ACT.

VISION FOR THE MANOEL ISLAND, WHITE ROCKS AND FORT CAMPBELL PARKS



INTRODUCTION

ACT welcomes and strongly supports initiatives that safeguard Malta's natural and cultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. The creation of new public parks represents a significant and positive step towards protecting local biodiversity, conserving natural habitats, and ensuring responsible stewardship of culturally important landscapes, while making such spaces accessible and enjoyable for the public. These objectives reflect long-standing efforts by ACT and other civil society organisations, exemplified by the broad public mobilisation in support of Manoel Island becoming a public green space; an initiative in which ACT was one of the supporting NGOs.

This proposal advocates for parks that balance public access, recreation, and sustainable mobility with the long-term preservation of ecosystems, ecosystem services, native biodiversity, and historic assets, recognising that such balanced approaches are essential to Malta's environmental resilience and quality of life. The proposal was developed taking into consideration feedback gathered from a series of discussions and workshops on the subject matter and also builds on ACT's experience on the conservation and preservation of Malta's natural heritage, it includes general and specific proposals for each proposed park.

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GENERAL PROPOSED PRINCIPLES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS, RECREATION AND CONSERVATION



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- Guarantee public accessibility to all three parks as inclusive, safe and welcoming public spaces, while ensuring that access is carefully managed to avoid degradation of sensitive habitats, ecological and heritage features.

- Adopt a zoning approach that clearly distinguishes between:
  - conservation core areas with restricted or guided access,
  - buffer zones allowing low-impact recreational use, and
  - designated recreational areas where public facilities and amenities are concentrated.

- Develop an integrated network of walking and cycling trails, designed to:
  - follow existing disturbed paths where possible,
  - use permeable, low-impact materials,
  - avoid habitat fragmentation, and
  - include boardwalks or raised paths in ecologically sensitive areas.

- Prioritise non-motorised access to the parks, encouraging walking and cycling as the primary modes of arrival and movement within the sites, and limiting vehicle access to essential services and universal accessibility needs.

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- Provide recreational spaces that are compatible with conservation objectives, such as:
  - shaded resting areas using native tree cover,
  - nature-based play and informal recreation zones,
  - viewpoints and seating integrated into the landscape, while avoiding over-commercialisation and intensive built infrastructure.

- Restore and manage landscapes prioritising indigenous Maltese flora of local genotype, ensuring that all planting contributes to biodiversity enhancement, habitat connectivity, and ecosystem resilience rather than ornamental landscaping.

- Implement a structured programme for the removal and long-term control of invasive alien species (IAS), supported by biosecurity measures, public awareness, and ongoing ecological monitoring.

- Integrate green infrastructure solutions throughout the parks, including:
  - permeable paths and surfaces,
  - rainwater capture and infiltration features,
  - vegetation that mitigates heat, improves air quality, and stabilises soils, thereby enhancing ecosystem services such as cooling, water regulation, and carbon sequestration.

