



HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of Transport, Traffic,
and Technical Services

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Minister for Transport, Traffic and Technical Services

The Hon Paul Balban

Budget Speech 2016

Mr Speaker,

Last November, the people of Gibraltar entrusted this Government with another term of office. A result that showed the resounding trust that the electorate have for a party that have had Gibraltar's true interests at heart. Mr Speaker, it is an honour to stand here today to deliver my 5th Budget address.

TECHNICAL SERVICES

Mr Speaker, I will commence my address by turning to my Ministerial Responsibilities for Technical Services.

During the past Financial Year, the Technical Services Department has continued to work tirelessly to meet its defined responsibilities, maintaining public infrastructure and supporting and providing technical advice to other Government Ministries and Departments.

The Technical Services Department has been involved with a number of projects covering a wide range of areas which have included coastal works, cliff stabilisation schemes, highways maintenance, sewer maintenance and demolition works.

Ministry of Transport, Traffic and Technical Services

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Coastal Works

Mr Speaker, Technical Services has been directly responsible for the delivery of the North Mole Reclamation project that will make way for the LNG plant that will supply the new Power Station. This project has seen the existing Western Arm extended northwards by just under 120m.

In all, nine concrete caissons have been placed to create the perimeter of the new reclamation. Approximately 90,000 tonnes of rubble from the Eastside Reclamation site have been processed to create the landfill. This is an important use of existing waste material to create a valuable plot of land of approximately 10,000m². The project posed various engineering challenges given its close proximity to the airfield and existing shipping routes to and from the marinas. The total cost of this project was £12M and was completed earlier this year.

For the coming year, Technical Services will continue to monitor and maintain all existing coastal defences and will offer technical support with the delivery of a new major reclamation project at Western Beach.

Cliff Stabilisation:

Mr Speaker, Turning now to cliff stabilisation and rock fall protection projects, during Financial Year 2014/15, the department has developed the design of additional rock catch fences along the northern end of the eastside water catchments and will be replacing an 80m stretch of fences during the current financial year. The department will continue to monitor and develop cliff stabilisation schemes in line with Government's on-going cliff stabilisation and rock fall protection programme.

Highways Maintenance:

Mr Speaker, with regards to highway maintenance, the works programme has once again been successful over the past year with on-going repairs to roads, footpaths and retaining walls.

Mr Speaker. The replacement of pelican crossing lights and equipment has been undertaken in a number of locations throughout Gibraltar, working jointly with the Gibraltar Electricity Authority. The first countdown timer system was installed along Line Wall Road in the vicinity of the City Hall last financial year. This was an enormous success.

This has led to (in fact today's announcement by way of PR of the) the (imminent announcement by way of PR of the) recently announced introduction of 2 new countdown timer systems aimed at improving pedestrian safety and fluidity. The first countdown timer has been placed along North Mole Road at the crossing by Block 1 Watergardens. These timers will form part of a crossing system which incorporates signs which will encourage pedestrians wishing to access Main Street and the City Centre to do so at this controlled crossing which will clearly define pedestrian crossing times and vehicle movement times.

The intention is to alleviate the congestion created by visitors especially those from cruise ships when they cross at the uncontrolled crossing adjacent to the Waterport Fountain Roundabout. In doing so, large traffic tailbacks are created as a result of swarms of pedestrians crossing without a means of controlling their crossing times. A second countdown timer, as announced, was placed at



the last pelican crossing leading from the fuel station to Market Place. These new measures are expected to provide better fluidity to traffic flow and safer pedestrian access to town.

Mr Speaker, Last year saw the completion of pedestrian improvements to the Trafalgar and Ragged Staff areas with the introduction of a new puffin crossing together with a new zebra crossing from Ragged Staff parking to the Trafalgar Cemetery. This falls in line with the policies and objectives of the Traffic Plan which aims to improve pedestrian access, cutting journey times and make walking safer and more enjoyable, hence encouraging its take-up as no doubt the best way of getting to and from places.

Mr Speaker, the Department as usual, continues to successfully manage road closures and diversions on the Public Highway, both for its own in-house works and for all other utility companies and contractors, in a manner that allows essential works to be undertaken whilst at the same time allowing vehicles and pedestrians to circulate in a safe manner with the minimum amount of disruption. The increased construction activity generated by new projects over the past few years makes this task increasingly difficult. In order to reduce the impact as much as possible, road closures are avoided during peak times wherever possible, and after hours and weekend work is a condition that is normally imposed on contractors in order to minimise inconvenience to the public.

