at that time, Malta seemed like one large construction site. Initially, there was pressure to demolish existing buildings and erect new buildings in their lieu but greater conservation awareness coupled with the introduction and implementation of planning guidance have largely prevented this from happening.

5.3.2 Degradation of Historic Centres

There were a number of ways in which urban conservation areas were degraded. The scale, nature and extent of the degradation varied both within the same settlement as well as between the different settlements. The following points outline the main factors that contributed to degradation:

- Demolition of existing dwellings and their replacement by modern and visually architecturally non-contextual edifices. In most cases, the use of non-traditional materials, the resort to tasteless architecture and the increase in height and in mass prevailed. (see PLATE 27.)

- Instances where the tortuous alignment of most of the Maltese Urban Conservation Areas gave way to wider and more open streets. Unfortunately, some of these amendments were proposed by the Temporary Provisions schemes.

- A number of conspicuous large buildings were left in a dilapidated state and at the mercy of the elements and vandalism.
• Massive increase in car ownership has resulted in greater visual congestion in our village cores. Heavy vehicles also contributed to greater pollution levels which accelerated stone degradation and the narrow streets occasionally led to these vehicles scratching against corners, signs or building elevations. There was also an increase of road signage in urban conservation areas.

• Interventions in existing buildings were often ill chosen and misguided. Aluminium framed apertures, Aluminium balconies, incompatible changes to the facades, rendering or tiling of facades, the use on incongruent colours, increased use of signs and adverts and so forth.

• Some commercial activities such as small garage industries, showrooms, car hire outlets etc. started to mushroom in village cores and their presence introduced an additional detracting feature. In some instances, the activity spilled out of the premises and there are instances where, for example, vehicle engines are found scattered outside on the pavement or stretch of road adjacent to the garage.

• There was an increase in cables being hung along facades, most notably cable TV cables which constitute a grave eyesore.

• The skyline was increasingly marred by TV and other antennae as well as satellite dishes, water tanks and air conditioning plant as structures (other than washrooms) that were emerging at roof level.

• As new development almost invariably occurred on the perimeter of the village cores, and as height limitation for new development is almost invariably higher than that for Urban Conservation Areas, the result is that when observed from a similar level point, the newer development obstructs
the village core. In many instances, the distant view of the village is a mass of whitish buildings with large apertures still dominated by the parish church (see PLATE 35). The problem is more accentuated in a number of instances on the Gozo ridges where new and multi-storey development (exploiting the difference in level at the ridge break of slope) completely obliterates any visual contribution by the village core when observed from a point just below the settlement boundary.

- Very important cultural heritage such as the Megalithic temples, other archaeological remains (incl. cart ruts) remain mostly inadequately managed. The result is a continued degradation of these very important monuments as well as the non-generation of compatible activities to viably financially sustain their management and upkeep.

5.3.3 Positive Developments in Urban Conservation Areas

Whilst the negative aspects of development within UCA’s were listed above, it would be incorrect to assume that positive developments did not take place during the Structure plan review period (1990 - 1999). These included:

- Street alignments in village cores were mostly maintained as a result of adopted planning legislation.

- There were increased efforts towards sensitive conversion of traditional town houses, which by the late 90’s have become desirable property to own and reside in (see PLATE 95). This desire is also reflected in the asking prices of such houses.
• There are a number of encouraging instances whereby people are once more resorting to traditional elevational elements (e.g. The timber “gallarija”, louvered windows, antique styling signage etc.). There were also successful attempts where previous cement rendering was removed and the splendour of the local stone was once more exposed. However, in most such cases, this removal was misguided and resulted in accentuated erosion of the facade (especially when pointing was resorted to.)

• Local Councils also made a difference: A number of areas were paved and pedestrianised and a few themed or conservation compatible commercial outlets appeared, thus introducing more life to areas such as Valletta, Mdina and Cittadella. In some cases, street luminaires were also changed to a style that is more compatible to the historic status of the area. A large number of churches, fortifications and other historic landmarks were illuminated. Annual events (e.g. Birgu day, flower show in Mdina etc.) gave a new lease of life to historic areas in these special occasions and during the review period, there was a tendency to appreciate more the fortified cities of Birgu, L-Isla and Bomla. Local councils were also instrumental in the enhancement of public open spaces within urban conservation areas with the introduction of landscaping, the pedestrianisation of selected areas and the re-organization of parking.

• There were a number of initiatives to rehabilitate buildings such as windmills (e.g. Xarolla, Qala (see PLATE 96), Xaghra etc.), fortifications (e.g. Tal-Grazzja Fort including the Cannon, redoubt at Comino,), chapels (e.g. Bir Miftuh), Landmarks (Lija tower) and others. In Valletta, extensive paving has also been undertaken. These and other initiatives originated from Central government and Local Councils as well as NGO’s, commercial entities and private individuals. The Planning Authority launched a scheme to partially sponsor the embellishment of the traditional balconies.

• The designation of Urban Conservation Areas has led to a stricter and well-defined statutory protection. In a number of instances, the protection was extended to incorporate an un-built
viewshed (e.g. Mdina, Cittadella), thus protecting the respective UCA from insensitive development in its foreground.

5.4 **TOURISM RELATED SETTLEMENTS -**

5.4.1 **Introduction**

Tourism related development in the Maltese Islands has been given a boost in the late 1960’s and accelerated in pace in the subsequent decades. In the late 90’s the rate seems to have slowed down but there is still significant tourism related development being undertaken. This section focuses mostly on development that has taken place within areas designated for such development and not on tourism related development on white areas or ODZ. The following is a brief summary of the impact of tourism related development in the main tourist resorts in the Maltese Islands. Although there are tourism related facilities in other areas and in Comino, these are dealt with in other sections.

5.4.2 **Msida / Gzira / Sliema / St.Julians / Paceville -**

These settlements experienced an increase in commercial outlets (including a number of hotels) and the continuation of the trend towards high-rise buildings. An increased articulation of elevational treatment, a bolder design approach and a disposition towards the use of non-traditional materials can be observed in the more recent and prestigious development. The larger up market tourism oriented facilities also generally indicate more sensitivity towards external landscaping and better management of parking and surrounding vehicular circulation although it cannot be said that this is invariably the case. The area also accounts for the higher rise buildings especially along the coastal front where buildings above 8 stories prevail along the Sliema front. These have practically destroyed the former character of the area, as even though a few terraced houses remain, the congruency of the streetscape has been lost (see **PLATE 97**). Embellishment of coastal promenades contributed towards an amelioration of the local visual amenity but lack of maintenance and lack of attention to design and detail remain outstanding problems. The predominant visual impact was therefore an increase in urbanization and the continued degradation of remnants of
traditional architecture and townscape especially in areas close to the foreshore. The Yacht Marina at Ta’ Xbiex has radically transformed the seascape in the area.

5.4.3 **St. Paul’s Bay / Qawra / Bugibba -**

These coastal settlements have also experienced an increase in transient residential and commercial areas. Furthermore, the trend towards higher rise buildings continued. The predominant visual impacts included an increase in urbanization and the continued degradation of remnants of traditional architecture and townscape especially in areas close to the foreshore. The Urban Conservation Area in St. Paul’s Bay has suffered considerably as a result of this development and a number of prominent landmarks were demolished near the “Rдум L-Abjad” area to make way for larger residential/commercial buildings. The result was that much of the previous scenic character was lost. Embellishment of coastal promenades generally contributed towards an amelioration of the local visual amenity but lack of maintenance and lack of attention to design and detail remain outstanding problems.

5.4.4 **Xemxija -**

Xemxija lies on a promontory opposite across St. Paul’s Bay to St. Paul’s and Bugibba. An increase in development, mainly in construction of multi-storey residential areas has also been experienced in this settlement (see PLATE 98). Fortunately, trends to exploit differences in level to gain on more floors have been curtailed through the imposition of stepping in some instances. Upgrading of facilities at Mistra Village have left a more or less unchanged situation to what was existing as far as long distance views are concerned. The continued development of soft landscaping and weathering of the stone have imparted a greater positive integration of the project within the landscape. Demolition of Xemxija church and its reconstruction on a more modest scale are considered positive from a visual perspective. The siting of the regional fire station at tal-Kortin, whilst commendable from an operational point of view, has negatively affected the scenic qualities of the area given that no mitigation measures were employed.
5.4.5 **Mellieha** -

Increase mainly in the construction of multi-storey tourism related dwellings or second homes (see PLATE 93). The villa area at Santa Maria Estate continued to be developed at a moderate rate and road surfacing in the 90's improved the general external appearance of the area. Increase in commercial activity was also registered, especially along Main Street. Signage and shop front designs tended to introduce a detracting element and a number of older houses were demolished to make way for commercial development. Extensions to some hotels (mostly upwards) were also registered during the review period. Urbanization and increased congestion of the sandy beach especially during the warmer months contribute to a general scenic degradation of the area. Increased maritime congestion, the fish farms at the mouth of the bay and the caravans imparted additional negative visual impacts.

5.4.6 **Marsaskala / St. Thomas Bay** -

Increase in commercial outlets and continuation of trend towards high-rise buildings. Residential dwellings and tourism related apartments also on the increase (see PLATE 39). Visually, the creation of Il-Maghluq Nature reserve contributed to open space and greenery in the area but was received with mixed feelings by the local population. Embellishment of coastal promenades contributed towards an amelioration of the local visual amenity but lack of maintenance and lack of attention to design and detail remain outstanding problems.

5.4.7 **Marsaxlokk / Birzebbuga** -

Moderate increase in commercial activity and residential development. Visually, the Freeport Project and the power station dominated the bay. Fish farms were also introduced to the bay. In the early 90’s, attempts were undertaken to create artificial sandy beaches. The one at Pretty Bay was significantly extended and part of it has been planted with palm trees and converted to an open recreational area (see PLATE 99). The stretch from the Pretty Bay water polo pitch to the pier near Pinto Battery has also been similarly reclaimed but was eroded by rough weather in the early 90’s. Two sandy beaches have developed near il-Maghluq (M’Xlokk) and near the excavation waste spill at L-Ingernier (Delimara).
5.4.8  **Mgarr Harbour (Gozo)** -

There were a number of factors that changed the character of Mgarr Harbour, most of which were resultant to increased communication between the main islands. These included the increase in commercial outlets, the introduction of the Gozo marina together with the MMA club house, the construction of Mgarr Hotel, Grand Hotel and Chambray Project. The larger tourism related projects as well as increased maritime activity in the Harbour to a certain extent contributed to visual detraction by virtue of massing which overwhelmed the scale of the port and its traditional characteristics (see PLATE 59).

5.4.9  **Xlendi (Gozo)** -

Xlendi lies at the head of a narrow bay at the edge of a steep sided V-shaped valley. Unfortunately, this once quaint fishing village has continued to see an intensification of tourism and second-home related development with the result that much of the former charm has been lost (see PLATE 100). Fortunately, the visual enclave prevents the negative visual impact from being imparted to other areas in Gozo and is thus mostly restricted to the immediate vicinity of the locality.

5.4.10  **Marsalforn / Qbajjar (Gozo)** -

Marsalforn was another pleasant settlement which has fallen victim to the pace of building development which engulfed the Maltese Islands. The little church at Marsalforn, which once dominated the bay, is now engulfed by surrounding apartments and hotels that have despoiled the former character of the area (see PLATE 101). Although Qbajjar has suffered to a lesser extent, the development that has taken place cannot be said to have contributed positively to the scenic qualities of the area. The recent dumping over “Il-Qolla” l-Bajda has added to the dereliction. Fortunately, the area is scenically secluded from distant view by the still mostly rural higher ground but the negative impact extends to the areas on the NW flanks of Xaghra ridge and the eastern flanks of Zebbug ridge.
5.5 CONSTRUCTED MAJOR PROJECTS (generally not including those within previously built-up areas) -

5.5.1 Introduction

During the review period, a number of major projects external to the statutory development areas have been undertaken and these have left a considerable impact on the Maltese landscape depending on their mass, height, design, position and relation to surrounding features. The influence is often a mixture of negative and positive impacts. In general, there has been more attention towards articulation of facade elements; the juxtaposition of the various building masses and structures; the more adventurous use of new materials, colours and textures, the organization and visual mitigation of roof mounted mechanical plant, the organization of vehicular traffic and parking and the introduction of landscaping in surrounding spaces and its integration with the built project. The Planning Authority played a very important role in this gradual but perceptible transformation.

The nature and design of major projects outside schemed areas was quite variable ranging from the new airport terminal and ancillary development to the power station at Delimara, the Kalafrana Freeport development and so forth to tourism related and communication related development.

5.5.2 Industrial development

In the case of industrial development, where extensive use of steel and concrete has been resorted to, the resultant impact on the landscape has been normally detracting. For example, the gantry cranes at the Kalafrana Freeport (see PLATE 102) and the fuel storage tanks at Benghisa greatly contributed to the scenic detraction of Marsaxlokk Bay and the same could be said of the Delimara power station especially through its 100 m plus chimney stack which is visible from large areas of the Maltese Islands (see PLATE 46). Unfortunately, the Freeport complex and the ancillary excavation at Benghisa lie right within the approach
flight-path of MIA’s runway 3/2 and therefore give a first negative impression from the air to most visitors to Malta.

A micro-electronics plant at Kirkop has also undertaken expansion which continued to increase the visual impact on its already imposing structure. The construction of a large food processing plant in San Gwann Industrial Estate has blocked distant viewsheds from various areas of Bellavista road at San Gwann. Another construction, this time on the Western Flank of the Xewkija Industrial plant in Gozo, has visually dominated the area, this being accentuated by the fact that the factory was constructed on the slope overlooking the “Taflija” area. Fortunately, in the Xewkija case, the architecture employed in the construction of the food processing plant represents a positive development from the rather bleak and un-imaginative architecture that was prevalent in the main industrial areas.

The building construction plant at Hal Farrug (especially the blue painted shed) represents another example of industrial development which presents a very negative scenic impact through its mass, colour and relationship to surrounding landscape features. Apart from being very inappropriately located in an otherwise un-built and level area, this complex lies virtually on a break of slope at the edge of an elevated ridge. Furthermore, it lies practically underneath the approach threshold of runway 1/4 and therefore is very conspicuous to low flying aircraft using this runway or to the Gozo helicopter.

Various warehouses and construction plants developed along Zebbug bypass, near tal-Barrani road, on the link road from Lija to Mosta and other areas, have left a significant detracting scenic impact on the surrounding landscape. In most of these cases, there was very little effort to introduce visual mitigation measures to soften the resultant eyesores, and extant operational procedures do not aid to ameliorate the situation. Worse eyesores have been created by scrap-yards in various areas such as B’Bugia and Qormi/Zebbug and where the sites happen to lie close to a picturesque V-shaped valley. In many such instances, the development sticks out like a very sore thumb in the landscape and visual mitigation measures were all but non-existent. A number of car wash and auto-repair centres have also been developed in areas
ODZ Some like the car wash centre at Iklin have been conditioned through planning permission to employ soft landscaping to soften the visual impact of this development. After a few years, the mitigating influence is apparent.

5.5.3 Aviation

Other projects such as the new MIA terminal building have left a generally positive impact by virtue of the design, its setting in relation to surrounding topography and land-use as well as the design of the landscaped parking area. In spite of the large scale of the project, the impact on the landscape has been rather contained especially from long distance views and overall it represents a positive contribution as a development of its kind. (See PLATE 37.)

5.5.4 Social and Community facilities

Projects such as the private hospital in St. Venera, have resorted to mostly traditional materials on their external facade and together with the utilization of stepped massing have mitigated the impact of such large buildings. The surrounding landscaped areas also make a positive visual contribution to the urban landscape save for the fact that previous uninterrupted views from Triq Salvu Psaila have been partially blocked by another building. The use of traditional materials does not however guarantee integration into the landscape. For example a number of private and public schools have been built ODZ but to date, none has yet integrated well into the surrounding rural landscape in spite of well-directed efforts to mitigate. Perhaps the main reason lies with the fact that stone has not yet had time to weather and the surrounding soft landscaping has not yet matured. The very scale of such projects renders mitigation very difficult to achieve. But definitely location, design and the relationship of the site with the surrounding areas play a pivotal role in this respect. For example, in the case of the secondary school at Santa Lucija, the very fact that the site lies on a ridge line and that it is relatively massive translates into a conspicuous silhouette on the Sta. Lucija - Luqa skyline especially when viewed from various areas in the inner and outer harbour region.
Projects at the University of Malta have in general introduced novel architectural expressions in the local context. Here greater architectural liberty was employed with generally positive results. The use of mainly traditional material on certain blocks intermingled with the use of well matched colours, together with the articulation of the external facades and their relationship to intervening spaces, resulted in a complex architecture which when viewed from a distance delivers an experience of adventure but the whole generally fits with the surrounding context. It is a pity that soft landscaping was only frugally employed in the newer areas, with extensive areas being devoted to open vehicular parking. Fortunately, the landscaped areas due south and East of the Malta University complex were generally retained and maintained. The National pool complex in the same area has introduced a mass that blocked previous long views towards Gzira, Manoel Island and Valletta from Regional Road. The architecture of this building is neutral in the sense that it does not evoke particular emotions but at the same time it does not unnecessarily disturb the eye.

Various new government housing projects were constructed in various parts of Malta during the structure plan review period. The architecture of these buildings is not particularly evoking but it represents a definite step forwards from the egg crate architecture of public housing projects of the 1970’s and 1980’s. Lack of maintenance has unfortunately led to degradation especially where colour was employed on the external facades. Public housing apartments tend to locally dominate the skyline as their height usually exceeds that of surrounding buildings by a number of storeys. The use of traditional timber balconies in public housing projects such as that at Valletta was again a step in the right direction.