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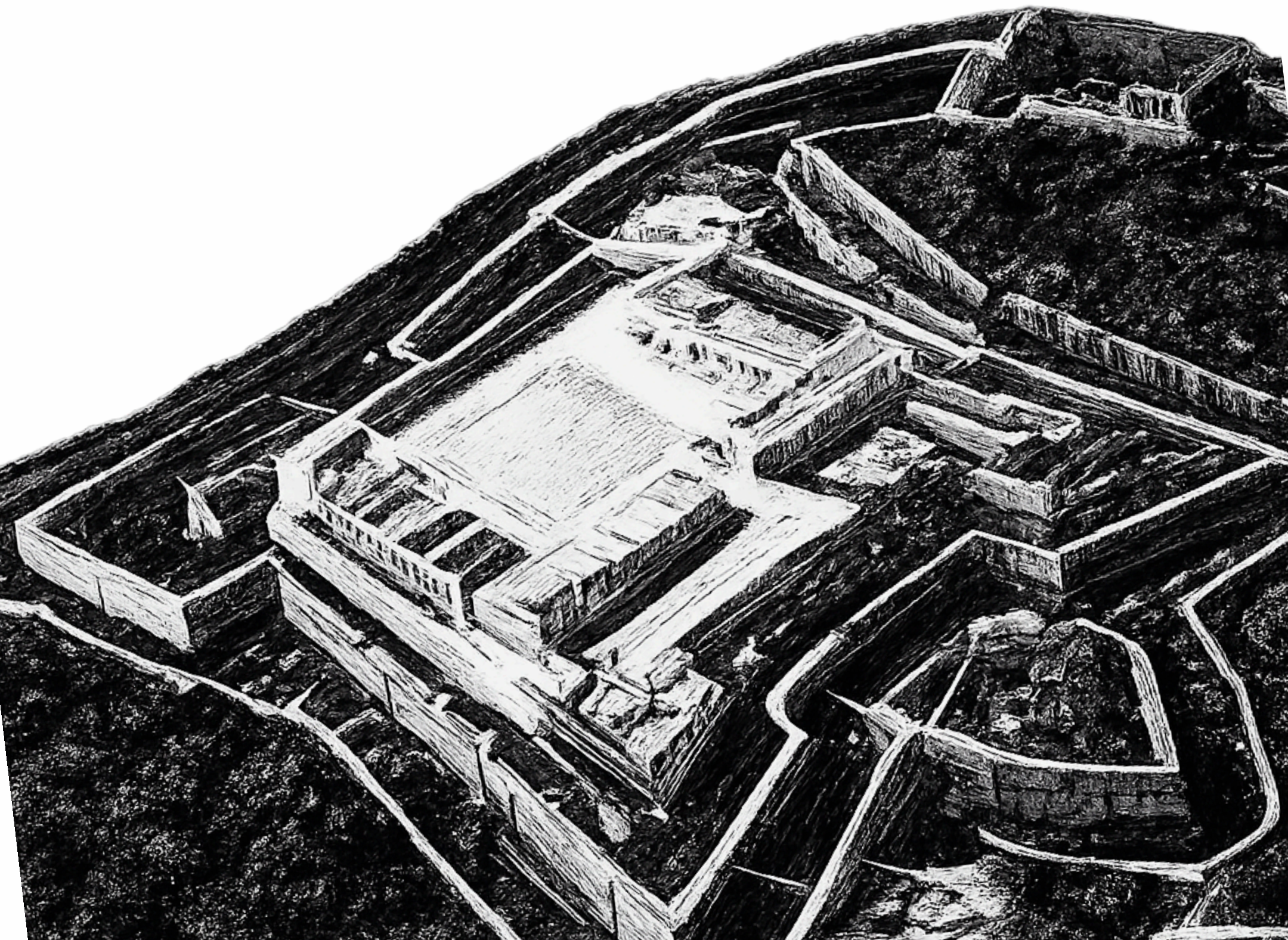
- Conserve and adaptively reuse historic buildings and structures within the parks for public-oriented uses such as interpretation centres, education spaces, research hubs, or community facilities, ensuring that heritage conservation and public benefit reinforce each other.

- Embed environmental education and interpretation into the park experience through signage, guided routes, and citizen-science initiatives, fostering public appreciation of Malta's natural heritage and support for conservation efforts.

- Establish and man agencies focused on managing and governing these spaces, monitoring and maintenance frameworks, with measurable indicators for ecological health, visitor pressure, and habitat recovery, and the employment of full-time trained park rangers, ensuring security, cleanliness, education, and that public access remains compatible with long-term environmental regeneration and the park goals.

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MANOEL ISLAND CENTRAL PARK





MANOEL ISLAND PARK
A World Class City Park

Manoel Island, home to Fort Manoel and the historic Lazzaretto, represents a rare urban green pocket rich in local biodiversity at the heart of Malta's harbour region. This proposal envisions the island's transformation into a world-class city park, comparable to leading European urban parks, where natural habitats, cultural heritage and public life are carefully integrated.

Through high levels of environmental protection, restoration of indigenous biodiversity, and thoughtfully designed public access, Manoel Island can become a landmark green space that enhances quality of life while safeguarding its ecological and historical value for future generations.



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PROPOSALS

1. **Tree planting approach aligned with landscape character**

    a. While maintaining conservation priorities and while also prioritising the selection of native flora, Park designated sights can incorporate also some non-invasive ornamental trees planted as accents within recreational or arrival zones, without compromising native habitat restoration areas or protected cores.
    b. Implement an IAS removal programme.
    c. Restore habitats using mainly Maltese indigenous flora.

2. **Heritage-first adaptive reuse: Fort Manoel and its surrounding ditch. Glacis and underground complex and the Lazzaretto complex as a "nature + culture/arts" public asset**

    a. Apply adaptive reuse best practice for fortified heritage: preserve fabric and historic value while giving buildings a sustainable public/cultural/tourism function that funds upkeep long-term.
    b. Suggested uses (low-impact, education-led):
        i. Interpretation centre/museum
        ii. Arts space
        iii. Conference/events space (current use)
        iv. Possible public service use such as notarial archives
        v. Research/volunteer hub (seed collection, citizen science, training)
        vi. Heritage-guided routes that keep commercial activity limited and compatible with conservation.