Highways Resurfacing:

Mr Speaker, As stated in last year's budget speech, the comprehensive resurfacing programme will be continued this year by the Department. Last year major resurfacing works were undertaken along the southern section of Queensway from the Dockyard roundabout up to entrance to Commonwealth Park. This project also included the laying of new road channels on the sides of the road and remedial works to existing road gullies to improve drainage in the area. Additionally, the roundabout leading to the supermarket on Europort Avenue was also completely resurfaced.

During the current Financial Year the resurfacing programme will continue and the department is currently reviewing various areas for resurfacing which will include a section of Queensway by the new multi-storey car park, the Sundial Roundabout and Cumberland Road.

Main Street Paving:

Mr Speaker, we are also pleased to announce that the first phase of works to repair the paving joints on Main Street was completed last year. The works entailed the lifting up and relaying of the stone blocks and the filling and stabilising of all joints using a special polymer. Last year a stretch of Main Street from the junction with Engineer Lane to its junction with Cooperage Lane was completed. In line with our manifesto commitment we are pleased to announce that Phase 2 of this project will continue this year and will see the repairs to the joints extend southwards along Main Street.

Dudley Ward Tunnel:

During the past few years' major improvements have been carried out within Dudley Ward Tunnel with the installation of a fire-fighting main and emergency telephones along the full length of



Dudley Ward Tunnel. Last year mobile phone coverage was extended within the tunnel and the Department has been working with specialist consultants to develop a ventilation scheme which will improve air quality as much as possible, working within the constraints imposed by this ex-military tunnel. In line with our manifesto commitment, funding has been earmarked for the installation of the ventilation system to be commenced during the current Financial Year.

Traffic Plan

The draft Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan was published during 2015 and was open to public consultation to allow the public to comment on the various initiatives being considered. The various comments and suggestions have helped to form the final version of the plan that is earmarked for publication soon and will provide a footprint for all matters relating to traffic, parking and modes of transport on our roads for the next ten years.

Mr Speaker, on traffic matters the Department has continued to make good progress this year and has seen a number of improvements and initiatives. Traffic Speed Indicator Devices were installed on several of our main arterial roads. These Speed Indicator Devices are vehicle-activated signs, which detect and display real time vehicle speeds as vehicles approach them in order to advise drivers of the speed they are travelling at. The aim of the devices is to provide information that will allow drivers to change their behaviour towards speed and is one of several measures, which form part of a wider speed management plan. In this respect the department has been carrying out a full review of the speed limits on all of Gibraltar's roads and is pleased to announce that in the coming year, changes will be made to the current speed limits to a number of our roads, some of which have already started.

Mr Speaker, during the past year, the Department has also been involved with the installation of Speed cameras along Europa Advance Road, Rosia Road and Devil's Tower Road. These sites were chosen in consultation with the RGP who are the experts on the ground when it comes to "hot spots" for speeding around Gibraltar. These roads have the highest accident rates statistically and it is hoped that the introduction of these Speed Cameras will reduce vehicle speeds and make our roads safer for all our users. The project is currently at a very advanced stage and it is hoped that the cameras will become operational within the next few months.

Mr Speaker, in respect to parking the construction of the new multi-storey car park at the site of the old Naval Grounds is now completed and this will provide parking for 1000 + cars directly in the heart of Gibraltar. This facility will provide 40 covered parking spaces for large coaches as well as additional spaces for smaller coaches and taxis. It will also provide around 700 public car parking spaces – this is double the number of spaces that were previously available where Commonwealth Park now stands and 100 more than the combined total of that car park and that of the Naval Ground. 326 spaces have been sold and some let out on a monthly basis. This car park also has 19 parking bays designated for the disabled drivers and 30 bays fitted with electric car charging points.

Other parking initiatives have included the introduction of additional Pay and Display facilities at Landport Ditch and the introduction of Pay and Display parking at Romney Huts car park. A new parking scheme is currently in progress and being developed along Line Wall Road, Orange Bastion and Zoca Flank including Fountain Ramp. There has been a redistribution of motorbike parking to Zoca Flank and Reclamation Road allowing a greater area for quick turnaround Pay &



Display parking along Line Wall Road, and more loading bays for commercial and residential use in the area, which will be segregated depending on user type.