5.5.5 Tourism related development

Definite improvements were noted on tourism related architecture especially that related to the larger projects. For example, the Corinthia San Gorg utilized non-traditional materials but the articulation of the facades, the stepping of masses on the lateral flanks, the careful use of pastel colours and the external landscaping have made positive visual contributions to the area. The negative visual impacts of this project include the mass of the hotel which together with the adjacent SAS Radisson is visible from certain parts of Gozo. This occurs by virtue of their location on a peninsular stretch of land on Malta’s lower lying north-east
Another negative impact of Corinthia San Gorg relates to the obstruction of a historic tower from long distance views.

Improvements to and upgrading of existing hotels was also noteworthy. The Coastline Hotel introduced a steeped roofline dominated by the central slab apex. The surrounding landscaping was more organized and well designed. In another less drastic improvement example, the painting of the Paradise Bay Hotel at Cirkewwa in a pastel shade clearly demonstrated how a simple intervention drastically reduces the impact of a massive building upon the surrounding undeveloped environment.

A large number of restaurants have started operations in various tourist areas in Malta and Gozo but their impact was generally limited to the local streetscapes. Of particular note are the various catering outlets that opened in Valletta and Mdina whereby much greater respect towards the urban qualities of the cities was demonstrated. A hotel in Mdina for example was also created within a historic building and great sensitivity was demonstrated in the execution of the project with the result merging beautifully with the Mdina skyline. A number of heritage attractions were also created in historic areas or buildings in Malta and Gozo. Tapping of the great potential of these buildings finally started to gather pace.

Other visitor attractions were created or upgraded. Some were temporary fun-parks so their visual influence was temporary in nature. Others, such as the “marine park” at Baharic-Caghaq and the recreational park at Il-Prajjet were upgraded. In the former example, additional structures and landscaping improved the visual impact of the project whilst in the latter, additions to the project introduced further intrusions in an otherwise rather unspoilt landscape. The creation of a new Cinema Village at Rikasoli improved upon the dereliction that formerly existed in some parts of the area, however the structures are generally not compatible with the historic context of Fort Santu Rokku.
5.5.6 **Telecomms**

A number of steel lattice towers have been erected between 1990 and 1998. These included masts intended for the tracking of cars and a television mast at Iklin. The design, materials and height of lattice towers as well as the requirement to make them conspicuous for air traffic renders them inherently visually detracting with very little opportunity for mitigation against scenic impact. To aggravate matters, technical requirements dictate that such masts are erected on high and visually prominent positions.

Paraboloid satellite communication dishes such as those at the Melita Cable complex and at the Maghtab earth station present different problems. These dishes need a considerable collecting surface area in order to maximise the incoming signal and are normally painted white for thermal stability reasons. Hence they tend to be visually very conspicuous. Limited landscaping at and around the Melita Cable site as well as the nature of the surrounding land-forms has implied that the site is practically invisible from most land areas due north of the site with the exception of the lattice tower employed in the reception of terrestrial TV signals from Malta and Sicily.

5.6 **DEVELOPMENT IN INDUSTRIAL AREAS -**

5.6.1 **Introduction**

Industrial development in the Maltese islands continued with a pace that was different from previous years. Within the main industrial estates, the trend to construct standard factories was mostly discontinued with the exception of the Mosta Technopark. Several large factories were either extensively modified or in the case of Hal Far built on previously un-built land. The visual landscape of the main industrial areas has been relatively unchanged during the review period save for Hal-Far, San Gwann, the Mosta Technopark, modifications to the Kirkop micro-electronics plant, development along Mriehel Bypass and the foods processing factory in Xewkija Industrial Estate in Gozo.
There was also a significant development in the smaller industrial areas (e.g. Hal Luqa, Ta' Handaq, Mosta (Wied il-Ghasel industrial area), Zebbug (Hal Mula), the area enclosed by the outskirts of St. Venera, Qormi and Hamrun together with the Mriehel Industrial area. Apart from manufacturing, warehousing, retail, commercial and service industries can also be found in this area. The urban quality and the architecture of the industrial areas is usually poor to very poor with isolated exceptions such as the Brewery at Marsa which is well designed and landscaped, the Brewery at Mriehel and to a lesser extent the head office of one of Malta’s major banks (which is not industrial but lies in the middle of an industrial area). The most visually offensive estates are those at Ta’ Handaq that is surrounded by agricultural land.

In **Sections 5.6.2 to 5.6.6**, emphasis is being placed on areas where most development has taken place during the Structure Plan Review period. Other areas such as the Malta Ship Building and Ship Repair industries that have not been significantly visually modified during the same review period are not considered.

### 5.6.2 Hal Far -

Hal Far industrial estate lies in the south-east of the mainland. It started as a disused airfield but in the 1970’s efforts were undertaken to create an industrial area. Initially, the estate was not popular with manufacturers as it was considered to be distant from the main settlement centres however this situation is slowly changing. The relatively large open space and the ex-runways were extensively used for informal recreation but more recently; part of one of the runways was designated for the quarter-mile racing event. Other parts of the estate were assigned for non-manufacturing uses. The most prominent structures in the estate are the ex-foundry, the ex-aircraft hangers and a number of construction related plants, the most conspicuous of which lies just outside the MDC controlled estate boundaries. A groupage container depot was also constructed on the northern flank of the estate. In the late 1990’s, large areas of the estate were excavated to accommodate the relocation of a major factory.
The general scenic atmosphere at Hal Far is not one that inspires investment. Although some ad hoc improvements did take place since the beginning of the review period, the state of most of the government built factories is still deplorable and attempts at landscaping and designing the areas around them have been all but non-existent (see PLATE 45). Signage is again almost absent and most of the premises where manufacturing takes place lack the corporate identity expressed either through architecture or through other means of external design. The intermingling of recreational activities with the construction industry and manufacturing is not helpful either. Fortunately, the predominantly flat ground which is not overlooked by any high ground above, mitigates on the visual effect. Unfortunately, the approach path to the most heavily used runway in Malta lies almost directly over Hal Far. The new factories indicate much better attempts at industrial design but these attempts have been limited to within the respective company’s site curtilage. The approach route from either Gudja or Kalafrana is littered with eyesores which include litter, construction rubble, ill-designed walls, metal scrap and other scenically detracting features.

5.6.3 Mosta Technopark -

The Mosta Technopark stands out in stark contrast with the situation at Hal Far. The superiority stands out on a number of points. The first is that visually, the estate has an element of coherence which is linked by common architectural features, the use of well detailed facades in “franka” stone, the hard landscaping elements and the restriction of operations only to electrical or electronics related activities. External landscaping has been considered at the design stages rather than as an afterthought and parking and its relation to the access points to the industrial buildings has been well thought out. Furthermore, resort was made to multi-storey factories to make more efficient use of land. (See PLATE 23.)

The soft landscaping of the area was still immature at the end of the review period but if the current maintenance is continued, it is expected that the area would become even more attractive than it currently is.
5.6.4 **Mriehe**l -

An extensive area due south of the main industrial estate was envisaged as a private small-scale industry area. Whilst some parts of this area were indeed developed in this manner, large tracts of land remained undeveloped or were developed for large-scale non-manufacturing use. Thus activities ranging from showrooms, warehousing, superstores and retail outlets were developed in this area. At the end of the review period, various unfinished construction operations ranging from excavations to partially constructed buildings can be found in various parts of the area and most of the road surfaces are either not yet formed or remain unfinished. Hence substantial parts of the area flanking Mriehe Bypass give the impression of a partially complete and visually non-cohesive construction site.

5.6.5 **Albert Town**-

A small area between the ship-building and warehousing areas of the Grand Harbour and Marsa Industrial Estate. The site is fringed by one of Malta’s busiest thoroughfares and a number of large showrooms (by Maltese standards) have been constructed on the western flank of the site. These showrooms have contributed to the reduction (in part) of some of the dereliction that existed in this part of the area. The rest of the site is generally dominated by a number of small industries interspersed with storage facilities. The streetscapes in the central part area constitute an eyesore by virtue of the lack of maintenance and industrial littering as well as the state of the road surfaces.

5.6.6 **Development in other areas** -

There are many areas around Malta where industrial operations take place but are not controlled by the Malta Development Corporation. These range from the Malta Ship Building and the Dry-Docks in the Marsa/Cottonera area to various scattered construction related plants or service industries. Other areas which were designated for predominantly residential use have been converted to predominantly small garage industry use. The most important change that has occurred in the dry-docks was the demolition of the high wall that used to fringe the yard on the Bormla (Cospicua) side.
5.7 MINERAL EXTRACTION –

5.7.1 Introduction

Mineral extraction in Malta takes place through open cast quarrying. To a much lesser extent, there is extraction of salt from seawater through salt pans but this type of activity is rapidly declining. There are two types of quarries, hard stone and soft stone. Their visual impact depends mainly on their extent and the nature of operations, the age of the quarry and the surrounding topography. During the review period, there has been a tendency for quarries to expand in the vertical direction and/or the horizontal direction. Some stone and soft stone quarries have become redundant and have been converted to uses such as repositories for municipal waste (a practice which has been discontinued), repositories for construction waste, sites for garage industries, water reservoirs, greenhouses or have been rehabilitated to agriculture.

During the review period, stricter planning legislation has envisaged the need to plan mineral extraction operations and to minimize environmental impact. Therefore, applicants often had imposed bank guarantees to ensure compliance with planning permit conditions. Positive response has been relatively slow but there are already examples (especially around hard stone quarries) where hard and soft-landscaping schemes have been implemented. In most cases, earth mounds and native shrubbery is resorted to and in some instances there were conditions to remove batching plants to a lower and therefore less obtrusive level. It is still too early to appreciate the mitigation measures as soft landscaping takes years to mature, however, results look promising.

5.7.2 Soft stone Quarries

The largest quarry area in Malta is an L-shaped parcel bounded by the settlements of Kirkop, Mqabba and Qrendi on the south and by MIA runway 06/24 on its northern flank. From the air (including close up satellite images) this area is extremely evident and predominates by virtue of the stark contrast with the surrounding terrain (see PLATE 38). Fortunately, since the area lies on fairly level ground and is not surrounded in the proximal vicinity by significantly higher ground, the area is not particularly visually offensive even when
observed from certain close quarters. The same could be said of the soft stone quarries at San Gwann, most of which have ceased to be operational before or during the review period.

Soft stone quarries which lie on the side of a valley are however particularly visually offensive. This problem is inherent to most of the quarries which occur along Wied Xkora and Wied Hanzir l/o Siggiewi. The blinding reflection created by the freshly cut stone and the normally orthogonal planimetric shape of the quarry with its vertical faces contrasts sharply with the surrounding normally cultivated terraced fields. The visual problem is often exacerbated by the generation of significant amounts of dust onto the surrounding countryside and by the presence of spoil heaps. A number of soft stone quarries have been repartially rehabilitated into agricultural land (see PLATE 105) and this tends to mitigate against their former negative visual impact if judiciously undertaken.

The worst visual problem related to soft stone quarries occurs in Gozo in the Santa Lucija - Kercem area (see PLATE 104). Unfortunately the quarrying here takes place along the sides of a visual basin which encapsulates the Qawra/Dwejra area and which has a high landscape value by virtue of its geomorphology, orientation, proximity to the sea, cultivation and relative absence of built structures. There has been little success during the review period to curb their expansion and to introduce effective mitigation measures to reduce their visual impact. Trucks also tend to leave a very evident dust trail or mud trail, depending on the prevailing season.

5.7.3 **Hard Stone Quarries**

Hard stone quarries are in general more dispersed and often constitute a greater visual liability than soft stone quarries. Some reasons for this problem are summarized as follows:

- Hard stone quarries tend to occur on upper Coralline Limestone and given that this was the last major deposited stratigraphic layer, it tends to be located on higher ground. Therefore, Upper
Coralline Limestone quarries are usually more visually prominent by virtue of their relative elevation.

- Batching plants are often constructed on hard stone quarry sites. When situated at a level which permits views from areas external to the quarries, batching plants tend to be notoriously unsightly.

- Given that excavation methods differ substantially from those employed in soft stone quarries and given that the product is much more finely divided (i.e. Spalls and sand as opposed to “franka” blocks), more fine dust tends to be generated. Vehicles and wind tend to deposit a white blanket of dust onto the surrounding landscape which changes the appearance to a rather bleak one. Furthermore, the generated dust tends to be whiter in colour than “franka’ dust and this enhances the colour contrast.

- Coralline Limestone quarries often occur in the vicinity of beautiful garrigue areas and in areas of special landscape value. The negative effect of these land-uses is therefore exacerbated.

- There are a number of instances where explosives have blasted the visual enclosure defined by the parent rock surrounding the excavations. The landscape significance of these occurrences has been invariably to add a significant visual scar to the relative landscape or seascape. This is especially true when occurring on coastal cliffs (some of which were subsequently scheduled for ecological and scenic value). In all cases, it is rather difficult to visually remedy the damage done through the breaching of cliffs.

5.7.4 **Salt Extraction**

There are various areas especially on the north-east coast of Malta and northern coast of Gozo where salt extraction takes place or used to take place. The salt pans through which this activity takes place constitute a
positive visual amenity to the area (see PLATE 106) except in areas where shabby storage facilities or equipment is kept nearby. Apart from the sculptured normally orthogonal salt pans which are hewn in the rock, the presence of water in the cooler months or the presence of shimmering salt crystals in the summer months, contribute to the scenic qualities of the respective areas. It is a pity that in some areas cement or concrete has been used in lieu of the roughly hewn rock or to accommodate equipment or vehicular parking in the vicinity. In some places, stone huts have been built and machinery placed in order to render the extraction and transport of salt easier. Crates, pipes and other equipment and wastes left lying near some of the extraction sites create a detracting sight.

5.8 **TRANSPORT -**

5.8.1 **Introduction**

The land transportation situation in Malta has changed quite significantly in the review period as a result of a dramatic increase in car ownership rates. The main result was that in the beginning of the 1990’s, the need for the upgrade of the arterial route network was quite pressing in view of the traffic congestions at the rush hours experienced mainly in the Msida and Marsa areas. To this effect, the St. Venera tunnels and the Mriehel Bypass as well as the Tal-Qroqq / San Raffaele junctions were constructed in the 1990’s. Improvements were also undertaken to the arterial network in the vicinity of Marsa industrial estate. Initially, these improvements have eased the previous congestion problems but given the steady increase in cars on the roads, by the year 2000, congestion in the rush hour started to occur once more.

Other improvements were undertaken to other areas near the Grand Harbour but in general, these did not involve major re-routing of circulation flows. The more significant changes were undertaken near Blata l-Bajda, near the entrance to the Qawra-Bugibba area and at Marsaskala. Other interventions in terms of re-surfacing of the busier thoroughfares and less significant modifications to traffic flows occurred in various areas of Malta and Gozo. Traffic lights began to be re-introduced or installed in various areas around the Maltese Island to streamline traffic flows at busy junctions or to render pedestrian crossing safer.
Improvements were also undertaken to the Gudja International Airport, berthing facilities in the Grand Harbour as well as in the Gozo harbour.

5.8.2 **Mriehel Bypass and Santa Venera Tunnels**

The Mriehel Bypass and the Santa Venera tunnels were probably the most significant road improvement projects to be undertaken in the 1990’s (see PLATE 108). The proposal involved linking the northern part of the arterial network with the southern part through a tunnel underneath Santa Venera. A ditch was excavated to accommodate the entrance to the tunnels and this was faced in roughly hewn stone. The visual impact of these road works is thus limited to the immediate vicinity of the Santa Venera tunnels. The grade separated junction on the southern side of the tunnels has a greater visual footprint but given that a built-up area surrounds this structure, the visual influence is mainly limited to the carriageways and buildings in the vicinity. The Mriehel Bypass fringes the southern confines of the Mriehel industrial areas and the visual impact of this project has been mitigated by the greater attention to detail and the routing through areas of higher elevation than the carriageway. As far as long distance views are concerned, the main influence is limited to the lighting poles which occupy the centre-strip of the bypass.

5.8.3 **Road network near Tal-Qroqq Hospital and University**

The construction of the new hospital at Tal-Qroqq as well as new facilities at University have dictated that significant modifications had to be undertaken on the previous carriageways. These improvements were also ultimately linked to the improvements on the Msida to Gzira stretch of the arterial network. Given that most of the works were undertaken in areas confined by built-up areas, the visual influence of the project was mainly limited to the immediate vicinity of the thoroughfares.

5.8.4 **Link road to Corinthia San Gorg and SAS Radisson**

Two major hotels were constructed in the 1990’s near the north-western tip of St. George’s Bay. A link road to the arterial route was constructed in the late 1990’s. Other ancillary road works were also undertaken at
Pembroke, also with the aim of rationalizing access to the arterial route. The main visual impact of the link road was due to the disturbance of the valley leading to St. George’s Bay. The treatment of the area overlooking the valley (due north of the link) leaves an impression of an incomplete job. This area was supposed to be landscaped in order to soften the transition between the carriageway and the rest of the valley.

5.8.5 **Upgrading and resurfacing** -

Various road works were undertaken throughout the Maltese Islands in order to upgrade the carriageway and the ancillary sidewalks. These were mainly limited to the urban areas and thus the influence was confined to the immediate locality. Almost in all cases, an improvement was noted in terms of the standard of workmanship and the materials used. However, this does not mean that there is little room for improvement. Indeed, compared to even some of the smallest European settlements, the standards of the Maltese road building and open space surfacing techniques are primitive. Apart from design considerations, the main problems are related to lack of attention to detail and still poor standards of workmanship. (See [PLATE 109](#).) The state of a substantial number of our vehicles and a culture of almost absent maintenance exacerbate the problem. Leaking oil or fuel spillages mar road surfaces and damage left to road infrastructure arising from vehicular collision is often left unrepaired for long periods of time. In the year 2000, there was still some reluctance to adopt appropriate soft landscaping measures to impart a more appealing appearance to the Maltese carriageways.

