MEPA CIRCULAR 06/15

VISUAL SIMULATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority (MEPA) acknowledges that the whole planning process will gain from formulating a set of guidelines to promote best practice standards on the preparation, presentation and use of visual simulations of buildings and other structures such as communication masts and antennae, road and bridge infrastructure, ports and other structures, which will have a visual effect on the surroundings.

The main aim of these guidelines is to standardise the way visualisations which are requested during the assessment of planning applications are prepared, presented and used. This will ensure that the visualisations are clearly and easily understood, that they are accessible to the public and that they could be relied upon by all those involved in the planning process to inform their judgement.

MEPA has published the document 'Best Practice Guide - Visual Simulations' which is aimed at periti and urban designers, planners, case officers, decision makers, consultees and those involved in producing visual simulations. This document shall be brought into force on the 1st March 2016.

The scope of this circular is to summarise its key components.

2. GENERAL

2.1. All applications which require an Environmental Planning Statement (EPS) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) shall conform to the requirements set out in 'Best Practice Guide - Visual Simulations'.

2.2. All applications which do not qualify for an EPS or an EIS but for which a visualisation study will be requested shall conform to the requirements set out in 'Best Practice Guide - Visual Simulations'. However a proportionate approach, depending on the size and context of the proposed development, shall be made with respect to:

- ✓ Whether a Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) map is required,
- ✓ The number of viewpoints,
- ✓ The level of detail of the 3D model of the proposed intervention, and
- ✓ Whether single frame images only, as opposed to panoramas and single frame images, will suffice.

It is up to MEPA to determine the most appropriate approach for the proposed project and site in question. It is important that this approach is established and defined at the initial stages of the application.

2.3. All images for all applications shall be presented on A3 pages in order to ensure that these are more accessible to a wider audience.

2.4. Due to an increase of major projects in certain areas, MEPA may request the study of cumulative visual impacts. These types of studies shall be undertaken when an EPS or EIS is being requested.

2.5. For projects which require an EPS or an EIS, a set of photographs of the completed project taken from the same viewpoint locations and under the same photographic conditions shall be submitted together with the compliance certificate to MEPA.

2.6. Zone of Theoretical Visibility maps shall be used to determine those areas from where there is the possibility that the proposed development is visible.

2.7. Viewpoints must be carefully selected with respect to their representativeness and their significance.

2.8. Specific viewpoints to and from particular buildings or landscapes shall be considered in specific circumstances.

2.9. The number of viewpoints will depend on the scale and context of the proposed project and the number of locations required to provide a representative range of views.

2.10. A summary of viewpoints shall be presented on a single drawing. Each viewpoint together with the relevant data shall also be presented individually on a separate drawing.

2.11. MEPA places considerable importance on high quality professional photography. This guideline advocates the use of a high quality digital SLR camera with a full frame sensor and a 50mm fixed focal length camera lens. The use of a 28mm fixed focal length camera lens shall only be permitted in very particular circumstances.

2.12. When panorama views are used, these shall be made of individual photographs stitched together with the appropriate software.

2.13. Visualisations should be capable of being reproduced and printed such that all parties involved can clearly understand the scale and nature of the proposed intervention.

2.14. Visual simulations need to be prepared and presented in a way to allow the verification of the images. This is possible by checking the original image data and a template to check that the image dimensions are correct.

2.15. Visualisations shall include all the relevant viewpoint information, camera and photographic data, reading distance and all other information used in the preparation of the visualisations.

2.16. Panoramic images showing the proposed development in its wider landscape context are required for professional assessment whereas 75mm single frame images (recalibrated from the 50mm images) are required for visual impact assessment for a wider audience.