A new Pay & Display area is also being considered for Waterport Road. These initiatives are aimed at improving the availability of parking in busy areas at peak times by the introduction of a parking fee to encourage vehicle turnaround. The feedback has been very good as increased turnaround means a greater chance of finding parking in the most needed areas, close to commercial and business zones. This has been greatly welcomed by the many that use these already existing facilities.

During this current Financial Year the department is expecting to construct a new pedestrian footpath along Governor's Street from the junction of Bishop Rapallo Ramp to Library Ramp. This area is extremely narrow and there are concerns for the safety of pedestrians entering and exiting the properties and businesses lining the western side of the road.

Sewers Section:

Mr Speaker, moving now onto sewers, during the past year the Infrastructure Section of the department has been carrying out significant works to the existing sewer that runs along Devil's Tower Road. These have included repairs to a sewer collapse by the Sundial Roundabout as well as the rehabilitation and repair of several brick manholes along the sewer run. During the coming financial year extensive sewer relining works will be carried out along this length of sewer to deal with the additional flows that will result from developments in the area.

Apart from the works at Devils' Tower Road the department has been working on a new foul sewer system at Europort Avenue and will shortly commence works to lay a new storm water system in the area. This new system will go a long way in dealing with the problem of flooding along Queensway which has been caused by the collapse of an existing brick culvert and which has required an over pumping regime to be put in place to deal with the problem.

The condition and upkeep of Gibraltar's main sewer and storm water drainage networks continues to be a matter of great concern for the Government arising from a lack of sufficient investment and neglect in the past to what is arguably the most important part of our infrastructure. The Department will therefore this year continue to carry out desilting and cleansing works to the Main Sewer from the area of the Museum to the Trafalgar Roundabout.

Other works will include improvements to the storm water systems at both Road to the Lines and the Southern end of Main Street where flooding has become an annual problem during periods of very heavy rainfall.

Funding is once again being provided for the purchase of equipment to allow the Sewer Infrastructure Section to continue to expand and provide an enhanced service in respect of its inspections of the sewer network.

Garage & Workshop:

Mr Speaker, funding is also being provided this Financial Year to the Garage & Workshop for new equipment. The Garage & Workshop will continue to provide a service to maintain the fleet of Government vehicles, including the refuse collection vehicles.



Conclusion:

Mr Speaker, the Technical Services Department is one of those Government departments who are rarely in the limelight but who work tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on their defined responsibilities, maintaining public infrastructure and supporting and providing technical advice to other Government Ministries and Departments. You will recall that the Department was heavily involved during the major landslide that affected Europa Road in October last year and is testament to the professional and technical ability of the department to deal with all manner of challenges.

As can be seen, Technical Services will quietly yet effectively and professionally continue to carry out this coming year all manner of projects in order to deliver on the Government's extensive and comprehensive programmes.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr Speaker, turning now to Public Transport, the new MAN buses are providing Gibraltar with a much-needed improved bus service and are playing a key role in part of the Government's Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan. These buses are fully accessible to all and include wide step entrance, space for wheelchairs or buggies, kneeling suspension and powerful and reliable air-conditioning. Additionally, the Ministry for Transport, Traffic and Technical Services announced in October of last year that HM Government of Gibraltar was working on a real-time bus tracking service that would cover all working routes offered by the Gibraltar Bus Company.

The Gibraltar Bus Tracker WebApp, developed by the Information Technology & Logistics Department, was officially launched in April with Routes 2 and 3, with further routes to be announced in due course.

The Bus Tracker WebApp now offers users real-time bus information. Therefore Mr Speaker, from any smartphone or desktop computer with internet access, any citizen will be able to access the website, select a bus route and see a transit map that will display where buses are located within the given route.

Mr Speaker, this is yet another way in which our public transport experience has been enhanced. Why should we wait for the bus, when we can meet it at the bus stop! The bus tracker app will revolutionize bus travel in Gibraltar helping to provide that modal change to more sustainable and shared and environmentally friendly transport. The Bus Tracker App is imperative to give the control to the user so that they have the confidence to leave their vehicle behind and choose the free and efficient service that is being provided. Further bus routes will be rolled out shortly as the routes are further reviewed.

Bus routes are also being modified with consideration given to user feedback and comments. The hardest thing to do is to strike that happy balance that pleases all bus users, each with their own differing and indeed conflicting needs. The hardest compromise is providing a bus service that gives the maximum route coverage, especially to an increasingly aging community while providing a reasonably short journey time to satisfy the working population too, hence encouraging that



step change of leaving vehicles behind and opting for public transport instead. Although a long and convoluted bus service favours people with a lot of time on their hands, it does little for those who need to get to work quickly. Some routes can take up to between 45 minutes to 1 hour from start to finish, sometimes longer if snared up in traffic.