5.8.6 **Traffic signage** -

Some improvement was registered in terms of the quality of signage used in conjunction with the carriageways. A problem of standardization still remains in terms of the design and colours used but progress has also been registered on this front. The main difficulties still lie with the workmanship and the design in terms of placement of these signs. Many of the supports are not truly perpendicular to the ground and the connection to the rest of the flat surface is often identified by a mass of unsightly cement. Although these are very localized details, they are repeated so often that they impart a feeling of dereliction even to newly
constructed carriageways. Limited improvement was once again noted in terms of workmanship but much remains to be done to achieve an acceptable level of standard.

5.8.7 **Grand Harbour berthing** –

Considerable works were undertaken in order to upgrade sea ferry terminal facilities in Valletta. These consisted in the creation of a berthing area as well as upgrading of the terminal buildings. The main visual influence from close quarters was the creation of the boundary wall which, through the use of iron railings, has permitted some visual access to the rest of the harbour area. Long distance views from the opposite side of the harbour were not significantly affected except for the greater intrusion of the berthing area into Grand Harbour. The Valletta-Floriana bastions still maintain an overwhelming influence in this area except for the instances when large cruise ships, military marine craft or other large sea vessels, berth along this stretch of the Grand Harbour.

5.8.8 **Gudja International Airport**

The air passenger terminal at Gudja started operations in the early 1990’s. The project was in general well executed and the parking area ancillary to the airport was well landscaped and maintained. The design of the terminal represented a good exercise in terms of fitting a relatively massive building in the local context and the use of local stone reinforces the character of most of the rest of urban Malta. Overall, this project represented a good case study on the execution of construction works, the importance of landscaping open surfaces and the organization of the various spaces in a large project.

5.9 **SERVICES** -

5.9.1 **Introduction**

The development of any country is intimately linked with the provision of a good infrastructural network. Most of the main services only marginally affect the landscape since the bulk of the infrastructure is located underground. The most conspicuous aspects therefore tend to be concentrated around those areas where
the relevant service is generated, processed or otherwise conveyed through a relatively large facility. The worst offender in visual terms tends to be the electricity network because a substantial proportion of the service is conveyed via rather unsightly structures.

5.9.2 Water -

The main Reverse Osmosis (R.O.) plants are located at Cirkewwa, Tigne, Pembroke and Ghar Lapsi (see PLATE 49). These are rather large isolated structures which (with the exception of the Tigne’ Reverse Osmosis Plant) tend to dominate the relatively undeveloped surrounding landscape. The Tigne’ Reverse Osmosis was eventually decommissioned in view of decreasing water consumption and other operational reasons. The soft landscaping adopted on some of the R.O. plants matured during the review period and tended to somewhat soften the visual impact of the main building, however few mitigation measures were adopted to limit the visual impact of the pipe-works and disruption to the ground undertaken during the laying of the pipe-works. A reservoir was constructed in a quarry at Mellieha and from a scenic point of view, the reservoir is almost un-noticeable. There were numerous changes to water mains and these created temporary unsightly disruptions to the road network. Various operations were undertaken in order to clean sediment and debris in valleys. The most prominent was the cleaning of parts of Wied il-Qlejgha in the late 1990’s. The result was that most of the littering was removed and some plant regeneration has taken place, however, the use of gabions set in a metal cage contrasted with the traditional rubble walls. Other valley cleaning exercises have partially improved the scenic situation but resulted in damage to local vegetation. No new dams were constructed in valleys during the review period.

5.9.3 Electricity -

Various stages of the Delimara power station became operational during the review period. This plant is particularly offensive because it is set in the middle of a predominantly rural area and the high chimney is visible from many parts of Malta. Additionally, the power station overlooks one of the most picturesque fishing villages in the Maltese Islands. The power station has entailed excavation of significant parts of Rdum il-Bies and the creation of a substantial rubble mound which adds to the unsightly appearance. The only
redeeming factors relate to having set the plant in a concave excavation and the terracing of the excavated rock behind the power station plant. The creation of a tunnel to release cooling water effluent into the Hofra Iz-Zghira has created another eyesore on this part of the Delimara peninsula as little attention was paid to mitigate visual impact in this very picturesque area.

Main gallery from Marsa to Mosta rendered some high-tension lattice towers redundant. Substations in the countryside increased but efforts to camouflage them was also noted. An electricity distribution centre was constructed at Comino and has created a veritable eyesore. Some countryside poles damaged through high winds but not replaced. Other poles were damaged by corrosion, impact (especially by vehicles) and lead pellets from hunting practices. The number of street lighting poles has increased - some left in a metallic finish rather than being painted in pastel shade of yellow, others were painted in a dark shade of blue.

5.9.4 **Sewerage** -

Considerable upgrading has taken place during the review period but most of it has been limited to underground facilities and thus of no visual significance except during the construction stage. New pumping stations were the exception to this general rule. However, pumping stations are generally rather small and the zone of scenic influence is normally quite limited in extent, especially when constructed in urban areas. Soft landscaping near the Wied il-Ghajn sewage treatment centre has achieved a degree of mitigation. The areas near the sewage outfalls at Wied Ghammieq and il-Prajjet continued to present eyesores. The same observation applies to the Ras il-Hobz outfall in Gozo as well as the pipe infrastructure leading to the Wied il-Mielah and San Blas outfalls. In the case of Ras il-Hobz, interventions were undertaken to reduce the impact of the sewage outfall by directing release in deeper waters. This has resulted in noticeable clearer waters in the vicinity of this site.

5.9.5 **Telecomms** -

During the review period, the main telecomms related visual impact continued to be the “forest” of television reception antennae and other domestic antennae. (See **SECTIONS 5.2.2 and 5.3.2**
A number of telecomms support facilities were installed during the review period (Section 5.5.6). For example, upgrades were undertaken to the Gharghur master antenna (see plate 103) to incorporate additional TV transmitters, FM stations, link microwave dishes and so forth. A very conspicuous television lattice tower was erected at Iklīn and a number of smaller lattice towers (e.g. At B‘kara and Mellieha Exchanges) were erected to relay telephony and related services. During the late 1990’s, a proliferation of repeater antennae has taken place especially on the rooftops of the more prominent buildings in urban areas. These antennae are requisite to the mobile telephone networks that became operational during the same period. Fortunately, the visual signature of cellular phone repeater stations is generally restricted to the immediate neighbourhood especially in areas where they merge with a forest of television antennae.

A large microwave antenna was installed next to the existing one at the Maghtab Earth station. Given that this feature is white in colour and that the complex is surrounded by agricultural fields, the negative visual impact is quite considerable especially when viewed from higher ground. Large paraboloid and other antennae have also been installed at Madliena (Cable TV site). Some of the larger structures are visible from Gozo and the impact is exacerbated by the fact that the site lies on a ridge and in close proximity to a historic fort.

Additional communications antennae have appeared on various commercial premises. Amateur transmission or relay antennae have been installed on various buildings including schools and churches. Other small antennae were intended for community radio, television repeaters and data links. The introduction of domestic satellite reception was envisaged to introduce an additional eyesore to the Maltese rooftops; however, smaller satellite dishes have implied that by the year 2000, the eventual impact was much less severe than that of terrestrial television (Yagi) antennae.

A new radar at Luqa was installed in the late 1990’s and is covered with a white geodesic dome. The visual impact was mitigated through reading as part of the airport infrastructure. However, it contrasts sharply with the backdrop of the south airport settlements especially when viewed from a northerly direction.
A number of coastal radars have been introduced especially on sites occupied by the armed forces of Malta. Some such as the one at Dingli and the one at the Red Tower (Marfa) have been mounted on the top of historic buildings and in such cases these do not make a positive contribution to the architecture of such buildings.

In some areas rationalization of haphazardly dangling telephone wires was undertaken. In some cases these were bundled to render wiring neater. These arrangements are very unsightly but their influence is normally limited to the immediately contiguous areas.

Introduction of cable television introduced unsightly thick cables and ugly distribution boxes onto our facades. By the year 2000, cable TV was not significantly effective in contributing towards the dismantling of terrestrial “Yagi” antennae that clutter the Maltese urban skylines but a degree of improvement was noted to this effect.

During the review period, the Deutsche Welle relay station at Xrobb l-Ghagin was dismantled and the lattice towers were removed from the skyline of this picturesque area.

5.9.6 Signage and Adverts

A proliferation of signage and large posters on blank building facades and rooftops has taken place during the review period. A number of these signs were lit at night. Traffic related signs have also increased. The problem of attention to detail in the installation of these signs has already been referred to in SECTION 5.8.6.

On a local level, street name plaques (mostly in Maltese) were replaced. Each council tended to adopt different styles, shapes and materials, but this is not necessarily a bad thing.
5.10 WASTE DISPOSAL -

5.10.1 Introduction

The disposal of solid waste continued to represent one of the main visual problems in the Maltese Islands. The official disposal site at Maghtab has increased to the size of a small hill whilst “unofficial” dumps occur all over the islands, especially in the eastern and southern parts of mainland Malta. During the review period, Gozo was observed to suffer slightly less from the problem although the visual impairment at the Xaghra waste tip has increased. Apart from cultural considerations, the main difficulties seem to stem from the fact that during the 1990’s, there was a dramatic increase of activity in terms of excavation (to utilize underground space) and to clear large sites prior to construction works (e.g. Hilton site). These construction activities have created a huge increase in the amount of construction debris and undoubtedly account for the drastic increase in the size of the Maghtab waste tip. During the review period, the Wied Fulija waste tip was rendered redundant and a limited amount of rehabilitation was undertaken.

5.10.2 Maghtab -

Solid waste continued to be dumped at Maghtab at ever increasing rates since 1990. The closure of Wied Fulija and excavation material from a number of projects around the Maltese Islands inflated the vertical and horizontal extent of Maghtab to such an extent that it has increased in height to around 100 m above sea and its limits are encroaching ever closer to the Coast Road. By the end of 1999, the Maghtab dump has become a veritable eyesore which is visible from as far off as Mdina which lies due South and from certain areas in eastern Gozo (see plate 11). The toxic fumes which frequently emanate from the dump, add to the appearance of dereliction and to the eyesore problem. The northern flanks of the dump have been steeped to encourage future landscaping initiatives once dumping operations cease.

Various studies and proposals to address the problem at Maghtab have been undertaken by various public agencies as well as private individuals. The major health, visual and land-take problem that the Maghtab landfill poses has been recognized by all. Alternatives such as recycling of organic wastes both at public
recycling complexes as well as at domestic levels have not left the desired results. Proposals to limit construction related debris has also not been successful and even though some major projects were compelled through planning conditions to dump construction wastes out at sea, the construction related waste related problem at Maghtab was far from being curtailed. Alternatives to reclaim land along the coast have also not materialized, mainly due to lack of information on coastal ecologies, the relative absence of planning guidance on this matter and the objections of the marine environment lobby. Minimization of waste at source initiatives also proved to be relatively ineffective to address the Maghtab problem.

5.10.3 Pulverized fuel ash (discontinued) -

Pulverized fuel ash generated by the formerly coal burning power station at Marsa used to be dumped at a site known as Il-Mara, into a former hard stone quarry. The dark fly ash used to be a veritable eyesore and used to settle onto the surrounding roads and fields. During the later dumping stages, fly ash used to be dumped literally into the sea over sheer cliffs. Il-Mara happens to be an area of great scenic beauty, as well as an area of considerable environmental and scientific interest.

The tipping of fly ash has been discontinued in the mid-1990’s and the area has been “rehabilitated” through a covering of soil. Although this mitigation measure has reduced the visual impact, the scar in the cliff face is still very evident, especially when viewed from the sea.

5.10.4 Closure of Dump at Wied Fulija -

The rubbish tip at Wied Fulija was another veritable eyesore which punctured the unspoilt continuity of the south-eastern sheer cliffs. What was formerly a pluvial valley in lower Coralline limestone cliffs ended up as a heap of rubble. When tipping operations were discontinued in the mid-1990’s, the whole site was cordoned off, the sides terraced and limited soft landscaping undertaken. Soil was used to cover the whole site so that in future it would be easier for vegetation to take root.
Whilst the rehabilitation project has been slightly successful in mitigating on the land-front side, the mitigated impact is still very much evident when viewed from the sea as the tipping mound is visible as a negative human intervention in the continuity of the southern Coralline Limestone cliffs. During the Structure Plan review period, there were several attempts to landscape the area and to change its use to a managed recreational space but till the end of 1999, none of these envisaged interventions had taken place.

5.10.5 **Solid Waste Treatment plant at Sant’Antnin** -

In a bid to recycle organic waste, a solid waste recycling plant was constructed in the vicinity of the sewage treatment plant at Marsaskala. Consequently, a large metallic clad shed was erected in order to accommodate the recycling process. This shed is the most visually obtrusive element in the area and is also very visible from the air (see plate 111). No visual mitigation measures were employed to mask the unsightly feature and the problem was compounded by the release of bad odours especially during the warmer months.

5.10.6 **Scrap Yards** -

Scrap yards continued to mushroom during the Structure Plan review and where existing ones were present, these continued to grow with little or no visual mitigation measures. The mass of twisted steel scrap is easily perceived as an incongruent intrusion in the rural landscape. Even when such scrap yards occur in mostly developed areas, they tend to stand out as conspicuous eyesores by virtue of their lack of unifying and discordant visual elements as well as their mass and colour (see plate 112).

The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that planning guidance on scrap yards is either vague or non-existent. The lack of alternatives, as well as land ownership related problems, has rendered the relocation of these eyesores extremely difficult.
5.10.7 **Informal dumping** -

Indiscriminate dumping continued to take place around the Maltese Islands. The dumping ranges from spalls falling from uncovered trucks to half dismantled buses lying in the middle of nowhere. Increased access to the countryside through greater access of vehicular transport has severely exacerbated the problem. Problems have also increased with the introduction of tipping charges at the official dumping sites as well as the lax enforcement measures. Thus, individuals revert to dump illegally, often along scenic routes, rather than pay the charges imposed at the tipping sites. (See plate 113.)

Sunday picnickers also play a considerable role in dumping. The widespread availability of non-biodegradable plastic containers, the lack of waste bins coupled with an uneducated attitude towards indiscriminate dumping has resulted in the accumulation of all sorts of litter in our countryside. Even glass bottles which can be recycled against a small re-payment can be found intact or broken even in the remotest and non-accessible areas of our countryside or coast. The introduction of aluminium tin cans into the local consumer market has helped to introduce an additional tipping problem.

Hunters and clay pigeon shooters contribute to dumping through the multitude of multicoloured spent cartridges and shreds of blasted clay pigeon remnants. Initiatives to clean debris originating from shooting activities have been few and far between and operations are rendered more difficult if the debris falls into deep crevices, thick spiny vegetation, onto steep boulder terrain or if it becomes embedded within the soil fabric.

Agricultural malpractices also contribute to tipping. The introduction of galvanized steel and plastic irrigation pipes has resulted in whole stretches of rubble walls being overlain by these pipes when the irrigation activity is not in operation. Disused pipes are also left indiscriminately around agricultural land rather than being properly disposed of. The increase in greenhouse and cloche practices has also generated an additional agriculture related tipping problem. When the transparent plastic deteriorates due to wind, mechanical wear or solar exposure, it is often dumped in a nearby heap rather than being properly disposed.
of. With the proliferation of greenhouses in the early 1990’s and the increased use of cloches, the problem has increased in a corresponding manner. Incineration of wastes on site also contributes to visual dereliction due to the thick smoke often generated, the non-proper disposal of the resultant burnt matter and ashes as well as the falling particulates from the smoke plume. There are also tendencies to leave all sorts of litter lying around the farmer’s residence, the agricultural store, the agricultural workshop or any non-cultivated patch of land nearby.

Animal husbandry related malpractices also generate their litter. Animal manure is often left lying in heaps close to the farm. Whilst this practice is considered quite acceptable in other parts of the world, in Malta the relative distance between animal husbandry concerns and other human activities is extremely limited. Thus such heaps are considered to be much more visually offensive than they would otherwise be. Apart from visual considerations, other health, olfactory and psychological considerations contribute to such impressions. The presence of concentrated manure and its spread by various mechanisms around the farm also precludes many forms of vegetation from taking room, thus adding to the appearance of dereliction around the farm.
5.11 **AGRICULTURE -**

5.11.1 **Introduction**

For the purposes of this section, agriculture is taken to comprise all cultivation, whether of flora or fauna, which takes place on land. Therefore, animal husbandry, silviculture and horticulture shall also be considered in this section. Traditional cultivation is the largest land-user in Malta, accounting for over one third of the territorial land use. Most of what is considered as picturesque “natural” landscape in the Maltese Islands is in fact man-made. Hence whilst agriculture is very important in economic terms since it supplements local food, it is very important as it is the most important contributor to the picturesque rural qualities of the Maltese countryside.

The various agricultural elements of Maltese agriculture and their visual contribution to the landscape are indicated below.

