



BirdLife Malta's Comments on the Partial Local Plan Review for Rural Settlements (2006)

5th May 2025

BirdLife Malta wishes to submit its comments on the proposed Partial Review of the 2006 Local Plan Policies concerning Rural Settlements.

The Planning Authority asserts that the proposed amendments are intended to provide greater clarity and align existing policies with contemporary planning standards. However, the current policies leave little room for conflicting interpretations and instead this review is allowing the expansion of land take-up within rural settlements through additional ancillary facilities.

Rather than permitting further encroachment into rural areas, the policy focus should shift towards tightening restrictions on allowable land uses. Specifically, the inclusion of swimming pools and changing rooms as ancillary facilities is inappropriate and should be removed from this review. Such additions are not necessary to improve living standards within rural dwellings. This would likely lead to the sealing and development of extensive areas of unbuilt land, ultimately undermining the very rural character and environmental integrity these policies are meant to protect.

Given these concerns, we strongly contend that any changes introduced through this review should serve to impose stricter limitations and not loosen them. New measures should aim to prevent further land take-up and hard landscaping within rural settlements.

Another notable example of policy misuse is the recurring approval of developments under the guise of agricultural use, such as so-called sheep farms which are later revealed to be excessive in scale and inappropriate in context - such as the recent case in Bidnija, involving a three-storey sheep farm in a previously unspoilt valley.

To address this issue, the Local Plan should include more robust and specific provisions on this issue. The clause stating *"Agricultural buildings for livestock farming and for arable farming provided they comply with the criteria set out in the Rural Policy and Design Guidance, 2014 and future amendments"* should be refined to include clear limits. This would help prevent abuse of policy intended to support genuine agricultural activity.