New Upper Town Buses:

Mr Speaker, Government has made a significant investment in six new buses for the Upper Town in order to guarantee a better bus service all round and to try to encourage the use of Public Transport as a sustainable and an attractive alternative mode of transport.

These modern buses have not only proved to be the best value for money, but also conform to the latest Euro 6 emission guidelines. They were carefully selected following a series of tests with different makes and models of vehicles carried out around our unique road network and topography. These trials were undertaken to ensure that the vehicles selected would meet the stringent requirements of the Upper Town. I am pleased to announce that the Ford Transits that were procured have proved to be powerful enough to deal with steep inclines while at the same time providing an adequately comfortable and cool environment within (that is, in terms of temperature) for its users. Furthermore, these buses are sufficiently small to be able to navigate our narrow roads while at the same time offer adequate passenger capacity.

Their main specifications are:

- CCTV for passenger/driver safety;
- Grab rails in order to accommodate standing passengers;
- Electric sliding doors.

Moreover, three of these buses have also been fitted with fully accessible rear entry wheelchair lifts. These lifts will not only allow access to wheelchair users, but can also enable those persons with severe walking disabilities to access the bus interior using these same means while in the standing position. Provisions are also in place should there be demand enough to fit wheelchair lifts in more buses.

These new buses are now serving the Mount Alvernia route with its wheelchair facilities. This was a much needed and much sought out service by the residents of this facility.

Transport Inspectors:

Mr Speaker, in order to continue to improve the Public Transport service, Government will be training 2 more Transport Inspectors thereby bringing the compliment to seven officers that will further ensure that our public transport meets the expectations of their users and that they fully abide and conform to all the legal requirements under the Transport Act.

In parallel, Government continues to work hand in hand with the GTA in order to jointly identify strategies to continue to better the Taxi service throughout Gibraltar. This year a new City Service Pilot Scheme has been put in place whereby more taxis are available to the public during the busy daytime hours. Although still under assessment, signs of customer service improvements are already starting to show. It is in fact the GTA who are the most self-critical of themselves, and taxi drivers generally agree and support these measures with a view of safeguarding an adequate



service to the population from taxi ranks and the airport alike. I wish to thank the GTA and its members for their willingness to help improve what is already a very difficult service to provide amidst daily traffic pressures especially around the Frontier and the airport.

Driver & Vehicle Licensing Department:

Mr Speaker, I now turn to the Driver & Vehicle Licensing Department. This Department is working closely with the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) UK for the introduction of the tachograph cards that will serve our drivers, operators, and enforcement agencies. All the administrative procedures (application forms, information letters and databases) are now in place, a Memorandum of Understanding and a service level agreement drafted jointly by the Driving & Vehicle Licensing Department and Government Law Offices is awaiting DVSA's comments. The department is actively working to try and find an apt solution in order to record speed, distance and the accurate activity of Lorry and Bus drivers in accordance with the Regulations.

Mr Speaker, Transport Undertakings wishing to complete the new driver - certificate of professional competence (CPC) initial qualification and periodic training, can obtain the training that is continually being provided by the DVLD. In the past year, twenty-five (25) more drivers have successfully passed the "Bus Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC)" and sixteen (16) more drivers have successfully passed the "Lorry CPC" initial qualification. The Government, in an effort to ensure that all Directive requirements are met will continue to deliver the 35-hour periodic training for existing drivers during 2016/2017. Presently, in total, 169 Bus and 85 Lorry drivers have successfully attended the CPC periodic training. With this Government initiative both Transport Undertakings and individual applicants are now taking advantage of completing the 35 hours of periodic training over a five year period necessary to be able to drive in a professional capacity. This structure is now assisting undertakings and individuals to spread the CPC training costs over the full five year period.

European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR)

Mr Speaker, the carriage of dangerous goods by road carries the inherent risk of accidents. Taking into account the safety requirements of vehicles in Gibraltar that carry dangerous goods, and in accordance with the Transport (Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road) Regulations 2010, Government has already trained seven officers. It is envisaged that Government will continue to provide this training in order to qualify officers and allow them to issue an authorization certificate to these types of vehicles. This year further courses will be held by qualified persons from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) from the UK in order to train the newly recruited vehicle testers. This course will be held locally.