5.11.2 **Cultivation in the open -**

Modern agricultural practices have introduced elements which are alien to the traditional landscape. These include cloches, greenhouses, “franka” block rubble walls, concrete reservoirs and so forth. The problem has been compounded by the failure to introduce visual mitigation measures, the general lack of attention to detail during construction, the general lack of cleaning up after construction and/or operation and the abandonment of extensive tracts of previously cultivated agricultural land. On the other hand, increased irrigation practices especially through sprinklers and drip-irrigation have introduced more greenery to the Maltese agricultural landscape especially during the drier months. The modern practices of viticulture at Mamisi l'oo M’Xlokk and within the National Recreational Centre at Ta’ Qali have also introduced a visually pleasant component to the Maltese landscape. An equally positive visual contribution arises from stubble mulching practices whereby stubble is left in the field after harvesting. Apart from drastically reducing erosion, this practice gives a softer appearance to the Maltese summer countryside as opposed to a parched and dusty fieldscape.
5.11.3 **Cloches** -

Cloches are small, often semicircular plastic tunnels often erected parallel to each other in the field to shelter young plants from the elements. They started being introduced in earnest in the early 90’s as a relatively cheap and effective substitute for greenhouses. Productivity generally increased and greater summer greenery on agricultural land has also been noted. On the negative side, cloches have introduced large expanses of plastic in the Maltese countryside during the season when its best visual qualities are exhibited, i.e., in spring. Furthermore, once dismantled, the plastic is often left to decompose in the strong Mediterranean sunlight in the open fields, often placed in a heap against a rubble wall. When the plastic becomes frail and brittle, the wind continues to disperse it onto the surrounding countryside.

5.11.4 **Greenhouses** -

The early 1990’s witnessed a proliferation of plastic covered greenhouses especially in the west of Malta (see plates 114 and 115). Greenhouses were perceived as the means to greatly increase productivity within a controlled environment. The net result was an increase in artificial visually degrading structures into the Maltese countryside. Given that greenhouses serve to maximise on the collection of sunlight (especially during the winter months), it is very difficult to camouflage them from above, as this would obstruct the incoming sunlight. Nor is it possible in most cases to cover them up with green or earth coloured netting as this would cut on sunlight.

Some soft landscaping mitigation can be achieved where the greenhouses lie on plans or very gently rolling countryside which is not overlooked by higher terrain. Thus greenhouses lying in depressions on certain parts of the Rabat/ Dingli plateau are not particularly offensive as greenery in the line of sight between the greenhouses and the main thoroughfares achieves a moderate visual mitigation. However, greenhouses in valleys overlooked by higher terrain such as those at Bumarrad, Pwales and the agricultural area between Mgarr and Bingemma are visually very conspicuous. Fortunately, the surrounding higher terrain contains their
scenic impact but they do tend to stand out like a sore thumb in otherwise natural looking traditional cultivated countryside.

In Gozo, some greenhouses have been constructed on the clay slopes of Gozo. Again, the visual effect on the rural landscape is negative. Greenhouses occupying a relatively large tract between Rabat and Xewkija remained rather unchanged in shape form and size. Conversely, Greenhouses which were introduced at Tal-Brieghen due south of Ghajnsielem were not particularly visually offensive due to the presence of surrounding trees and shrubs, the intervening presence of Ghajnsielem on higher ground and the distance from Gozo’s main public elevated panoramic points.

Some pseudo greenhouses have also sprouted into our countryside. These catered for activities ranging from car repair to regional horticulture retail centres. The painting of the roof of such structures in a highly reflective white colour have rendered them even more conspicuous in the landscape.

5.11.5 **Reservoirs** -

Due to developments in agriculture, the demand for the availability of water close to cultivated areas increased. The result was a proliferation of generally open reservoirs.

Well-designed reservoirs contribute to the countryside in a positive manner in mainly two ways:

- They contribute through the presence of water bodies which are generally a positive contribution in rural areas.

- The availability of water enhances traditional agricultural activity and generally maintains the land green for a longer period of time.
For safety reasons, reservoirs are normally constructed with a 1.2 m. boundary wall around them to prevent accidental fall especially by small children. As these are normally constructed in “franka” blocks and little attention is paid to detail during construction, the result is rather shabby. When the reservoir is entirely cast in concrete, the results are visually variable depending on the design of the reservoir, the type of concrete, the height of the boundary wall, its location in the landscape and any soft landscaping present. *(See plate 72.)*

A very small minority of farmers have opted for reservoirs which are completely underground, leaving only a small inspection access for cleaning and maintenance purposes. These reservoirs have been roofed over in concrete slabs, water-proofed and a layer of soil is deposited on top. Thus land over the reservoir is also cultivated rather than taken out of production in order to store water, as is the case with open reservoirs. Others have optimised on land-use by constructing the reservoir totally beneath an agricultural store.

5.11.6 **Wind-pumps and Pump-rooms -**

Before the availability of electrical supply in the more remote rural areas in the Maltese Islands, wind pumps used to be a popular method of extracting water either from underground sources or from open reservoirs that collected runoff water. Although the material used is alien to the Maltese rural countryside, the multi-petal rotor, the non-reflective surface of the unfinished metal and the dynamic turbine rotating in the wind became over a period of time an accepted visual component *(see plate 117).*

The introduction of electricity as well as portable generators and/or pumps implied that wind pumps were either gradually allowed to fall into disrepair or else being dismantled altogether. The main areas where wind pumps have remained in some concentration is the outskirts of Dingli and some fields in the Mellieha Isthmus and on the eastern Marfa ridge. Wind-pumps do not seem to be very popular in Gozo.
Pump rooms have become quite popular in the late 1990’s. These are normally small “franka” block rooms designed to accommodate and shelter electrically operated pumps. A number of pump-rooms can be observed at the Mellieha Isthmus and l-Ahrax areas although others are scattered all over the Island. The rationale behind building a structure of 9 m$^2$ to accommodate an electricity meter and a small pump is not quite clear. A sheltered structure the size of a small cabinet could easily accommodate all the pumping equipment without introducing additional visual intrusions into the Maltese countryside.

5.11.7 Agricultural stores -

In terms of agricultural development, requests for planning permission for agricultural stores far outweighed other requests for agricultural development during the Structure Plan Review period. Whilst it is understandable that agriculture has developed and a number of such requests are genuine in nature, a stroll across the countryside reveals other aspects of agricultural stores.

The first visual problems occur during the construction phase where sand, spall and stone blocks are brought into the field. Construction debris together with unused sand piles and “franka” blocks remain scattered around the store long after the construction operations cease. The use of “franka” blocks that are not properly jointed and with mortar splattered all over the facade, in many instances adds to the sense of dereliction. The concrete slab is often constructed flush with the “franka” facade and apertures are often either in galvanized steel or in some improvised collection of scrap fixed onto the apertures. The main negative aspect of this problem lies with the fact that improper construction of agricultural stores are not limited to isolated incidents but have become rather widespread. (See PLATE 119.)

Size of the agriculture stores is another source of concern. Most of the recently constructed agricultural stores can adequately serve the relative agricultural needs given the normally small size of the agricultural land tracts and the nature of the cultivation. Apart from this consideration a number of agricultural stores were found to be used for purposes other than agriculture. Some are glorified hunting and trapping hides, others accommodate small industrial concerns whilst others serve as rural garages. In other instances,
“agricultural stores” are used as shelter during weekend family outings. In a number of instances one can find an electrical supply, water supply, a bed, some furniture, a refrigerator, a T.V and some sporting a satellite dish have also been observed. In some cases, lateral windows have been finished in oak and protected by wrought iron pregnant windows. In other instances, a drive, a landscaped area and even a swimming pool surround the “store”. Obviously, such cases cannot be considered as genuine agricultural needs.

During the review period, the Planning Authority discouraged the proliferation of agricultural stores, for which it was often criticized of operating against the interests of Maltese agriculture. Nevertheless, the review period witnessed a continuation of development of agricultural stores.

The Planning Authority has also introduced mitigation measures in permit conditions for agricultural stores. These ranged from the planting of trees to the use of timber apertures and appropriate detailing of these rural buildings. Unfortunately, in the majority of the cases, the measures have either not been implemented or else trees have been planted and not maintained. When bank guarantees were applied in permit conditions, implementation was more successful.

5.11.8 Land-reclamation -

The very rapid urban sprawl of the 1980’s has resulted in a considerable amount of agricultural land being taken out of production. Thus pressures mounted to create agricultural land elsewhere. This phenomenon, coupled with the ease and greater affordability of creating reservoirs as well as problems with the management of public land has resulted in a drive to reclaim garrigue for agricultural purposes.

The net result can be best seen in the I-Ahrax area at Mellieha. Here, construction rubble was dumped onto fairly large expanses of public land in a series of terraces. The embankments were not supported by rubble walls in spite of steep gradients from the higher field to the lower field. A layer of soil was applied on top and once a source of irrigation was available, cultivation has been undertaken.
Whilst it may be arguable whether the principle of reclamation of garrigue for agricultural purposes is acceptable, there are a number of implications to the scenic value of the area. The first is a change from an open and barren landscape to one which is green when produce is being cultivated to a soil surface when ploughing has taken place. The absence of the traditional rubble wall or worse the inclusion of a “franka” block retaining wall, have impaired the qualities of the area which was predominantly dominated by traditional agricultural practices. The situation is rendered visually even worse when a greenhouse or a group of greenhouses are installed as has happened at Wied Rini.

Although pockets of garrigue, especially those which were previously cultivated would benefit from appropriate reclamation efforts, garrigue is such a visually important component of the Maltese landscape that it should be afforded great protection. Apart from the well known ecological merits, garrigue has a great informal recreational and scenic contribution to the Maltese rural landscape. These two latter qualities are often overlooked.

5.11.9 Field walls -

The Maltese Islands are not the easiest terrain on which to practice cultivation. Apart from water shortages, shallow and rather infertile soils, exposure to wind-borne saline particles and high winds in the winter season, the Maltese farmer has to cope with a hilly terrain. Since the earliest of times, it has been recognized that every measure should be taken to conserve precious soil. The rubble wall was found to satisfy this requirement and was extensively used to keep soil from being eroded by storm-water. The rubble wall was also employed as a rather convenient method of delineating property.

The Maltese rural landscape is dominated by the presence of rubble walls as well as the relative absence of large trees. Most of the shrubs found in the countryside are either fruit trees which are regularly harvested or else consist of the very predominant carob tree as well as other trees such as the fig tree, the prickly pear, the olive and other Mediterranean climate species.
During the Structure Plan Review period, rubble walls continued to be degraded at an alarming rate. In the case of abandoned fields, rubble walls simply collapsed to the forces of nature or mankind. In other cultivated fields, rubble walls were being replaced by improperly detailed and ill constructed and normally higher “franka” block walls (see PLATE 120). In other instances, large and rusty steel drums placed adjacent to each other were employed instead of rubble walls whilst in more recent agricultural reclamation efforts on slightly sloping ground, no rubble walls were employed. In rarer instances, the use of a hedge of prickly pears was employed either to complement or to replace the rubble walls. Thus whole hillsides such as those overlooking Wied id-Dis at Gharghur and those overlooking substantial tracts of Mistra Valley have become dominated by dilapidated rubble walls. In Gozo, the situation is not much better as abandoned agricultural land on steeper clay slopes, has suffered a similar fate. Other rubble walls have suffered at the hands of mankind. Some were dismantled in search of snails whilst others were overturned either to create access or to make way for more recent human interventions. In the latter part of the 1990’s, rubble walls also became a convenient source of rustic stone and ironically, an awareness of their importance partly further contributed to their demise.

On a more positive note, there have been attempts to encourage the rebuilding of rubble walls (see PLATE 121). A low rubble wall was built on roads leading to the Ta’ Qali National Recreational Centre and along Mdina Road. Whilst certain details of the construction methods were criticized by some, overall it can be stated that the efforts represented a considerable improvement over the visual incongruencies that existed before the intervention. Some of the more recent rural buildings also employed rubble walls or at least rusticated stone on their external parts. The Planning Authority, the Department for the Protection of the Environment and more recently the Department of Agriculture contributed towards a greater awareness on the importance of the rubble wall to the Maltese countryside.
5.11.10 Animal Husbandry -

Development in agriculture was not limited to cultivation of trees and crops. Considerable developments were also taking place in the animal husbandry scene. Development applications for farm-buildings continued to increase in the 1990’s especially for poultry farms and more recently for rabbit farms.

Whilst it is acknowledged that animal husbandry is an important component of Maltese agriculture and that it has to take place in rural areas, the number of farms, their design and operational practices raise many pertinent questions. For instance, given that the Maltese and tourist populations are known and given that Malta is a net importer rather than exporter of animal products, why is the demand for the building of new animal farms being maintained? Given the small size of the Maltese countryside and the extensive visual connectivity with the well-accessed rural road network, animal husbandry units tend to be very conspicuous in the Maltese countryside.

Animal farms are spread all over the countryside but concentrations occur at Maghtab, in the Zebbug / Siggiewi / Rabat / Dingli area, on the outskirts of Zabbar and between Xewkija and Sannat in Gozo (see PLATE 122). In the vast majority of cases, the buildings themselves are shabbily constructed and the dumping of all sorts of animal and other waste in the vicinity of the farm is the norm rather than the exception. Unfinished concrete structures often appear amidst the “franka” outer skin or overly it. Other structures such as animal feed hoppers, corrugated metal sheds, shabby aperture frames and other non-congruous features dominate most Maltese animal farms. Where open yards are used (e.g. in cow rearing) these often have a non-pleasant brownish surface often accompanied by a not too pleasant smell. Close to the farm itself, heaps of hay or straw can often be spotted, especially during the warmer months. On occasions, these heaps are covered in tarpaulin sheets to protect them from the elements.

Very offensive animal farms continued to operate right till the end of the review period. Building in historic sites continued to be a problem and farms could be found operating in Fort Delimara, Fort Benghisa, Fort San Leonardo and Fort Bingemma. Whilst the external surfaces of these farms have not apparently been
extensively damaged when viewed from a distance, extensive alterations have been undertaken within these historic sites and reversal of this situation should be given a high priority. Dumping near all of these sites (possibly originating also from inappropriate farm operations) further adds to the surrounding degradation. Incidentally, all of these areas lie on sites which command extensive views and it’s a pity that besides being precluded from being enjoyed by the public, very valuable components of the Maltese cultural heritage are being put to such an inappropriate use.

Whilst it is appreciated that animal farming constitutes a very labour intensive activity, the modus operandi of most farm concerns does not contribute to ameliorate the scenic value of the area. Most people take it for granted that animal farming is by necessity an activity which deteriorates the rural visual qualities. Experience from other countries indicates that this does not need to be so. Indeed, in most European countries, traditional animal husbandry activities have created a niche in tourism known as agro-tourism whereby the visitor participates in traditional farming activities whilst enjoying the benefits of the rustic setting away from the penalties of urban life. Surely, monumental architecture is not to be expected from farm buildings but even in the local context, a lot of lessons can be learned from the older agricultural buildings.

It must also be appreciated that amelioration of the visual qualities of a farm is not something which could be especially taxing on the farmer. Care to detailing during construction, proper detailing of the “franka” block joints, careful disposal of waste both during construction and during operations as well as regular cleaning and maintenance of the areas surrounding the farm would contribute to a considerable visual improvement. Careful design of the external spaces and planting of appropriate trees sometimes constitutes a major mitigation measure. There are isolated examples of farms which are invisible from distant viewing by virtue of the extensive soft landscaping employed.

On a more strategic level, the location of a farm is of utmost importance. The location of farms in the midst of extensive agricultural land, in the midst of extensive garrigue or on top of an undeveloped ridge, or near an escarpment, renders the development especially conspicuous. Although careful design, choice of
materials and landscaping do help, such locations are best avoided. The location of farms within or near historic buildings or sites or in the vicinity of archaeological remains should be avoided at all costs.

5.11.11 **Rural access** -

Access to the Maltese countryside is highly variable. Large tracts can be accessed via rural carriageways whilst others can be accessed via well-defined pedestrian paths. On abandoned agricultural land, paths are less well-defined and more prone to change. Some tracts of garrigue are accessible even though there are few or no defined paths. Other stretches of garrigue and some coastal areas are relatively inaccessible either because the rock is too jagged and impracticable to trek or because the slope is too steep or the boulders too large to navigate. Some clay slopes are accessible to motor-cycles or 4-wheel drive vehicles; these however leave much disruption to the terrain.

Most access to the Maltese Countryside is limited to areas close to the carriageways or field access which is accessible by vehicle. Large tracts, although being visually accessible, are not physically accessible for a variety of reasons. The most predominant reason for impeding physical access is cultivation. Trampling is detrimental to cultivation and is therefore strongly discouraged. Other land-uses taking place in the countryside such as quarrying or fire-works manufacture, also restrict access to certain areas. Hunting and trapping also restrict physical access especially during the open season. Therefore, a very large proportion of the population who seek enjoyment and renewal through the countryside are confined mainly to areas near carriageways, to parking areas and fairly large tracts of rural public land such as Buskett. Semi-rural spaces such as Ta’ Qali serve a similar purpose.

Most country roads are poorly surfaced and almost invariably last to be maintained. A lot of patching can be observed and potholes predominate more than in other areas. The introduction of Local Councils in 1993 has brought about efforts to improve access to agricultural areas by concreting rural roads. The Department of Agriculture has also given assistance to farmers in this respect. Apart from the usual workmanship and concrete quality problems, this kind of surfacing gave rise to scenic quality degradation as the grey concrete
and the splattering onto the flanking rubble walls contrasted starkly with the mellow colour of the weathered walls. Fortunately, algal growth on and weathering of the concrete surface and gradual colonization of the sides of the carriageway by wild vegetation, visually mitigated the negative impact. The concreting of rural roads also brought about an indirect visual problem. During torrential rain, the water flows unimpeded along a slope with the result that the force of water downstream causes increased damage in terms of soil erosion and overturned rubble walls.

5.11.12 Horticulture -

During the Structure Plan review period; there was an increased awareness towards the rewarding qualities of a greener and more colourful environment in urban as well as in rural areas. Consequently, demand grew on garden centres to increase output and diversify the product.

