



# Local Communities' Charter for liveable cultural landscapes in our Grand Harbour

## A Place for Our Children

### Rationale

We, representatives of the Local Communities in our respective localities in the Grand Harbour region,

- convinced that our **Green and Blue Open Spaces & Cultural Landscapes** are critically important resources of the communities we represent, and
- aware that the natural and historical resources of the region deeply impact the social, mental, physical and economic well-being of our communities, and
- committed to honour our responsibility to give our children and our children's children a better quality of life, and
- committed to work hand-in-hand, together with willing partners, to plan holistically and collectively to protect & share the cultural landscapes of the Grand Harbour region, and
- committed to promote the Grand Harbour region **as a recreational & eco-heritage area** and as a discerning **touristic destination of local, national & European value**, and to create a regional eco-heritage trail across various localities,

*through* this Charter, embrace and promote the following principles, and with **one voice** call upon & invite authorities, planners, stakeholders, decision-makers, and NGOs at every level to endorse these principles:

# Principles and Pledges

## A. Green and Blue Open Spaces

**Green and Blue Open Spaces in the Grand Harbour region are a precious and limited resource** fundamental for the community's and nation's well-being. Notable green and open spaces in this region include the woodlands along the Cottonera Fortifications, especially those between the Cottonera and Margherita lines.

**Green and Blue Open Spaces offer multiple benefits to our health, environment, and economy.** Blue spaces are essential for our mental, physical and social well-being. Green spaces also play a critical role in environmental sustainability, particularly in a high-density urban environment.

Green and Blue Open Spaces additionally form part of our natural and historical heritage, as well as part of our national memory. They may attract local and international visitors, with great potential economic benefits.

It is also acknowledged that **present and future generations have an inalienable right to access and enjoy the region's Green and Blue Open Spaces.**

In view of the above, it is crucially important to protect and sustainably manage Green and Blue Open Spaces in the Grand Harbour region, for the benefit of present and future generations.

*Towards this end, the Signatories below pledge to work together with the appropriate partners, so as to safeguard and enhance this region's Green and Blue Open Spaces. Particularly, we aim to:*

- **Undertake** a stock-taking and situation analysis of **Green and Blue Open Spaces** in our localities with a view to identify how they can be better preserved and become more sustainable.
- **Develop** a better understanding of the ecosystems present in these areas, their contribution to biodiversity, the threats they face, and opportunities they present for more sustainable management in the future.
- **Manage** the woodlands around the Cottonera Fortifications in a sustainable manner so as to conserve these woodlands as a major green lung and place of quiet of the South for the benefit of the local communities and visiting tourists.
- **Create** a regional eco-heritage trail through the various localities. This eco-heritage trail will showcase the historical, cultural & touristic context of the fortifications while protecting green areas. This would be undertaken with the active involvement of the local heritage & historical societies.
- **Uphold** the public's right to safely access and enjoy Green and Blue Open Spaces.
- **Embark** on a programme of Communication, Education and Public Awareness on Green and Blue Open Spaces, addressed also to young generations to ensure there is a legacy to our endeavour.

## **B. Coastal Areas**

The waterfronts and shorelines of the Grand Harbour region are another unique national resource which is currently severely underutilised and degraded. While appreciating the need to locate certain industry and commerce along this coastal zone, the Signatories acknowledge that **the public's right to safely access and enjoy this unique interface between land and sea** must continue to be upheld and legally defined. Indeed, it is deemed that such access would increase commercial and economic activity in this area.

*Towards this end, the Signatories will strive to share and safeguard the waterfronts and shorelines of the Grand Harbour region, for the enjoyment of the public as their inalienable right. More specifically, we pledge to:*

- **Safeguard** the waterfronts and shorelines of the Grand Harbour region from further encroachment by incompatible and incongruous development.
- **Champion** the public's inalienable rights of safe access and enjoyment of the waterfronts and shorelines of the Grand Harbour region, and to continue to reclaim these rights wherever they have been encroached upon in the past.
- **Create** a Green and Blue walk along the coast starting from Marsa Power Station site to the Three Cities. This would comprise the opening & cleaning up of this coastline for public enjoyment, the restoration of historic buildings along this route, and the creation of a new green corridor along this coastal route, while protecting biodiversity in this important marine habitat.

## **C. Trees**

All trees in our localities, regardless of their age or the protection status of their species, form part of the **cultural landscape and ecosystems of our localities and of our collective memories**. Trees also have recreational, environmental, cultural, aesthetic and health values for our communities.

*In view of this, the Signatories will strive to:*

- **Ensure** that no damage, transplanting, cutting or uprooting of any such trees takes place without the prior consultation of tree professionals.
- **Rehabilitate** degraded green areas and create new green areas amidst the urban, industrial & commercial areas of this region. Rehabilitation and conservation of the region's green areas will be undertaken in an ecologically and sustainably sound manner.
- **Increase** indigenous biodiversity in this region's Green and Blue Spaces.
- **Adopt** sustainable irrigation methods for the region's green areas.
- **Ensure** that public underground reservoirs and wells be maintained and rainwater harvested so as to be utilised for irrigating public gardens and green areas.

## **D. Soil, Agricultural Land and Valleys**

Soil is a carbon sink which needs to be preserved so as to help limit carbon emissions which contribute to climate change. Soil and agricultural land **also hold significant economic value for family-based farmers** of local produce.

The Signatories acknowledge the value of **unsealed soil** and of agricultural land. We also recognise the importance of protecting and preserving the remaining open spaces within our valleys, given their intrinsic value as geological, hydrological and ecological units.

*Consequently, we will seek to:*

- **Stop/prevent** the onslaught of soil sealing through more buildings in green and agricultural areas.
- **Reverse** such soil sealing interventions undertaken in the past, where possible and appropriate.
- **Ensure** that the restoration of valleys, such as Wied Blandun, is undertaken with a holistic approach with minimum intervention which respects not only its historical and agricultural heritage but also its scientific, ecological and recreational value.

## **E. Built Heritage**

Green and Blue Open Spaces in the harbour region are **inseparable from the fabric of the built heritage** in the region, the most conspicuous component of which is the fortifications. The holistic and integrated conservation and management of the historic urban landscape is inseparable from the sustainable management and enjoyment of Green and Blue Open Spaces, and their natural as well as cultural heritage values. Furthermore, **the patina of historic buildings is an integral component** of their aesthetic and documentary value, and of the cultural landscape of our localities, and should be preserved.

*The Signatories undertake to holistically cooperate to safeguard the historic urban landscape, including the fortifications and green spaces around them. More specifically, we pledge to:*

- **Promote** appropriate practices in the conservation and management of the historic urban landscape, which conform to the principles of the Vienna Memorandum on “World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture - Managing the Historic Urban Landscape”.
- **Raise** awareness among the stakeholders involved to ensure that all conservation projects undertaken in our localities respect and retain the patina of the buildings, through **method statements** and other practical measures to ensure that overcleaning is avoided.
- **Install** appropriate lighting that enhances the legibility of the built heritage while preventing further light pollution in the area.

## **F. Genuine Public Participation**

The success of any local endeavour depends on the active participation and acceptance by the local community. Therefore any project intervention must be owned by the Local Communities, who are given ample opportunity and the appropriate tools, such as **community mapping**, to contribute to the plan. Local Community concerns are to be assimilated throughout the whole planning process, through **extensive social dialogue** and through genuine consultation.

*Therefore, the Signatories pledge to work together towards a better green and blue environment and **actively contribute to the whole process of safeguarding and enhancing the region's cultural landscapes, particularly the Green and Blue Open Spaces.***