CBT:

Mr Speaker, the introduction, by this Government of the Motorcycle Compulsory Basic Training Course for riders continues to be a tremendous success. Feedback from parents and the public at large has been extremely positive. Nine hundred and twenty eight riders (928) have been trained over the last year. I am very confident that this Government training incentive is contributing in continuously improving road safety and reducing motorcycle accidents especially in first time motorbike users.



Photocard Driving Licences:

Mr Speaker, due to an unexpected increase in demand of the photocard driving licence, Government has had to procure an extra 8,000 blank driving licence cards from the UK. Although similar to the previous cards, these cards differ in so much as the security feature at the back of Card. Nonetheless; the public should not worry as the validity of our licences including our paper models is up to 2033.

Mr Speaker, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department, as a means of improving customer service, has introduced a bespoke business counter that is assisting businesses and reducing their respective waiting times. Feedback from its users has been very positive. Furthermore, the department continues to use information and communication technology as a tool to achieve better customer services. The general public is now actively accessing a number of online DVLD services and applications via the new e-Government portal; mainly Roadworthiness Test bookings (MOT) and Driving Test and Theory Test bookings. This is proving to be very popular and is allowing customers to access and pay for such facilities “at any time” from the comfort of their own homes. These measures come as new e-Government opportunities for the DVLD that will appropriately cater for market demands and service requirements.

Traffic and Transport Commission:

Mr Speaker, the Department together with the Government Law Offices (GLO), is working closely in order to update all existing National Traffic and Transport legislation with a view to making both Acts more user friendly.

The Traffic and Transport Commission continue to meet on a monthly basis. The Traffic Commission is constantly working to assist our citizen’s in all matters relating to Traffic. The Commission is also heavily involved in recommending to Government the improvement of facilities and eco-friendly traffic advice regarding new project applications submitted to the Town Planning Commission. The Transport Commission works hand in hand with all the Transport undertakings, the Bus Company and the Gibraltar Taxi Association (GTA) in order to mutually find strategies to continue to better the Public Transport Services in Gibraltar. To this effect, I am very satisfied that both these bodies have been able to adopt all Traffic and Transport Regulations successfully. From here, again I thank all the members of both Commissions, many of which give up their personal time on a voluntary basis.

Data-Sharing

Mr Speaker, the Prüm Convention was signed on 27 May 2005 by Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom in the town of Prüm in Germany. The Convention was adopted so as to enable the signatories to exchange data regarding DNA, fingerprints and vehicle registration of concerned persons and to cooperate against terrorism.

The Prum Convention will require that Gibraltar authorities (principally the RGP and DVLD) be able to exchange fingerprint, DNA profiles and vehicle registration data via the UK with other Member States. We are working on legislative requirements to provide for this cooperation and analysis of this is in hand. For exchange of information about vehicle registration data, the DVLD



is pursuing advice from the UK Department for Transport and DVLA precisely on how the Prum obligation might be achieved in order to minimise the outlay and running costs.

PORT AUTHORITY

Mr Speaker, I now wish to turn my attention to my Ministerial responsibilities within the Port – I am delighted to confirm that the Gibraltar Port Authority has recently been granted Essential Services status. This is a very positive step for the Authority and its employees and provides an excellent platform from which to grow the Port in the future.

On the subject of finance, during the course of Financial Year 2015/2016 the Gibraltar Port Authority spent a total of £5,432,663 (including Capital expenditure) from a budget of £5,442,000. Revenue was £4,418,047. The reduction in overall revenue has been as a result of previously over optimistic financial projections against the backdrop of actual global activity, as well as the various discounts being applied to tariffs, which together with a concerted proactive and targeted marketing campaign, has resulted in greater levels of activity across most areas. Capital expenditure included the refurbishment of port assets as part of the Government's commitment to improve port infrastructure.

Mr Speaker, I am delighted to announce that the new Vessel Traffic Services System (VTS) tender process has been completed and the project is now expected to move forward with the new system being housed in the purpose built office complex at Lathbury Barracks. This building is well on track for completion later on this year. The delivery of the new system once again highlights the Government's commitment to ensure functionality and resilience in the system that underpins safety of navigation in our busy waters.