A number of garden centres have thus expanded whilst new ones came into operation. Most of these were located in the western part of Malta with some concentration at Burmarrad. Other garden centres such as the one at Qormi lies within an urban area whilst a major garden centre operates ODZ at Ta’ Qroqq but lies within an agricultural area which is surrounded by the University to the south and east, by industry to the north and by the San Raffaele hospital to the west. This latter example consists of a relatively large structure and its location on a ridge renders it more conspicuous. Nevertheless, its position is being overshadowed by development taking place at the University of Malta and San Raffaele hospital. Another large garden centre operates due south of the Ta’ Qali National Recreational Centre. Given that there is some green mitigation to these greenhouses and that there is no higher ground in the immediate vicinity of the area, the visual impact of this complex is rather contained. The intervening presence of Ta’ Qali (when viewed from Mdina and Mtarfa), its proximity to Attard as well as the use of greenhouse fabric shades further mitigates the visual impact. A new garden centre at Pwales on the other hand lies in the middle of a picturesque area dominated by well-cultivated agricultural land. The main retail area is a relatively large greenhouse covered in white reflective sheeting and surrounded by smaller greenhouses. The presence of higher ground in close
proximity to the development renders it more offensive from vantage points. On the other hand, Bajda Ridge and Wardija Ridge have visually contained the detracting development from more distant viewpoints.

5.12 AFFORESTATION AREAS -

The advent of mankind on the Maltese archipelago a few millennia ago has definitely left considerable impact on the islands. One of the most evident is that the islands are apparently quite devoid of extensive tree coverage. It is almost certain that tree cover was much more extensive than it currently is. Apart from the felling of trees for tools, implements, construction and as a fuel, the introduction of ruminants has severely curtailed unhindered growth of saplings. Upon recognizing this shortcoming, man has made numerous attempts to re-introduce trees on these islands. Apart from trees planted for their fruits and to provide food for life-stock, trees were also planted to provide shade, shelter from winds and for decorative or ceremonial purposes. There are only a few pockets of a few square metres of what is considered as remnants of an original local forest.

Many trees have been planted in private gardens and along public roads. Some of the private gardens have subsequently become public gardens and became sought after as recreational urban green spaces. In Malta, Buskett is the oldest existing and perhaps most well-known afforestation project. Currently it is a semi-natural small forest which provides a welcome break from a rather arid landscape especially in the drier months and is a very popular public recreational area.

In the years following the 1950’s, there have been various attempts at afforestation especially on garrigue and other public land. Malta’s main cemetery could also be visually considered as an afforestation project and its presence in the midst of a relatively industrialized and urbanized area provides a welcome visual relief (see SECTION 5.16). Afforestation projects on the garrigue areas at Bajda Ridge (see PLATE 123) and L-Ahrax have completely transformed the scenic qualities of these ridges and now the trees are self-regenerating. These ridge are now topped by a green cover which is visually pleasant especially from a distance. Smaller
pockets of land were afforested such as various areas at the Delimara peninsula, various areas close to
valleys such as Wied Has-Sabtan, areas close to industrial buildings and estates such as the Medavia Hangar
at il-Karwija l/o Kirkop, at Manoel Island, in the ditches of fortifications and on many other stretches of public
land, afforestation efforts have taken place. Afforestation efforts in Gozo have been rather limited and
mainly concentrated on the irdum tat-Tafal overlooking Mgarr Harbour, an olive grove at Ta’ Blankas at
Xewkija, and on the western flank of l-Gholja ta’ L-Ghammar overlooking the Ta’ Pinu Basilica. Other pockets
of afforestation have taken place in various areas of Gozo and some hunters and trappers have planted
pockets of trees on their land. Small pockets of afforestation can also be found at Comino.

During the Structure Plan review period, afforestation efforts were not concentrated onto relatively large
areas but were directed at greening of various urban and rural areas. The government nurseries at Wied
Incita, the Dept. of the Environment nursery at Kordin were the main sources of trees whilst the micro-
propagation centre at Lija sought to establish a source of endangered trees and plants for re-introduction in
the Maltese landscape. Many trees were planted at the Ta’ Qali National Recreational Centre whilst other
trees were planted in roundabouts, central strips and other pockets of public land.

5.13 **RECREATION -**

5.13.1 **Introduction**

The high density of the Maltese Islands coupled with the physically small size of the land territory implies that
pressures for informal recreational space are correspondingly high. Matters are complicated by the
problematic access to practically half of the coast of the Maltese Islands, the relatively small per capita
availability of open recreational space and the land-intensive as well as exclusive nature of activities such as
hunting, trapping and off-roading. All these activities leave very little informal rural recreational space and
this detracts from the quality of life. There are relatively few areas which cater for public recreational
activities. The main examples include Buskett, Ta’ Qali and Hal Far but there are a number of smaller ones
such as Kennedy Grove (see PLATE 124). Buskett is treated in SECTION 5.14 as it is also a specially protected area.

5.13.2 Ta’ Qali /Hal Far -

Ta’ Qali and Hal Far are two ex-military airfields. Ta’ Qali lies due north of Mdina whilst Hal Far lies due west of Kalafrana. Both are practically level stretches of land and have undergone fairly radical transformations after having been handed over to the Maltese government in the late 1970’s.

In the 1990’s, Ta’ Qali (see PLATE 21) continued to serve a predominantly recreational function. It continued to be quite popular with Maltese families especially on Sunday afternoons. Car racing which had been rather popular in the 1980’s was transferred to Hal Far. Changes were also undertaken to the various sports facilities (e.g. the National Stadium, the football nursery and the car racing track, the aircraft museum and so forth). Other upgrading was undertaken on the Vegetable market (Pitkali), the crafts village and afforestation in various areas. The most important changes included the transformation of a sizeable tract of land from recreational land into a vineyard and the inauguration of the Formal Garden and Greek Amphitheatre due north of the Pitkali. From a landscape point of view, during the review period, Ta’ Qali became visually more organized and maturing greening tended to camouflage some of the more obtrusive elements (e.g. the concrete manufacturing plant) from a number of viewpoints. A number of parking surfaces near the stadium remained derelict and tipping continued to be a problem in some areas. As a result of the additional development, the area of open space at Ta’ Qali continued to decrease in the 1990’s. In some cases (e.g. the Formal Garden), the visual intervention was positive in the sense that the built-up area was well designed and complemented the open space activities of the garden.

Hal Far developed on a relatively different track. In the late 1970’s, the area was converted into an industrial estate. However, substantial tracts of land continued to be used for informal recreation purposes. In the 1990’s, part of the informal area was occupied by containers, which were removed in the 1990’s to accommodate works related to the construction of new factories. A number of construction industry related
factories were also built on and around the industrial estate. A portion of the eastern flank of the ex-runway was occupied by go-carting activities whilst a “franka” block wall to accommodate the quarter mile-racing track enclosed another portion of the runway. Some factories have undertaken upgrading or extensions whilst other factories continued to fall in a state of disrepair. (see SECTION 5.6.2) The overall appearance of Hal Far is one of general abandonment with little by way of organization of spaces, focal points, landscaping, careful choice of materials and colours and workmanship standards. Again, the areas allocated for public informal recreation have been severely curtailed either by the building of factories or the restriction of access by organizations which cater for formal recreation.

5.13.3 **Comino** -

The small Island between Malta and Gozo continued to be relatively undeveloped. During the review period, some development ancillary to the hotels (mainly recreational and beach facilities) has been undertaken. The hotel itself was given a facelift (in terms of painting) which integrated it more with its surroundings. Some works were also undertaken on the surfacing of the tracks as well as trenching works associated with infrastructural services linking mainland Malta to Gozo. The spalls used in the surfacing were eventually washed down during episodes of torrential rain resulting in unsightly spalls being scattered over relatively wide spaces. Some disruption of the terrain was also undertaken as a result of tipping or other activities (e.g. film productions). In general, the few rubble-walls on Comino continued to fall into a state of disrepair. The Comino pig farm was used much less intensely than in the previous decade and nothing was done to improve upon the general dereliction in the area. The redoubt on the south-western part of the Island was restored, however, its contribution to long distance views is minimal.

The main visual difference in Comino did not result from construction but from the very high concentration of marine craft in the Bejn il-Kmiemen (Blue Lagoon) (see PLATE 125) and the other bays and inlets and which clutter the area. The cluttering has been in recent years restricted to areas outside the zone precluded for marine craft and which is imposed in the summer months. But from long distance views (especially from the
Hondoq ir-Rummien area in Gozo), the cluttering of marine craft in the Bejn il-Kmiemen (Blue Lagoon) area is the most important change to the seascape around Comino.

5.13.4 Caravan Sites and boat houses -

There are a number of caravan sites around the Maltese Islands. These are practically found in all the areas used for bathing. The main boathouse sites are located at along part of the bays or harbours along the north-eastern coast but boathouses can even be found in remote areas such as il-Karraba near il-Bajja tal-Mixquqa (Golden Bay) and even at Dwejra Bay (near Fungus Rock – Il-Gebla tal-General). With the exception of instances where the boathouses are constructed in the difference in level between the carriageway and the shore platform, the structures tend to be visually disorganized and rather obtrusive. The situation is exacerbated when shabby boathouses are constructed at the base of fortifications in the Grand Harbour area. Boathouses in relatively un-built areas such as those at Gnejna and those at Hondoq ir-Rummien and especially those at Qawra (Inland Sea) also tend to be visually detracting as they stand out in an environment which appears relatively undisturbed by human constructions. Boathouses excavated in rock are also visually problematic although the impact is diminished by virtue of the fact that only the front aperture of the boathouse is visible. The number of boathouses continued to increase during the review period especially in the L-Ahrax ta’ Gewwa (l/o Marfa) area.

There were a number of designated caravan sites namely one at Baharic-Caghaq and one at Ghadira. The one at Baharic-Caghaq was created during the review period whilst the one at Ghadira has undergone little overall changes. Other caravan sites have increased in size or developed during the review period. These includes areas at L-Ahrax ta’ Gewwa (l/o Marfa - see PLATE 126), Qalet Marku (eastern seaboard) St. Thomas Bay and other areas around Malta. There are no clearly defined caravan sites in Gozo. In all cases and to varying degrees, caravan sites invariably do not make positive contributions to the landscape, especially in instances where paraphernalia such as television antennae, water tanks and other additions to the caravan are added. In some instances, climbing plants have been planted near the caravan plots but the mitigation effect was rather limited.
5.13.5 **Hunting and Trapping** -

Activities related to hunting do not tend to be especially penalizing in the rural landscape especially in those instances where no structures, such as hides, are used and no interventions on planting are undertaken. The main visual impact from hunting arises from the multitude of multi-coloured spent cartridges that are found scattered in the countryside and in the disturbance of structures (e.g. boundary walls) through hunting related activities.

Bird trapping is an altogether different type of activity. Trapping hides and bird-cage supports tend to be especially detracting, particularly in instances (as is the norm) when the structures are shabbily constructed and roofed over in sheets of corrugated roofing, often weighed down by slabs of stone (see PLATE 127). Additionally, sizeable rectangular areas are cleared of vegetation and other obstructions in order to accommodate the net related equipment. Trapping is visually very detracting to the landscape especially in those instances where it takes place on garrigue. In scenic areas, bird trapping hides stand out as an eyesore in an otherwise practically unspoilt landscape. The occasional nearby tipping renders the eyesores much more offensive.

Afforested areas frequently used for hunting activities have also suffered through the occasional fires that sometimes decimated considerable tracts of afforested area. Hunting or trapping activities also tended to promote the planting of Acacia and Eucalyptus trees which are alien to the traditional Maltese countryside. During the review period, some hunters and trappers were promoting the planting of indigenous or archaeophytic trees and this was a step in the right direction. Clean-up activities as well as re-instatement or building of rubble walls was also undertaken in various areas and again this was a step in the right direction, even though in some instances the workmanship left somewhat to be desired.
5.13.6 **Shooting ranges** -

Shooting ranges have seen a gradual rise in popularity during the Structure Plan review period. They were intended as a formal recreational activity which in part replaces the pressures on avifauna. However, these facilities created new problems. Given that it is rather impractical to develop shooting ranges in the vicinity of residential areas, remote (and usually picturesque) sites were frequently chosen. The shooting stations entailed the construction of shelters and ancillary facilities were also constructed. The usual problems of poor design and shoddy workmanship did not help to alleviate the problems created due to visual intrusion. Neither was attention given to employing visual mitigation structures (such as soft landscaping). Additionally, considerable amounts of shattered platters tended to be deposited at one end of the shooting range and this represented a considerable eyesore even through long distance views.

5.13.7 **Off-roading** -

Off-roading activities do not normally entail built structures on the site of practicing of the activities. However, the activities have sought areas which were previously unspoilt and were often undertaken on steep clay slopes. The resulting erosion from the motorcycles or four-wheel drive vehicles has often resulted in unsightly aimless tracks criss-crossing various clay slopes in the Maltese Islands. The gulleying which took place after heavy rainfall has degenerated the erosion effects. In some instances, the tracks used for off-roading activities have remained long after the off-roading activities had ceased. Some valley beds were also adversely affected through the smothering of watercourse vegetation.

5.13.8 **Festas and Fireworks factories** -

Festas and fireworks are integral part of the Maltese culture and during the review period continued to be popular. A number of new fireworks factories were constructed and other were upgraded. The visual impact was highly variable. There were instances where the factories were so well hidden from view that it was practically impossible to identify the site except through the presence of signs or a high-flying red flag. In other instances, fireworks factories were constructed in very sensitive areas and the visual impact was very severe. Fireworks related accidents have happened during the review period and apart from the loss of life,
considerable tracts of (usually) agricultural land are littered with debris blown off during the explosion. Nearby trees are often burned by the blast.

Fireworks have other impacts. During festas, diurnal fireworks tend to create a mass of smoke downwind of the display and this does not contribute positively to the scenery. On the other hand, nocturnal fireworks displays tend to be much more attractive and the downwind smoke is almost invisible during the dark hours.

Festas also generate very spectacular and characteristic displays. A multitude of masts are raised on the rooftops, sporting very attractive multicoloured flags and standards. Inverted V strands of electric lights (often multi-coloured) also adorn the rooftops. At night, point-lights are attached to the masts and again these create a very attractive effect. During the review period, it became customary in some settlements to adopt a particular colour of light atop a mast depending on the feast being celebrated. These decorations have a positive effect on long distance views towards the relevant settlement.

Street decorations also contribute very positively to the streetscapes and add to the festive atmosphere. Elaborate designs of the festoons as well as statues are assembled in the weeks prior to the festa and radically transform the streetscapes (see PLATE 128). The scenic effect created by the transformed streetscapes is however often limited to the immediate areas and does not normally effect long distance views unless the decorations are situated at the edge of a settlement.

5.13.9 **Marine related Activities** -

The effects of marine-related activities on the landscapes are many and varied. There is a wide range of marine craft ranging from giant cruise-ships and supertankers to the small “Luzzi” and “kajikki”. Large ships tend to visually dominate the Grand Harbour area or the offshore areas. The overall height of some modern cruise-ships exceeds the height of the Valletta bastions. Tankers and military marine craft contrast sharply with the mellow colour of the bastions but fortunately they are not permanent structures and normally leave after
a few days. Yachts in full sail and traditional fishing craft berthed at Marsaxlokk impart a very positive impression.

During the review period, a few oil-rig structures were anchored off the south-east coast of Malta. These were eventually moved away. More permanently, a number of sea-based fish farm cages appeared. These were located in Marsaxlokk Bay, due east of Delimara Peninsula, in St. Paul’s Bay, in Mellieha Bay and due south of Comino. The structures tend to be fairly obtrusive against a flat water surface or a clear blue sky, especially when viewed from close quarters. However, in rough sea or grey skies, the adverse effect is reduced.

The increase in marine going vessels have also implied that more people were able to appreciate the Maltese Landscape from a different perspective, namely the sea. Apart from the discovery of new underwater scenery by divers (which is beyond the scope of this text), appreciation of the coast from the sea-ward area brings into perspective areas which are otherwise visually inaccessible from the landward side. Thus, the beauty of the coastal cliffs is brought into its full majestic significance whilst offending structures on the coast (e.g. breaches in the cliffs and incongruent development) is also highlighted.

5.13.10 Other activities

In the 1990’s, a multitude of recreational and cultural activities have been created. In most cases, these have not created dramatic changes to the scenery but one important consequence was that some activities have enabled people to appreciate the Maltese Landscape from a totally different new perspective. A very obvious example is the introduction of the helicopter service to Gozo. This same helicopter service is also utilized for sightseeing tours around the Maltese Islands. By the late 1990’s, the helicopter service was carrying around 50,000 passengers and this phenomenon has implied that structures that are normally concealed from long distance views (e.g. the Mqabba quarries), are brought into full perspective from an elevated position.
Other activities such as abseiling, hang-gliding, paragliding, parachute jumping, trekking, safari tours, horse-riding and other such recreational activities have all enabled the practitioners to experience the Maltese landscape from different viewpoints. Hence, the appearance of the landscape from these unorthodox viewpoints has acquired an importance which was hitherto relatively unknown.

The increases in car ownership have implied greater access to previously relatively unvisited rural areas. This phenomenon is especially relevant during the cooler months. Greater access to sensitive areas was not without penalties on picturesque settings. Apart from the visual intrusion of a mass of vehicles in an otherwise unspoilt area, the car has enabled littering and trampling to be conveyed to these relatively untouched areas. Additionally, the masses of visitors have prompted pressures for additional development in order to exploit the economic opportunities presented by relatively large numbers of visitors congregating into one area.

