



**HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR  
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER  
No 6 Convent Place  
Gibraltar**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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### **Over a year of an open planning process**

Of this Government's many initiatives, there is little doubt that some of the more in-depth reforms have been seen in the Development and Planning process.

Within days of being elected, the Government had announced that future meetings of the Development and Planning Commission (DPC) would be held in public, that the Commission's Chairman would be the Town Planner rather than a Government minister and that the Environmental Safety Group would be invited to join the Commission as a full voting member. Paul Origo who has been the Town Planner since the 1980s said, 'It seemed slightly strange at first to be the Chairman and have Ministers sitting on the Commission but I have to remember that they are not there as Ministers – they are simply there as members of the Commission.'

In another change, members of the public, including those objecting to Planning applications, now have the right to address the Commission as long as the DPC is notified in advance.

All this is in stark contrast to the way things were done before when meetings were held, in secret, at the offices of the Minister for Trade and Industry. No-one knew exactly what was on the agenda of those meetings nor how the decisions were reached. Applicants or architects might be invited to explain their views but they were never allowed to stay for the discussion or to hear the decision. And details of the Government's own projects were not revealed.

But today's new openness has proved popular with both the public and the press. Indeed, some recent meetings have proved so popular that extra chairs have had to be brought into the Charles Hunt Room at the John Mackintosh Hall. And articles in the local press have given an even wider audience to the various Planning applications and Development initiatives being considered by the Commission. 'Now we have to be aware that the public are much more informed which certainly keeps us on our toes,' says Town Planner and

Chairman of the DPC, Paul Origo. "I think it is important that the press are able to attend our meetings and, thus far, their reports have always been 100% accurate.'

Another major innovation has been the requirement for the Government's own projects to be submitted for comment by the Commission. Obviously, there is now the opportunity for members of the public to raise objections to the Government's proposals – something that would never have happened under the previous administration. And, because the media are present, it is now considered quite normal for the public to read in their newspapers about the demolition of the Fleet Pavilion or to hear on GBC of plans for a classic car museum at the Magazine Chamber on Ragged Staff Road. This would never have been the case before. At the moment, the Commission does not vote on Government projects, instead it comments on the proposals, 'But I think that this will change with Government projects soon having to go through the full planning process,' added Paul.

This was confirmed by the Deputy Chief Minister Dr Joseph Garcia, who is also the Minister with responsibility for planning. "The policy of the Government, at this stage, is that Government applications are now tabled before the DPC in public for guidance and advice. This will change in the next stage where Government applications will also be submitted to the planning process." Dr Garcia said that at first many departments were simply not used to this procedure and a circular had to be sent by the Chief Secretary to all Government departments, agencies and companies explaining the policy of the new administration that Government projects should be sent to the DPC for advice. There has to be a period of adjustment to a new policy and to a new system so allowances have to be made.

And, in line with other Government initiatives, the Planning process now makes much more use of the Government's website. The Commission's agendas, minutes and decisions are all now available on-line and it is hoped that, soon, the whole process will be made available on-line. 'We are looking forward to everything being on-line even though we will need new structures in place to handle all the extra e-traffic,' said the Town Planner.

To assist with these various initiatives, two new Gibraltar Town Planning Assistants, Giovanni Baglietto and Kathy Van Zyl, have been recruited. 'I was really lucky,' said Giovanni. 'I graduated in Environmental Planning last September and this job came up almost immediately. As the Gibraltar planning procedures are based on the UK system I learned at university, I have been able to settle in very quickly.'

It is no surprise that, after more than a year of the new openness within the Planning process, feedback from the public has been overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, the transparency of the new process now seems so normal that people can hardly believe the scale of the changes that have taken place.

'Although people are much more aware of the planning process, we still need to encourage the public to ask for our advice before they submit their applications. After all, our advice is free!' said Paul Origo.