As for other developments, the GPA recently commissioned the complete refit of the port launch, General Elliot. The newly refitted Port Launch is now actively patrolling BGTW providing all important eyes at sea level to complement the VTS, escorting vessels into and out of BGTWs and assisting where necessary distressed vessels. The provision of a reliable vessel is absolutely essential especially now with such a large influx of new pleasure craft, some users inexperienced, following the allocation of new berths at the new small boats marina. Said refit, does exactly this.

The Port has also invested in updating the port fenders as well as also investing in its other assets such as oil spill booms on the northern and southern harbour entrances. Work also continues in evolving the Vessel Management System programme to further facilitate the smooth running of the port.

Mr Speaker, the Government is also in the process of reviewing expressions of interest received in respect of Land Based Storage facilities in Gibraltar. There are a number of extremely impressive and interesting proposals and the Government will be considering these with a view to making sure that Gibraltar gets the best possible solution whilst not impacting on other port activities.

Following the procurement process for a new oil spill radar protection system, which failed to attract a solution to meet the GPA's requirements, the GPA now believes that the new VTS



system, which includes a more powerful thermal imaging capability in detecting oil spills, will close this capability gap.

In the important area of security, enhanced fencing will also be installed within the Port estate shortly. This improvement will go towards improving the first impressions of disembarking passengers in the Port. Other enhancements are also being considered as part of the Government's commitment to developing the Port for cruise passengers in general.

Mr Speaker, the Port Authority continues with its proactive marketing campaign, in line with Government policy, focusing on direct engagement with ship owners and key stakeholders and the GPA once again recently took part in the Posidonia Exhibition in Athens, the world's most prestigious maritime event. As always, the Gibraltar Stand, co-sponsored by a number of our key operators and partners, generated a lot of interest.

The Minister for Shipping, my colleague the Hon Albert Isola, the Captain of the Port and various port operators also undertook a marketing visit to the Far East in April and visited both Singapore and Hong Kong in order to promote Gibraltar to the Asian market and also took the opportunity to directly engage with ship owners and other key stakeholders. The Government held formal receptions in both territories, which were extremely well attended. Further marketing visits are being considered and GPA personnel have also continued to attend various bunkering, security, cruise and environmental conferences (Copenhagen, Rotterdam, Barcelona, Mexico, Sardinia, London to name but a few).

The impact of these efforts is clearly shown in the stability of our port activity data when compared to other regional ports, given the unfavourable global conditions generally.

The Port Authority, in conjunction with the RGP and GMA, has also recently relaunched the Safety at Sea booklet, in time for all those new boat owners now taking up berths at the Mid-Harbour Marina to be reminded of their responsibilities at sea in order that all leisure boat owners enjoy our local waters in a safe manner.

The allocation of berths at the Mid-Harbour Small Boat Marina has been extremely successful and nearly all allocations have been completed. These allocations have been carried out strictly by the berthing waiting lists and in accordance with the Small Vessels (Moorings Control) Rules 2016 and to those applicants without Government arrears. The temporary Caretaker Committee will shortly call for a meeting to elect a formal Association Committee who will have responsibility for the running of the marina with the Gibraltar Port Authority maintaining responsibility for berth allocation and oversight of expenditure.

I must thank the Gibraltar Port Authority staff involved in this project for their tremendous efforts in making sure that the process has been quick and efficient. I must also convey my sincere thanks to the temporary Caretaker Committee who have taken on their role with much enthusiasm and professionalism. The new Marina is no doubt the jewel in the crown of berthing facilities in Gibraltar and its western super yacht berthing facilities have already been of interest to yacht owners and yacht masters alike. Indeed, we have already seen some well-known super yachts making use of this new berthing area. No doubt this facility will serve us well in the future.



The marina itself has also brought back an important recreational area lost when the North Mole was lost to vehicular traffic. Now the area is a magnificent walkway, leisure and fishing area as well as a scenic waterfront drive.

The GPA has almost completed its review of the Port Contingency Plan as part of its responsibilities to continue aligning itself to the Port Marine Safety Code. In addition, a full review of port legislation is also underway, with the delivery of the new Pilotage Act already completed and the modernisation of Port licensing currently in hand.

Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our port operators and service providers who work very closely with the GPA and Government - their support in our efforts to maintain our reputation as a Centre of maritime excellence is essential.

TOWN PLANNING AND BUILDING CONTROL

Mr Speaker. I now turn my attention to my responsibilities for Town Planning and Building Control.

Applications

Mr Speaker, the Department continues to deal with large numbers of applications.