5.14 PROTECTED AREAS –

5.14.1 Introduction

The status of protected areas in Malta and Gozo has changed little during the 1990’s. The most protected area is undoubtedly Filfla. This has the status of a strict scientific reserve. There are a number of other so-called nature reserves but these are more no go areas for hunting. They were generally areas which were either strategically important (e.g. the airport) or were accommodating important telecommunication facilities (e.g. the ex-Deutsche Welle site), areas which are very popular recreational areas (e.g. Buskett and Ta’ Qali), or areas of special cultural significance (e.g. Addolorata cemetery, Ghammar Hill). Visually, there has been an almost insignificant change to each of these areas which was directly related to their designation as “nature reserves”.
5.14.2 **“Nature Reserves”**

During the review period, three new bird sanctuaries came into operation. These were the ones at Marsaxlokk, Marsaskala and is-Simar (l/o Xemxija). There were relatively few changes to the Ghadira Bird Sanctuary. In each case, the changes to the landscape were positive in the sense that the interplay of land-water on the terrestrial side of the coast as well as the choice of endemic or archaeophytic species implied that the intervention fitted quite well with the surroundings. The change was more dramatic when seen from adjacent higher ground (e.g. from Marfa Ridge in the case of Ghadira and from il-Wardija in the case of Simar). From elevated view points (e.g. aircraft) it is evident that the intervention is artificial as there is a rather drastic change of texture between the relevant bird sanctuary and the surrounding land. Furthermore, the perimeter of the bird sanctuaries often tended to follow a rather regular as opposed to an irregular form. (See PLATE 129.)

5.14.3 **Scheduled Areas**

During the review period, considerable tracts of land around the southern and western coasts of Malta (as well as other areas including Buskett) were scheduled in terms of the Development Planning Act 1 of 1992. The scheduling took place in June of 1996. In the year 2000, there was little visual evidence to immediately indicate the protective status of these areas. Indeed, almost immediately after scheduling, some tracts along the scheduled areas were burnt. However, it was noted that the rate of development that was observed in the pre-Structure Plan era, has slowed down considerably. However, the erection of small scale offending structures (e.g. bird trapping hides) continued almost unabated during the review period. In the case of sand dunes, the situation has in some cases got worse, especially in instances where development has encroached upon the sand dunes. Another phenomenon that was noted was that damage undertaken during the pre-1990’s (e.g. breaches in coastal cliffs by quarrying) was not repaired. Neither were any well planned and executed attempts undertaken to rehabilitate damaged landscapes (e.g. ex-pulverized fuel ash site at il-Mara, the dump at Wied Fulija and so forth.) Interventions were mainly limited to a covering of soil, and some terrain profiling; and although this helped, it was simply not enough. In other instances, additional dumping continued atop the soil layer.
5.15 **FISH FARMS –**

5.15.1 **General Picture**

Fish farms have been on the increase in the 1990’s and have brought a relatively permanent change to the Maltese seascapes. The most offending types are those which have elevated frustrum like structures which render the cages conspicuous even from shallow observation angles. It is rather fortuitous that the mass of cages have not mushroomed to a much greater degree and they are still largely visually overwhelmed by the surrounding mass of the sea (*see PLATE 130*). Fish farms are invariably conspicuous from higher elevated positions (e.g. nearby higher ground or aircraft) and it is very difficult to mitigate against scenic impact. Moreover, it is essential to render fish farms conspicuous, as they need to be avoided by marine going vessels. There is definitely some influence of fish farms on underwater scenery but this is not discussed in this context since it does not contribute to long distance views.

5.16 **CEMETERIES –**

5.16.1 **Introduction**

Cemeteries are a feature of the Maltese landscape that is encountered fairly often both in urban as well as rural areas. The largest cemetery (Addolorata) lies on a small hill overlooking the Marsa industrial area whilst a number of smaller cemeteries (including the ones dedicated to non-Maltese citizens) can be found scattered all over the island. In Gozo, cemeteries tend to be smaller. During the review period, most cemeteries (especially the smaller ones) have not grown in size but the Addolorata cemetery is a major exception to this general rule.

5.16.2 **Addolorata -**

The cemetery at Addolorata (*see PLATE 32*) lies due east of the Marsa Industrial Estate, separated by Triq Garibaldi and tracts of agricultural land. During the review period, the cemetery has expanded considerably.
especially towards the eastern slopes of the Addolorata Hill. Whilst the older part of the cemetery has remained quite attractive, the marble lined tombs of the eastern portion stand out starkly in the landscape as they are not masked by the dark foliage of the mature cypress trees or the well laid weathered “franka” slabs that line some of the older access ways in the older parts of the cemetery. Whilst the attention given to the design of the individual tombstone reflects a high level of craftsmanship, the overall layout of the newer part of the cemetery as well as the attention given to the spaces between the tomb rows stands in sharp contrast in relation to similar spaces in the older part of the cemetery. It is evident that little provision has been made in the newer extension to the Addolorata cemetery for the inclusion of appropriate hard and soft stone landscaping elements to enhance the solemnity and dignity of Malta’s largest burial area.

5.16.3 Other Malta Cemeteries -

Some mainland Malta cemeteries (apart from Addolorata) have also undergone alterations, although the majority has not been extended laterally. A number of cemeteries have undergone an extension that amounted to around twice their former area. Some examples of cemeteries which were extended include the Dingli cemetery, a cemetery in Zabbar and another one in Mosta (near Torri Cumbo area). In most cases, the designs of the extensions were reflecting the former designs so that the unity of the cemetery was maintained. It is too early to state what the effect of soft landscaping in the extensions would be, given that any soft landscaping has not yet had time to mature. Most of the still utilized cemeteries in Malta are in a good state of repair. When located in a rural area, the characteristic mature cypress trees (or a chapel in the middle of the cemetery) point to the location of these cemeteries from considerable distances.

5.16.4 Gozo Cemeteries -

In Gozo, one totally new cemetery was created on the outskirts of San Lawrenz. The perimeter wall of this cemetery was clad in random rubble interrupted at regular intervals by “franka” stone rectangular pilasters. By the year 2000, there was no evidence of soft landscaping visible from the external parts of the cemetery as there was not enough time to mature. When cemeteries are located in a rural area, the characteristic
mature cypress trees (or a chapel in the middle of the cemetery) point to the location of these cemeteries from considerable distances.

5.16.5 **Historic Cemeteries** -

Apart from cemeteries which are regularly used for burial purposes, there are cemeteries which are no longer in use and have acquired historic value. One of the most notable is the Turkish cemetery in Marsa. There are a number of other historic cemeteries such as the naval cemetery bordering Ta’ Qali and Ta’ Braxia cemetery on the outskirts of Pieta’. Unfortunately, some of these historic cemeteries have fallen into disrepair. The quality of the architecture and the enclosure of the older cemeteries are, as a general rule, superior to that found in the more modern cemeteries.

5.17 **DEFENCE** -

5.17.1 **Introduction**

The Maltese Islands have had a long history of architecture and urban design related to the defence of the islands. In more recent years, a number of ex-British services establishments were taken over by the Maltese Armed forces and this has normally helped to maintain the relevant site in a good state of repair. Most of the Armed Forces sites are usually housed in structures which have weathered “franka” stone on the facades and are often quite well landscaped in terms of trees, shrubbery and flowers. Many of the historic military facilities (e.g. Manoel Island, Tigne’, Fort Rinella, Fort Campbell and Dingli Barracks to mention a few) and others, have fallen in a state of disrepair (see PLATE 131). The historic military facilities (e.g. Fort Mosta, Lister Barracks) which are used by the armed forces are generally kept in a good state of repair.

The armed forces also use Nissen huts which are mainly concentrated within and around the perimeter of the Malta International Airport. Those huts are not considered as attractive architectural features but fortunately most of the Nissen huts in the area are other obstructed by other development or camouflaged by mature soft landscaping.
During the review period, the most conspicuous example of military accommodation related development has occurred within the precincts of the Fort Mosta Complex. This development is highly conspicuous by virtue of its location on a promontory as well as the design and white colour employed on the external facades which contrasts sharply with the weathered stone of Fort Mosta. New military facilities were also constructed at Luqa but in spite of the latter being of a greater scale than those at Mosta, the location of the new development near the airport perimeter and the integration within mature soft landscaping has implied that the influence on long distance views has been rather contained.

5.17.2 Facilities -

Apart from accommodation facilities, the Armed Forces of Malta has a wide range of facilities ranging from berthing areas for patrol boats to shooting ranges to helicopter flight facilities. In most of these cases, the changes undertaken to these facilities were limited to the local field of influence rather than to long distance views. A change which has adversely affected the scenery has been the addition of a number of coastal radars to historic buildings. The worst example is the addition of a coastal radar to the Red Tower at Mellieha but there are other examples which include the Dingli lookout, and the area of the Marsaxlokk lighthouse.

5.18 NIGHT SCENERY -

5.18.1 Introduction

The nightscape in Malta has experienced an increased level of illumination resulting from greater use of light. The main additional contribution resulted from increases in:

- Urban structures resulting in greater contribution to the light output.
- Illumination of private open spaces around buildings.
• Illumination of non-residential areas (especially the Malta Freeport and the Malta International Airport)
• Road lighting (and light from vehicle headlamps).
• Illumination of historic buildings and structures
• Illumination of commercial outlets.
• Use of lighting on construction sites.
• Illumination of recreational areas (in particular sports related complexes)
• Internal light from residential and commercial development “leaking” from wider apertures.
• Lighting for special occasions (e.g. Festas)
• Navigation related lighting

The result was a mixed one in terms of night scenery. On one hand, the illumination of historic features has brought out details which were previously unappreciated and seen in a light which is quite different to that appreciated during the diurnal hours. Furthermore, the “strings” of street lamps create a very pleasant effect especially when viewed as differently coloured glimmering lights from more elevated vantage points. The disadvantage of over-illumination (apart from wastage of energy) relates to light pollution. This phenomenon detracts from the appreciation of non-urban areas in an unlit environment and the experience of the dark sky heritage.

5.18.2 Bastions -
A number of bastions, especially those at Grand Harbour, Mdina and Cittadella were illuminated during the 1990’s and this has brought out an appreciation of this heritage that was never experienced before. The dimly lit bastions contrast with the darker surrounding environment and this has rendered their majesty even more conspicuous. When well-designed lighting schemes are employed (i.e. practically all of the illuminated falls upon the feature to be illuminated), the levels of light pollution are normally moderate.
5.18.3 **Churches and Historic buildings**

Most of the parish churches in Malta were indirectly illuminated during the structure plan period and this has enhanced their visual dominance over the given the surrounding settlements. The resultant effect is very pleasant and apart from added light pollution when the lighting is not properly designed, the achieved effects are generally quite commendable. When well-designed lighting schemes are employed (i.e. practically all of the illumination falls upon the feature to be illuminated), the levels of light pollution are normally moderate. However, it is very difficult to light church steeples and domes without beaming a significant percentage of the light into the night skies.

5.18.4 **Football stadia and other sports fields**

A trend has been established to illuminate more recreational and sports related facilities. Unfortunately the types of floodlighting employed normally do not direct the light only onto the relevant area with the consequence that high levels of light pollution are achieved. Furthermore, the high levels of illumination have been known to bother nearby residents and some complaints to local councils to this effect have been registered. Sports or recreation related floodlighting is among the worst offenders in terms of the magnitude and range of influence of the light pollution levels.

5.18.5 **Road Lighting**

New roads (e.g. Mriehel Bypass) were installed with road lighting and in many instances this has changed the nightscape both locally as from long distance views. The effect can be quite spectacular when viewed from higher ground especially when looking towards the north-east conurbation from view-points along the break of slope at the north-eastern flank of the Rabat-Dingli Uplands. Road lighting appears as long strings of beaded twinkling coloured (normally yellowish) light that merges with the other colours of the rest of the urban areas as well as the moving lights of car headlamps or tail-lights. Some stretches of existing carriageways had either previous luminaires replaced (e.g. from high pressure mercury to high pressure sodium) or were installed with new road lighting (e.g. parts of the Salina Coast Road). Apart from the interplay between the coloured points of light, road lighting has also considerable increased light pollution.
5.18.6 **Adverts and Signs**

Given the increase in commercial development that has occurred during the 1990’s, there were two sources of light related to this aspect of development. The first related to illuminated signs. These are either indirectly illuminated adverts which are either located on the relevant commercial establishment or else are located in strategic locations which are visible from major thoroughfares. In some instances, dynamic displays, which enable more than one advert to be displayed on the same board, have been resorted to. The second category of displays are self-luminant and often multi-coloured and with dynamic displays. This second type of display is more often used either on the façade of the relevant commercial outlet or on a prominent point on the roof of the same establishment. The self-luminant displays tend to predominate in coastal tourism related areas. During the review period, both types of display increased significantly and some were even placed on blank party walls facing busy thoroughfares or intersections.

A new type of illuminated advert was noted in the 1990’s. This relates to the use of lasers pointed towards the night sky. The effect is very dramatic, especially when conditions of partly cloudy skies are prevalent. However, these types of displays have the disadvantage of being quite distracting to drivers and they contribute to light pollution.
6 ASSESSMENT OF THE MALTESE LANDSCAPE

6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Background

The geomorphology of the Maltese Islands has been moulded through the action of physical, chemical and biological agents over millions of years. During the last several millennia, human intervention has significantly changed the natural landscape. This anthropological action has created a unique collage of micro-landscapes which gradually merge into each other to form the unique Maltese Landscape. This landscape is not a static one but is constantly being changed through natural and human forces. The preceding chapters have given a clear indication of the dynamic aspect of the Maltese Landscape. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the dynamic element of the landscape will remain in the foreseeable future.

The aim of a landscape assessment is to impart a qualitative aspect to the landscape with a view to address future interventions. In this study, the aim is to assign a qualitative hierarchy to the Maltese landscape in order to develop a framework to guide strategic planning. The main objective is to develop a model which can measure the quality of the Maltese landscape in terms of a set of quantifiable parameters which can be numerically defined through a geographical Information System (GIS) and interpolated through the appropriate algorithms.

6.1.2 Complexity of Landscape Assessment

There is a considerable body of international literature which indicates the difficulty of interpreting landscapes and attempts to address these difficulties. The complexity tends to occur in urban and peri-urban areas where variety in landscape character also tends to increase. The quantification of scenic beauty has been a challenge since the earliest recorded history. The many attempts at quantification have not always been directly linked to landscape assessment. In some instances, the quest was more of an academic nature
with the main objective being to find a mathematical basis for the concept of appreciation of beauty. In other instances, the underlying quest was for the mechanism which leads the human mind to appreciate a context via the input through the five senses. On the landscape assessment front, there have been many attempts to assess the landscape with a view to protecting the more picturesque tracts. In other instances, the assessment helps to guide future development.

6.2 The Landscape Assessment Model

6.2.1 Background

The Landscape assessment model for the Maltese Islands has been developed according to a brief which was approved by the Planning Authority in 1998. The model is based on the formal aesthetic model coupled with the aspects of the psychophysical model of landscape evaluation. It is heavily based upon the sense of sight as interpreted by experts in order to arrive at a description, assessment and evaluation of the Maltese Landscape with a view to establish a hierarchy of importance upon which future strategic planning policies will be based. The results emerging from the model are then compiled into a format which forms the framework for future landscape policy which is then submitted to a public consultation exercise.

6.2.2 Main Assumptions

The proposed model is a sensitivity model, i.e. it highlights the sensitivity of a particular area to change from its current state (usually induced through proposed urban development). The main aspect that determines sensitivity is related to intervisibility between the site of the proposed intervention and the surrounding physiography. Topography plays a very important role to this effect in the sense that landmasses and their distribution on the surface of the earth are the main determinants of the visual range of a particular feature on the landscape. There are however many other factors which determine visual range but these tend to be secondary to physiography.
Given the assumption that viewshed is an important determinant of the quality of the landscape, the next logical step would be to measure viewshed for each and every particular point on the Maltese Islands. With GIS technology (and the appropriate software), it is rather straightforward to compute viewshed for a chosen point of a chosen height above a surface, provided that the GIS database for topography exists. However, it is very difficult to compute the three dimensional viewshed of each and every point on the Maltese archipelago. The next best approach is to isolate those physiographic parameters that contribute to extensive viewsheds. Topographic data lends itself quite readily to this approach.

It is important to keep in mind that whilst physiography contributes significantly to the landscape quality of an area, there are many other factors. These include complexity, variety, balance of composition, texture, lighting conditions, atmospheric visibility, interaction with water bodies, position of the viewpoint station, clutter and so forth. In the Maltese context, the extent of the viewshed was judged to significantly contribute to the sensitivity of the landscape. Therefore, the model is mainly based on the macro physiographic features that contribute to an extensive viewshed.

This does not mean that small structures do not have a significant impact on the landscape. Indeed, relatively small features such as spires, chimneys and lattice towers tend to have a disproportionate effect on the skyline. A large agglomeration of relatively small features (e.g. roof-tanks, TV antennae) also have a considerable influence on the quality of a skyline. However, these elements also tend to disproportionately complicate a model in view of the extremely complex permutations involved.

6.2.3 Model Parameter Considerations

Based on the above assumptions, the main determinant of viewshed is related to topography. The visibility limit is normally taken around 20 km maximum. This maximum is quite acceptable for the local context given that the highest point on the island is just 253 m above sea level. For the purposes of the local model, topography can be analysed (in its barest form) in three quantifiable components namely altitude above the mean sea level, change of altitude versus a predetermined extent of horizontal run (i.e. gradient) and break
of slope. Local literature and experience indicate that these three components are by far the most influential as far as the quality of the rural landscape is concerned.

A number of other considerations are also taken into account. These include further parameters that are judged to be influential on the landscape character of an area, namely:

a) Proximity to watercourses  
b) Proximity to the coast

These factors are judged upon the positive visual effect of water on the Maltese landscape. Watercourses also create local ecosystems which are clearly differentiated from the surrounding milieu. Given the relative scarcity of inland water bodies on the Maltese Islands, watercourses are considered to contribute positively to local landscape character. Another very influential parameter is the distance from the coast as the probability of observing the land-sea interface from a selected vantage point tends to increase with a decrease in the distance between the said vantage point and the land-sea interface. This was judged to be an important consideration given that the visual play between the landmass and the territorial waters are determined to contribute significantly to the quality of the landscape. The situation is generally greatly compounded by anthropogenic structures which tend to break an otherwise unimpeded line of sight through physical obstruction.

All the foregoing are natural characteristics. Anthropogenic influence on the Maltese Islands is quite extensive. The main macro-features are rubble walls forming terraced fields, vegetation planted by man (e.g. carob trees, afforestation projects), fortified structures (e.g. bastions), settlements, industrial areas, large infrastructural works and mineral extraction areas. Although churches influence the local skyline to a high degree, their influence on long distance views is so greatly compounded by the surrounding built structures that evaluation is rendered extremely complex. To this effect, it is better to protect churches as individual
monuments rather than to consider them as macro landscape elements. In the negative visual influence sense, the same applies to structures such as chimney stacks, and telecomms towers.

Human features tend to give distinctiveness to the local landscape. The most notable are the extensive fortifications and the main churches. Given the extent of fortifications, it is rather straightforward to determine the visual footprint (the same applies to industrial and quarried areas as well as waste disposal sites) but in the case of churches, the situation becomes very complex especially since they tend to occupy a position at the centre of a very heterogeneous settlement. Thus, it is quite difficult to determine where the church will be visible from and the extent of the structure that will actually be visible. Thus while the datasets for fortifications (and major fortified structures), industry, quarries and waste disposal sites were used in the model, the one for the churches was not.

Another factor taken into account was the concept of remoteness. In a number of landscape models, this is a measure of landscape quality on the basis of the assumption that the less a particular landscape is modified through human intervention, the higher the landscape value. There is no easy way to measure this component of the landscape given that it is very much dependent on access and intervisibility. One way of addressing the issue is to utilize existing data in the form of the extant road network and the distribution of the settlements. In the case of the road network, the existing data was not found to be reliable enough given that data on the traffic loads did not have the requisite level of detail. Furthermore, detail was required for rural roads given that access to the west of Malta (popular in the cooler months) is dependent on rural route access. Given the problems that these shortcomings would have created on the model and the highly temporal component of this aspect, this dataset was not utilized in the final evaluation model. The dataset of the existing settlements, on the other hand, was taken into account in order to include one factor determining remoteness.

Once the main quantifiable components of the landscape were identified, these were translated into a form which could be assessed in the final interpolation. Values were given to the various features based on
experience of the Maltese Landscape, previous studies and correlation of opinions. These were subsequently developed into thematic maps on GIS and analysed through software through a process of cellular interpolation. Given the considerable processing power required, the initial landscape hierarchy model was based on a level of resolution of 200 m by 200 m. In the case of Malta, this level of resolution is considered to be too low, even for strategic planning purposes. After initial calibration, a finer resolution utilizing a grid with each cell being 100 m by 100 m, a number of iterations were undertaken in order to fine tune the numerical quantities employed in the model.

Positive values were assigned to features which were judged to enhance the landscape and negative values to detracting features. Thus features which either have a neutral contribution to sensitivity or have an overall neutral contribution scored near to zero. The features which have an overall neutral contribution are particularly problematic as they may constitute a sum of enhancing sub-features and detracting sub-features which tend to cancel each other out. However, these sub-features would tend to fall at a level of resolution which is lower than that which can be addressed by the current model. The contribution from each sub-category was weighted according to the judged contribution to the landscape, the weighting mainly dependent on the extent, vertical projection qualities of the feature, as well as estimates of the viewshed.

A set of eight levels was chosen in the initial trials. These helped to better understand the details of the transitions between the different ranges. This approach also simplified adjustments in the case of future calibration and/or upgrading of the model. The final level of resolution adopted was that having cells which are 50 m by 50 m. This level of resolution is quite suitable for strategic purposes and indicative even in a local planning context.

In the final model iteration, a set of five levels was adopted. The first four related to a value for landscape in order of decreasing sensitivity. The fifth value relates to landscapes which merit intervention in order to mitigate against considerable human impact (see SECTION 6.2.5.).
6.2.4 Results

The Landscape Assessment Model indicates the relative sensitivity of the Maltese landscape on a 50 m by 50 m grid. Interestingly, a close correspondence can be observed between sensitivity of an area and expectations in terms of perceived quality of the Maltese Landscape (see MAP LSM 1). In terms of sensitivity, the areas which scored highly include the southern and western areas in Malta, the coastal cliffs on the eastern coast (including Delimara Peninsula), the v-shaped pluvial valleys, the escarpments around the Rabat/Dingli plateau, the Great Fault and the escarpment around the horst/graben series due northwest of the Great Fault. The model has also confirmed the intuitive perception that from a landscape point of view, Gozo is more sensitive than mainland Malta. In common with Malta, the most sensitive areas tend to occur near the escarpments and the cliff areas. However, the taluses of Gozo stand out as sensitive areas. Comino as a whole has also featured as a sensitive area with the more sensitive areas towards its eastern and western coasts.

The model has also indicated that the more degraded landscapes tend to occur throughout the outer harbour region, in the area around Marsaxlokk Bay and in the plain around Burmarrad/Maghtab. In the case of Gozo, the most degraded landscapes occur in the vicinity of the quarries and in the area between Victoria and Ghajnsielem.

Thus overall, Western Malta, Comino and Gozo scored more highly than eastern Malta although there are pockets in eastern Malta which also scored highly.

6.2.5 Interpretation of the Model

The Landscape Assessment Model gives a good indication of the valuation of landscape quality in terms of sensitivity and distribution throughout the Maltese Islands. The model is also flexible and amenable to upgrading. Thus the model is quite useful in guiding development through the exercise of cautionary and precautionary measures in the areas with the highest landscape sensitivity. Apart from being a useful tool in
guiding strategic planning the model can be used to gauge the impact of individual large projects on the quality of the surrounding landscape.

Landscape sensitivity is graded into a hierarchy of five levels with Level 1 being the most sensitive and Level 5 the least sensitive. In terms of sensitivity they can be graded as follows:

- **Category 1 - Area of Very High Landscape Sensitivity (AVHLS)**
- **Category 2 - Area of High Landscape Sensitivity (AHLS)**
- **Category 3 - Area of Significant Landscape Sensitivity (ASLS)**
- **Category 4 - Area of Moderate Landscape Sensitivity (AMLS)**
- **Category 5 – Areas Requiring Landscape Upgrading (ARLU)**

It is important to note that these levels are based on the extant positive and negative macro-elements in the landscape. This implies that in future, if the existing detracting features are intervened upon and the relevant macro-features are rehabilitated, the anthropogenic component that led to the decrease in the valuation will change and consequently the value of an area could increase.

To this effect, another system of gradation has been compiled which is based on the same natural parameters as the above minus the permanent human detracting macro-features. This indicates an index of the envisaged level of intervention required in order to bring an area up to its potential level of sensitivity. *(See MAP LSM 2)*
Map LSM 1
LANDSCAPE SENSITIVITY MAP
MALTESE ISLANDS

Key

- Areas of Very High Landscape Sensitivity (AVHLS)
- Areas of High Landscape Sensitivity (AHLS)
- Areas of Significant Landscape Sensitivity (ASLS)
- Areas of Moderate Landscape Sensitivity (AMLS)
- Areas Requiring Landscape Upgrading (ARLU)

Remarks:
Indicative only. Not to be used for measurement or direct interpretation.
6.2.6 Implications of the model on Strategic Policy

The Landscape Assessment Model is assigning in general terms, the value of landscape tracts in terms of relative importance. Strategic policy therefore should be guided in order to ensure compatibility of development with the landscape sensitivity of an area. The proposed policies should be based on a three-fold course of action i.e.:

a) The removal of offending features from the landscape with a priority being accorded to the most sensitive areas.
b) The introduction of visual mitigation measures within and around detracting features.
c) The positive intervention (especially in the more sensitive areas) to either retain the existing qualities or to enhance the identified existing features (e.g. rehabilitation of cultural heritage).

The areas with the highest level of landscape sensitivity should only allow those interventions which maintain the existing landscape and remove the incongruous elements. Even small-scale interventions in such areas are likely to have a very disproportionate impact on long distance views. This factor is especially relevant in the case of interventions which are significant in terms of mass, extent and/or height. The fact that these areas score highly should not be interpreted that there is no degradation in these areas. Indeed, there are areas which scored very highly but a site inspection would reveal that the area suffers from dereliction, tipping and inappropriate human intervention. This is to be expected since the model has only considered quantifiable macro-elements of the Maltese Landscape. It has already been pointed out before that a large agglomeration of micro-elements can also significantly degrade a landscape. However, when degradation occurs in landscape with high sensitivity, the results are even more appalling than when it occurs in less sensitive areas.
There are many options available to enhance landscapes of lower quality or degraded landscapes. Some of the possible solutions emerge through other policy areas (e.g. rehabilitation of quarries). Other solutions entail the removal of the offending structures (e.g. waste tips). In other cases, the application of mitigation measures to screen adverse impacts for long distance views may be employed. In other solutions, measures can be applied in terms of massing, colour, texture and design of structures to mitigate visual impact or to integrate better with the surrounding landscapes. In urban contexts, the creation of a complementary focal point can assist with the creation of a pleasant skyline.

It is very important to note that the Landscape Assessment Model addresses the influence of macro-features on long distance views. However, there are many instances (especially within and around urban areas), where the local landscape becomes more important than long distance views. In this context, the emphasis should be on the quality of design, the integration of streetscapes, the attention to open spaces, the quality of architecture and the attention to detail. The need to give attention to detail cannot be over-emphasized as most of the degradation apparent in short distance views results from lack of attention to detail, clutter, littering, the use of inappropriate materials and design, poor workmanship and the virtual absence of a maintenance culture.
7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Summary of Maltese Landscape Characteristics

The Maltese Landscape is characterized by a number of features which impart a sense of identity and which distinguish this landscape from others. These landscape characteristics should be taken in cognisance during the planning process at the various levels of detail. Awareness of these characteristics can greatly assist with the understanding of the local landscape and to promote good and compatible interventions which would enhance the quality of Maltese Landscapes. The main characteristics of the Maltese Landscape are summarized below:

- The quality of natural light is normally very good. Long hours of bright sunshine, long periods of cloud free blue skies and high solar elevations result in high colour contrast.
- A very low number of days are dominated by fog or low visibility.
- Scenically, two seasons dominate - the main determinants being precipitation rates, hours of sunshine, wind speed and direction, temperature and the consequent evapotranspiration rates. These factors have a strong influence on vegetation growth. Thus in winter the Maltese Islands appear much greener than in summer.
- Geomorphology is the main determinant of landscape quality and has also determined the nature and distribution of the various land-uses to a significant degree.
- The ratio of ridge-line separation to average ridge-line elevation (above the intervening watercourse), is relatively low. This implies superior scenic quality in terms on interest and variety in the topography.
- Ridge line separation from nearest ridge line is well within normal visibility limits.
- Significant tracts of landscape have a gradient higher than 1 in 6, implying oblique projection of a surface to long distance views.
The sea is visible from many areas around the Maltese Islands. In this sense, the Maltese Landscape is also a coastal landscape. The low bathymetric depth, especially in bays, inlets and along the north-east coast of Malta, contribute to pleasant seascapes. The presence of offshore islands within normal visibility limits also enhances seascapes.

Significant water bodies tend to be absent from inland areas. Relative absence of forest vegetation is a feature of the islands. On the other hand, this permits the appreciation of long distance views.

Terraced fields (when well maintained) are a dominant characteristic of the Maltese countryside. Many panoramic spots are accessible due to the extensive carriageway network. Cultural heritage is strongly intertwined with natural heritage.

Fortified structures dominate the Inner Harbour area. Other ex-military structures in the countryside also tend to enhance the landscape.

Churches and large buildings tend to dominate the urban skylines. Maltese churches are intimately linked to the character of the traditional urban settlements.

Cubic massing within urban areas and the preponderance of flat roofs.

Most urban areas are concentrated within a radius of 5 km from the Grand Harbour. Most bays along the north-eastern and eastern coast of Malta and some bays in Gozo are dominated by modern development.

The Maltese Landscape is sensitive to detail. It is detail that makes or breaks the Maltese Landscape especially in short distance views. Relatively small features imposed on a sensitive landscape can have an incommensurate effect on long distance views.
7.2 Main Effects of change induced by man during the Structure Plan Review Period.

7.2.1 Introduction

The landscape of the Maltese Islands has undergone a substantial change during the Structure Plan review period. These changes were indicative of a changing lifestyle as well as an emergent national planning strategy which was adopted in 1992.

The main visible change was in the limiting of urban sprawl which had in effect started in the late 1980’s with the adoption of the temporary provisions schemes. The effect of decisions taken in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s were not immediately felt due to a natural lag of time between the award of a permit and completion of the development. Maturing of soft landscaping and weathering of “franka” stone take an even longer time to materialize. Furthermore, in the early 1990’s, construction activity increased by incentives of Building Development Areas (B.D.A.’s) and Home Ownership Schemes (H.O.S.’s) gave Malta the appearance of a large construction site at that time.

The review period has also seen changes to the skyline by virtue of the higher height limitation at the edges of the development schemes and in tourism related areas. Visually, this has effectively shrouded many urban conservation areas from long distance views.

Apart from the effects of built development, the skyline continued to suffer from accretions such as antennae, air-conditioning units, lift rooms, pigeon lofts and other such paraphernalia.
7.2.2 Influence of Local Councils

The introduction of local councils has left tangible benefits in terms of improvement to public urban spaces and cleanliness within urban areas. The state of many of the arterial and distributor roads continued to be appalling especially in view of the upgrading and maintenance on the infrastructural networks.

7.2.3 Infrastructure

The infrastructure of the Maltese Islands continued to be upgraded throughout the review period. Projects related to land, sea and air transport as well as upgrading of water, electricity, sewerage and telecomms facilities were undertaken during the review period. In some cases, the result made a slightly positive or neutral contribution on the surrounding landscape, in others the landscape has been significantly degraded. The dramatic increase in car ownership has not only resulted in greater pollution (visible on clear still days) but also in terms of new facilities to (at least temporarily) alleviate circulation and parking problems. Almost invariably, vehicular related facilities have adverse impacts on the landscape.

7.2.4 Tourism and Recreation

Development of tourism and recreation related urban facilities increased significantly during the review period. These have a profound influence on the urban landscape of tourism areas. A small but visually significant proportion of this development has taken place outside areas earmarked for urban development. In certain instances, the quality of urban development has improved in terms or architectural expression, layout and embellishment of spaces around the built facilities. Part of this change was induced by stricter planning requirements. By the end of the review period, the requirement for landscaping around major projects has become quite established.
7.2.5 **Development in non-Urban areas**

A number of non-agriculture related structures have emerged in areas which are outside the development boundaries. The types of development vary from showrooms and small factories to scrap yards and fireworks factories. Almost invariably, there are very limited (if any) visual mitigation measures which are implemented on these sites and the end results are often most unsightly.

Construction related activity and the greater use of underground space (implying the generation of excavated material) has resulted in a severe exacerbation of the waste disposal problems on the Island. An increase in the generation of domestic and industrial waste was also registered. Waste management is one of the major factors that adversely affect the Maltese Landscape. Although the dumping of pulverized fuel ash was discontinued from Il-Mara and the waste tip at Wied Fulija was closed down, both areas were left in an unsightly condition and the “rubble mountain” at Maghtab increased in size. Other forms of dumping and littering continued to be a problem throughout the territory.

The negative visual impacts of quarrying activity were not adequately addressed during the review period. Although most of the quarrying development was indicated through the extension of existing quarries, this did not imply that the negative impacts were mitigated. Indeed, in most instances the situation got progressively worse. There were some attempts to introduce visual mitigation measures around the quarries but by the end of the review period, soft landscaping measures had not matured enough to constitute effective screening measures. Scenic impacts resulting from the ancillary mechanical plant were only partially addressed in those instances where relocation of the batching/crushing plant to the lowest points within a quarry. The problems resulting from dust generation continued to exist.

Stretches of agricultural land (especially dry land on the steeper slopes) continued to be abandoned. Degradation continued in rural areas. Although regular cleanups take place, tipping continued to be a major headache in rural areas. Littering is also a problem around many animal farms as well as industrial concerns in rural areas. Dry rubble walling continued to fall in disrepair and it has tended to be replaced by
unsightly “franka” block walls. Higher walls along rural routes tended to block long distance views. The detailing of farm buildings and farm related structures as well the method of operations did not improve much during the Structure Plan review period.

The introduction of new farming methods such as cloches and greenhouses tend to leave a significant impact on long distance views. The effect is particularly severe in spring. The improper storage and disposal of cultivation related pipes and plastic created additional eyesores in the countryside. A drastic increase in rural storage facilities has been noted. Not all of these structures are used for genuine agricultural needs. Indeed, a significant number is used as garages, to accommodate small scale industry or as week-end rest-rooms. The majority of these rooms are rather unsightly and do not fit well with the surrounding countryside. Moreover, the areas around them tend to be disturbed and remain disturbed for significant periods of time.

A greater resort to soft landscaping measures and maturing plants are perceived to have slightly increased the level of greenery of the Maltese Islands. However, there are no detailed studies to confirm or otherwise this observation.

Trapping related structures remained a visual problem in the countryside. An increase in the number of structures was noted but the magnitude of the problem and the trend throughout the Structure Plan review period is not known as there were no applications for the erection of trapping hides. The visual qualities of the trapping hides rank amongst the worst that can be found in the Maltese countryside and the effect is exacerbated through the location of these unsightly structures in sensitive areas.