In 2015 there were:

- 451 Planning and building applications
- 17 Demolition applications
- 55 Advertisement applications
- 21 Tree applications

Some of these were large, complex applications involving assessment of environmental impacts through the EIA process and extensive discussions with applicants to try and achieve high standards of design.

Government/MOD applications – considered by DPC

Mr Speaker, Government and MOD projects continue to be submitted to the Development and Planning Commission (DPC) for guidance and advice. In 2015 Government and MOD applications totaled 52 planning and building, and demolition applications. The DPC provides its advice and guidance on such applications, which are then taken into account by the Government or MOD in finalising its plans.

Public DPC meetings

Mr Speaker, the DPC meetings continue to be held in public with a total of 12 meetings held in 2015. In addition, the DPC's sub committee meets regularly to determine minor applications. In 2015 there were 40 meetings of the sub-committee. This greatly helps in speeding up the decision-making process.



All agendas and minutes continue to be made available online ensuring that the planning process remains open and transparent

e-Planning

In October 2015 the first stage of the e-Planning service was launched. This represents a step change in the way that the public is able to access information about applications. ePlanning allows anyone to search and view the details of any application submitted after the launch of the service, including all the plans and other documents submitted with the application. This makes it much easier for the public to be able to see what is being proposed and members of the public can even submit their comments on an application through the service.

Mr Speaker, e-Planning also makes it much easier for applicants to submit their applications. These can be done entirely online without the need for applicants to have to post their applications or deliver them by hand. In the first 6 months of the service going live just over 60% of Planning/Building applications were submitted online. This level of usage has exceeded our expectations and indicates that this new service for applicants has been well received.

Mr Speaker, the Town Planning staff are continuing to develop and improve on the first stage and the intention is to roll out further improvements during the course of the year, including the ability to pay fees online and to provide the public with the facility to carry out map-based searches for applications that may be of interest to them.

Geographical Information System GIS

The department also continues to develop its Geographical Information System to enable it to record and analyse data geographically. It has recently completed development work that allows it to identify relevant consultation bodies that need to be consulted on applications based on spatially defined zones. This helps ensure that the appropriate consultation bodies are consulted on applications that are of relevance to their specific expertise.

Town Planning Act

In July 2015 we published a Command Paper for the new Town Planning Act with a public consultation period up to the end of September. All the comments received were reviewed and a final draft is now almost complete. We have also been drafting new Regulations in preparation for the new Act.

The Gibraltar Development Plan of 2009 is in need of review and work on this will continue this financial year.

The Town Planning Department continue to encourage property owners to improve the appearance of their buildings through the Tax Relief On Façade Improvements scheme. During 2015 there were 26 applications under this scheme. A similar tax relief scheme has been introduced to encourage the use of solar water heating and photovoltaic cells as a way of contributing towards sustainable energy generation, and my staff encourage home owners and developers to make use of this scheme whenever it is applicable.



Urban Renewal

Mr Speaker, 2015 saw the incorporation of the post of Urban Renewal Officer into the Town Planning Department to further strengthen the Department's expertise and capabilities. In this respect the department works closely with my colleague the Hon J Garcia who leads on Urban Renewal. Work is currently focused on identifying specific buildings in need of refurbishment and encouraging owners to undertake improvement works and to maximise the use of these properties thereby bringing new life back into these urban areas.

Building Control

Finally, Mr Speaker, I now turn to Building Control.

The Building Control department's main duties are the administration and enforcement of the Building Regulations made under the Public Health Act by inspection of deposited plans. This is followed up with the necessary site inspections in order to determine that the works have been carried out to the approved plans and specifications.

Applications

From 1st January to 31st May 2016 the department has received a total of 391 applications of which 150 are still pending a decision (a possible record for 2016). It has also received 7 demolition applications of which 4 are Government projects and 5 are pending a decision. Finally Mr Speaker, a total of 75 Certificates of Fitness have been issued this year to date.

FINAL CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker, I would like to conclude my contribution to my budget address thanking all my staff that work so hard to see our commitments become a reality. Thanks goes not only to those who ensure the rolling out of our commitments, my senior members of staff, but also to all those who do not go by unnoticed, who perform all the valuable functions within the service throughout all the various departments and offices.

I also wish to thank all the staff here at Parliament who work tirelessly to ensure that proceedings run as smoothly and efficiently as they do.

In particular, I would finally also like to thank my personal ministerial staff for all of their help, support, hard work and long hours during the past year.