7.2.6 Access to Rural Areas

A significant increase in access to rural areas was noted during the review period. This has partially resulted from an increase in car ownership. Apart from the car clutter that occurs on weekends and public holidays in rural areas during the cooler months, an increase in the effects of trampling and littering directly attributed to this kind of rural activity, was observed. The greater deterioration of the countryside was observed in spite of
only insignificant increase in the number of new roads in rural areas. In spite of the introduction of scheduling of areas in accordance with provisions of the Structure Plan, there are to date very few rural areas which are being effectively managed. The main positive outcome of scheduling was in severely curtailing abusive development in such areas. It had little or no effect on activities which do not require planning permission.

7.2.7 **Nocturnal Illumination**

An increased level of illumination was observed during the review period. There was a mixed influence on the nightscapes. The illumination of fortifications, churches and other historic features was definitely beneficial to Maltese nightscapes and has literally brought to light a new dimension of appreciating Maltese heritage. On the other hand, higher illumination levels in rural areas have resulted in increased levels of light pollution.

The main changes to the Maltese Landscape in the period between 1990-2000 can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URBAN</th>
<th>RURAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The urban sprawl of the 1980’s was significantly contained. However, some settlements continued to merge into one another and therefore the physical distinction of each settlement was lost.</td>
<td>• The rate of loss of agricultural land decreased but there was a higher level of visual influence resulting from modern agricultural practices (e.g. animal husbandry units, greenhouses, storage facilities, intensive irrigation facilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Landscaping was given more attention especially around major projects and public amenities.</td>
<td>• Greater accessibility has brought the more remote natural areas under greater pressure from human activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Localized improvements in treatment of facades and open spaces noted in Urban Conservation Areas and coastal areas (especially promenades).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Urban skylines continued to deteriorate especially near the urban fringes. Roof clutter (in the form of antennae, water tanks, lofts, mechanical plant room etc.) continued to degrade skylines. In periods of celebration, roofscapes are enhanced through use of multi-coloured flags, lights and other decorations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Waste disposal and dilapidation in the countryside continued to represent a major problem of degradation of the scenery in rural areas.

Industrial development imparted negative impacts in some areas (e.g. Freeport area, San Gwann, Hal Far, Xewkija etc.)

Fish farms introduced unsightly features offshore. The visual footprint of these facilities is however fairly limited and are generally overwhelmed by the scale of the surrounding water body and large marine going vessels. Sometimes, oilrigs are stationed a few kilometres offshore and this has quite an adverse impact on the seascape.

There was an overall improvement in the quality of architecture and public amenities, however, quality highly variable and in most cases not yet up to standard.

Poor workmanship, lack of attention to detail, inappropriate design and lack of a maintenance culture continue to contribute to dereliction and degradation.

The very high increase in vehicle ownership translated into additional scenic dereliction.

### Strategic Landscape policy direction

#### 7.3.1 Relation to the other Topic Papers

The various topic papers for the Structure Plan review exercise indicate recommendations that need to be reconciled into a common strategy of approach. This approach will indicate the strategic sustainable development approach for the Maltese Islands for the next 20 years. The topic papers also indicate the likely areas where urban development needs to be channelled whilst ensuring that land allocated for this type of development will be adequate (given the present body of knowledge and allowing for a reasonable amount of flexibility). The integrated planning approach is then coupled with the landscape model to assess how the areas with a different level of landscape sensitivity will be affected. Given that landscape policies integrate rural and urban policies, the effect of the coupling of these two policy regimes needs to be given special consideration as at the strategic scale, the visual influence of one upon the other is intimately linked...more so within the very restricted and heterogeneous landscape of the Maltese Islands.
7.3.2 **The main strategic direction**

The main strategic thrust is to enhance upon the positive qualities of the Maltese Landscape (often through active intervention) and to mitigate against the detracting features. It is imperative that the enhancing features of the Maltese Landscape are rendered more accessible but not at the expense that the visitation rates or the visitation modes will in the long term compromise the very scenic resource itself. Thus it may be acceptable in some areas to introduce new facilities to encourage pedestrian access but not vehicular access. Access is important because it enhances the appreciation of an area through appropriate interpretation facilities. Although simply looking at a picturesque landscape can, on its own, represent an uplifting and refreshing experience, coupled with interpretation, the experience can be enriched through the knowledge of the forces that shaped that landscape.

Access to views also needs to be given important consideration. The small scale of the Maltese Islands implies that views in inland areas tend to be restricted by man-made development or topography. However, there are many areas at the edge of ridges that command vistas extending tens of kilometres. These areas merit protection to safeguard these long-distance views. Similarly, the coastline merits protection measures to safeguard unrestricted views towards the horizon.

The small scale of the islands and their topography also imply that the Maltese Landscape is highly sensitive to the nature and location of development and its juxtaposition within the surrounding context. Experience shows that human landscapes that utilize materials originating from the Maltese Landscape, when incorporated into designs which contextually fit, can lead to an enhancement of urban settlements. However, planning, execution and maintenance need to be carefully implemented as every little detail counts. Agglomeration of details count for long distance views whilst isolated details become significant at close quarters. The problem of lack of attention to detail is so widespread in the Maltese Islands that it assumes strategic importance.
On an island's wide level, the main problems contributing to degradation of scenery can be summarized in the following points:

- An inadequate level of co-ordination between agencies responsible for the planning, implementation and operation of development;
- Clutter, dilapidation and the (mis)management of waste;
- Gross shortcomings in design and workmanship standards and practices;
- The almost virtual absence of a maintenance culture;
- Shortcomings in the implementation of planning conditions;
- The lack of a national awareness on the tangible benefits of having, maintaining and ameliorating upon a pleasant landscape;
- The virtual absence of integration between socio-economic realities and development related policies;
- The limited efforts towards nurturing a culture oriented towards appreciating and safeguarding the Maltese landscape as a civic obligation;
- The limited emphasis on focusing resources on those landscape features (natural and/or artificial) which give the Maltese landscape an identity which is different from any other, and to safeguard these features;
- The pervasion of the car as well as other means which assist mobility and structures related to operating or disposing of them;
- The virtual absence of a vision for the Maltese Landscape.

On the other hand, Malta is so disproportionately culturally endowed that the country can ill afford to scrape resources to keep this cultural heritage in good shape. Maltese cultural heritage represents an opportunity which, if well managed, can lead the Maltese Islands to have one of the most pleasant cultural landscapes in the Mediterranean. This opportunity can also develop into a niche for cultural tourism and
overall improve the quality of life. In many cases and in terms of intervention, projects to significantly upgrade the existing landscape generally require a large number of well-planned and coordinated small interventions over a wide area as opposed to one single large intervention. A case in point would be the upgrading of rubble walls. Rubble walls are a pivotal element of the Maltese countryside. Coordinated interventions which rehabilitate dilapidated rubble walls could significantly enhance a stretch of rural landscape.

Therefore, the main strategic direction for ameliorating the Maltese landscape needs to address the following points:

- The establishment of vision for a Maltese Landscape that has the general support of the Maltese people.
- The promotion of a culture that appreciates the salient features of the national landscape, that nurtures them and that procures resources for their maintenance.
- The establishment of a framework to address the issue of damaged landscapes and to determine the level of priority and the resources required for the execution of these projects.
- The drive to safeguard areas which permit long distance access to the countryside, the coast or the horizon (e.g. ridge edges, the coastline, countryside tracks etc.).
- The procurement of resources to analyse, assess and monitor the Maltese Landscape and to positively intervene within it.

7.3.3 Other Considerations

On a more detailed level, the following policy objectives are envisaged to be relevant to the Maltese strategic planning context.

- Protection of the Maltese Landscape according to a hierarchy of importance coupled with a strategic landscape policy regime.
Endeavour to retain and enhance those features which give the Maltese Islands their unique identity.

Direction of urban development to areas within the extant development zones.

Rehabilitation of degraded areas (including littered areas, collapsed rubble walls, shanty sites, industrial areas, skylines, rooftops, urban fringes etc.).

Fostering of a contextual sensitivity guided and design oriented culture coupled with the establishment of a statutory mechanism for adherence to standards in implementation, maintenance and monitoring of interventions in the Maltese Landscape.

Promotion of a landscape protection and enhancement strategy which satisfies the requirements stipulated by the European Landscape Convention.

Implementation of a comprehensive integrated national waste management strategy.

Promotion of traditional rural practices in the countryside.

Discouragement of high walls, hedges, dense shrubbery or other obstructions along rural carriageways or roads at the perimeter of settlements.

Afforestation of appropriate species on specifically identified degraded habitats.

Securing of vistas on identified panoramic routes, ridge edges, belvederes and along the coast.

Industrial areas to have mandatory minimum green buffer.

Discouraging the creation of large parking lots in rural areas peri-urban areas or urban fringes.

Sensitive contextual development along urban fringes, especially when these coincide with ridge edges and/or UCA’s. Height limitation should be very carefully established in these areas.

Use of local stone (in natural state to weather without surface treatments that mask its colour or texture) encouraged on building facades.

Removal of, or mitigation against, clutter on the rooftops and along the facades of buildings.

Location of telecomms equipment to the least obtrusive position and using the least possible dimensions.
• Creation of artistic focal points within and at the edge of urban settlements.
• Depending on design, the utilization of floor area ratio could be given favourable consideration especially in tourism related areas....however, the concept should be employed so as not to unfavourably compete with large churches, fortified structures or other landmark features in the Maltese landscape. Thus preference should be given to use the floor area ratio in modern tourist oriented areas.
• Better design treatment of the pavement surface in the countryside, in carriageways, along urban edges and in pedestrian areas.
• The establishment of Dark Sky Heritage areas in appropriate locations and the use of well designed, energy efficient luminaires for external illumination.

7.3.4 **Policy in the various Levels of Landscape Sensitivity.**

In **SECTION 6**, the landscape assessment model was described. This model has established a five level hierarchy of landscape importance in terms of landscape sensitivity. It is important to re-iterate that the first four levels relate to inherent sensitivity whilst the fifth category relates to sensitivity that has been appreciably degraded through human action to such an extent that it merits a specific categorisation. The following is a proposed policy context applicable for each Level of Landscape Sensitivity.

It is important to note that this regime is mainly applicable to the macro-features in the landscape and that interventions related to the removal of eyesores would be applicable in all the areas albeit on a different level of priority. Micro-interventions within an urban context are envisaged to be addressed in other policy topics.

For the purpose of this section, the term “Rural Areas” shall be applicable to areas Outside Development Zones (ODZ) whilst the term “Urban Areas” shall be applicable to areas enclosed by a Development Zone boundary and specific areas earmarked by the Structure Plan for large-scale development.
7.3.4.1 **Category 1: Areas of Very High Landscape Sensitivity (AVHLS).**

These are the most sensitive landscape areas in the Maltese Islands and interventions should be guided with utmost attention. Long distance views to and from these areas should be strictly safeguarded.

**Category 1- Rural Areas**

Interventions should be directed towards the planned and managed removal of dereliction (and offending structures) as well as the encouragement of the maintenance of traditional agricultural practices (where these are allowable under other policy regimes). Positive intervention in terms of encouragement of traditional farming practices is desirable in such areas (again where other policies permit). The rehabilitation of rubble walls should be given priority in such areas. Agricultural structures such as greenhouses, cloches, animal husbandry units, stores, pump rooms etc., should be avoided in such areas. Reservoirs may be considered on a case by case basis and strict design criteria for construction, mitigation and operation should be developed to this effect. Habitat regeneration or recreation may be considered provided that all the necessary studies are undertaken to ensure ecological compatibility as well as visual aesthetic suitability.

There needs to be very strong justification for the creation of new carriageways or upgrading of existing carriageways. Such proposals should only be considered if the intervention is deemed requisite at the strategic level and only after the other alternative options have been considered. There should be a presumption against all new urban development (including infrastructural development in such areas). Tourism related or commercial recreation related facilities (in rural areas) should not be located in such areas. New industrial development (including warehousing, quarrying, construction related activities and scrapyards) should be strictly precluded. With existing legitimate industrial concerns in such areas, vigorous mitigation measures should be imposed and implemented. Development on coastal areas should be strictly restricted. Illumination levels at night should be kept to the safest minimum levels.
Category 1 - Urban Areas

Priority should be the skyline in terms of conserving the landmark features (e.g. churches), removal of clutter from the roofs, utilization of materials and design compatible with the traditional urban context setting and avoiding excessive height of development. Attention should also be afforded to create Visual Integrity Buffer Zones around the main urban heritage conservation sites (e.g. Valletta, Mdina, Cittadella, and UCA’s whose boundary coincides with ridge edges) as well as around isolated monuments (especially ex-military heritage) in the countryside. The creation of new industrial or infrastructure related facilities should be avoided in these areas. Illumination at night of the relevant features would be encouraged provided that the luminaires are efficient in energy use and strive to avoid unnecessary light pollution. The creation of green pockets near urban fringes could be encouraged provided that their creation would not compete with nearby monuments or features.
7.3.4.2 **Category 2: Areas of High Landscape Sensitivity (AHLS)**

These areas are still highly sensitive landscapes but on a lower level of scale than Category 1 Landscapes.

**Category 2 - Rural Areas**

As for Category 1 but on a slightly less stringent level and on a lower level of priority. Consideration for pump-rooms and other low key agricultural structures (not stores) may be considered on a case by case basis. The creation of new carriage-ways may be considered but (amongst other considerations) subject to visual impact suitability. Development on coastal areas should be limited to essential facilities related to navigation, maritime operation safety or very limited coastal access facilities and all these shall be subject to consideration of alternatives, suitability for the specific location, access considerations, implications on the carrying capacity of the area and the application of good contextual design and visual mitigation measures.

**Category 2 - Urban Areas**

As for Category 1 but with slightly greater flexibility in terms of design (but not on massing, colour and texture). The same level of protection as per Category 1 should be given around landmark features, monuments and protected cultural heritage.

7.3.4.3 **Category 3: Areas of Significant Landscape Sensitivity (ASLS)**

Category 3 areas are still sensitive areas given their location and intervisibility with other areas but to a considerably lower degree than Categories 1 and 2. Consequently, greater flexibility in the determination of development possibilities should be indicated for these areas (subject to other Strategic Planning policies).

**Category 3 - Rural Areas**

The same provisions of Category 2 in areas due north of the Great Fault (Victoria Lines) with some flexibility on greenhouses, cloches, stores and farm-buildings depending on the individual site characteristics,
alternatives and other Structure Plan policies. Flexibility should be greater due south of the Great Fault (Victoria Lines) especially in terms of rehabilitation of existing structures and in the vicinity of industrial areas.

**Category 3 - Urban areas**

The main emphasis should be to treat urban edges with greater sensitivity in terms of design, massing colour and texture. In many instances, the introduction of an element of greenery would in many cases be welcome. The same level of protection as per Categories 1 and 2 should be given around landmark features, monuments and protected cultural heritage. Industrial development should preferably be restricted to the existing designated areas. In the case of Malta, the industrial development due north of the Great Fault should be actively discouraged whilst in Gozo, industrial development should be actively discouraged in all rural areas except for specifically designated areas around the existing industrial areas. Greenbelts and other visual mitigation measures should be applied around industrial estates.

7.3.4.4 **Category 4 - Area of Moderate Landscape Sensitivity (AMLS)**

Category 4 landscapes are moderately sensitive and thus there is a lot of scope for flexibility. However, this does not imply a free for all but good design is a requisite in this area. Special care should also be taken in the proximity of natural and cultural heritage.

**Category 4 - Rural Areas**

Unless otherwise indicated by policy, agricultural development of all types may be considered in these areas. Attention to design should be given special attention in the proximity to areas of natural or cultural value.

**Category 4 - Urban Areas**

Development is to be governed by policies for the area with attention to good design and contextuality. Special attention has to be given in the proximity of parish churches, chapels, piazzas and urban fringes.
Special attention should also be given in Urban Conservation Areas and near scheduled buildings or sites. Contextual design within streetscapes should be norm in terms of design, height limitation and fenestration.

7.3.4.5 Category 5 - Areas Requiring Landscape Upgrading (ARLU)

These are areas where existing large scale human land-use has been identified to appreciably degrade the surrounding landscape. In these areas, there is ample scope for scenic upgrading. In some cases, it is possible to upgrade the scenic value of an areas to such an extent that it becomes an Area of Very High Landscape Sensitivity (AVHLS). This is possible in areas where the disruption to the landscape is created in an otherwise area of AVHLS. It is important that in terms of intervention priority, these areas are given the order of priority as AHVLS.

Category 5 - Rural Areas

Interventions can be classified into two main types of operation: removal of clutter where the offending structure can be relocated and/or application of visual mitigation measures where the offending structures cannot be relocated. Relocation on its own is often not sufficient if the area which has been disturbed is not rehabilitated. Visual mitigation measures can be straightforward or elaborate; short term or long term. For example, terrain modelling tends to influence the scenic character in the immediate term, whilst planting tends to be a longer term solution. In terms of non-rural facilities which need to be accommodated in the countryside, the main effort should be to minimize conspicuity over the surrounding terrain and features and maximize integration into the surrounding context. Attention should also be given to the operational stage of major projects in the countryside as in many instances, the scenic dereliction occurs due a lack of maintenance, improper maintenance or inadequate attention to site management practices.

Category 5 - Urban areas

Once again, interventions can be classified into relocation and mitigation as for rural areas. However, given an urban context, the solutions tend to be more articulate in view of the higher landscape complexity.
and the restrictions on useable space. In urban areas, the focus should be on design considerations. In Urban Conservation Areas the focus should be on a contextual integration with the existing urban morphology whilst in modern or tourist areas, there is ample scope for experiment, provided that good design and good taste prevails. Other planning considerations (e.g. height, no. of floors, vehicular circulation and parking, sanitary considerations etc.) should always be taken into account in the sense that good design should not be endorsed at the expense of other planning policies. There is also ample scope to create interesting and imaginative focal points on the more modern areas of the Maltese skyline (especially in tourist areas).