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3. **Active mobility: Continuous walking and cycling loop around the island seamlessly integrated into the existing topography and landscape** The alignment should:

    - follow existing disturbed routes where possible,
    - avoid visual intrusion or physical interruption of historic structures and sensitive habitats,
    - use low-impact, permeable materials, and
    - draw inspiration from world-class urban parks where mobility infrastructure is discreetly embedded within natural and historic settings (e.g. waterfront parks in Copenhagen, Barcelona, and Amsterdam).

4. **Maritime sports and water-based recreation in keeping with local character** Reinforce Manoel Island's historic maritime identity by integrating low-impact maritime sports, including sailing, swimming, kayaking, diving and snorkelling. Existing buildings on the island can be adaptively reused as premises supporting such activities, including equipment storage, training spaces and clubs, ensuring uses remain compatible with conservation and coastal protection objectives.

5. **Adaptive reuse of buildings for culture, arts and community life** In addition to museums and interpretation centres, selected existing structures may be reinvented as:

    - art spaces and exhibition venues,
    - dance studios,
    - Indoor gyms,
    - workshop and maker spaces (for artists and artisans),

- music/ band rehearsal rooms, responding to the loss of long-standing cultural spaces formerly present on the island and in the wider Gżira area,
- small café, lounge and co-working areas, supporting creative activity, workshops and community interaction, strictly limited in scale and integrated within existing built footprints.

6. **Performance and gathering spaces embedded in the landscape** Identify suitable locations for:

   - a main outdoor stage for larger cultural events,
   - smaller performance stages

7. **Recreation and fitness infrastructure with minimal spatial footprint** ACT supports the provision of low-impact, inclusive sporting and physical activities on Manoel Island that promote health, intergenerational interaction and cultural continuity, introducing calisthenics and outdoor fitness areas that are modular, multifunctional, space-efficient, as well as integrate a non-commercial boċċi space.

8. **Green infrastructure, Modular Park furniture and multifunctional design** Integrate green infrastructure practices in the park design, use modular and multifunctional park furniture (seating, shading, tables, temporary structures) to allow adaptability for different uses while reducing permanent built interventions.

9. **Art installations responsive to nature** Encourage site-specific art installations that interact with wind, light, water and landscape, reinforcing Manoel Island's identity as a space where nature, history, culture and creativity coexist.

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10. **Community spaces as part of stewardship, not over-commercialisation**. Community-oriented spaces should support education, volunteering, workshops and social cohesion, reinforcing public ownership of the park while avoiding excessive commercial pressure.

11. **Security, site management and heritage safeguards. Ensure effective park management through:**

    - CCTV and passive surveillance where appropriate,
    - Recruitment of full-time trained Park rangers
    - Setting up a park committee that includes community stakeholders to advise on park management,
    - integrated effective waste-management systems,
    - mandatory heritage and archaeological assessments prior to any physical intervention, making use of existing historical documentation that already defines the site's constraints and sensitivities.

12. **Underwater Pedestrian/Cycling Tunnel ("Green Link")**

    - Propose a study for the development of a non-motorised tunnel (pedestrian/cyclist only) between Manoel Island and Valletta, creating a permanent walking link. Examples of such tunnels exist in cities like Amsterdam, Hamburg and London.
    - Mange access and reduce car traffic on or around the island.
    - Integrate Manoel Island into the active mobility network connecting to Valletta and Sliema.
    - Provide a unique experience that supports healthy lifestyles and increases park visitation without compromising ecological integrity.

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PROPOSALS FOR PARK WHITE ROCKS





WHITE ROCKS PARK
A community co-creation hub

White Rocks represents a unique opportunity to create a community park that combines high levels of environmental protection with carefully managed public access and cultural life. This proposal envisions White Rocks as a protected coastal landscape where biodiversity conservation, dark-sky preservation, and habitat restoration form the foundation of all interventions, while providing inclusive spaces for recreation, exploration, youth-led culture and community activity. Public use is conceived as compatible with conservation through low-impact design, controlled programming and strong stewardship, ensuring that White Rocks remains both ecologically resilient and socially vibrant for present and future generations.



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PROPOSALS

1. **Elevate White Rocks to protected area status with a legally backed management plan and clear conservation objectives.**

    - Establish coastal setback conservation zones (cliff/coastal garigue and sensitive areas) where access is via boardwalks/raised paths to reduce trampling and erosion—common in coastal protected sites internationally.
    - AIS eradication and control interventions
    - Concentrate amenities only in already-disturbed footprints to avoid further habitat fragmentation.
    - Restore habitats using mainly native stock, and build a public narrative around the importance of "Malta's living natural heritage"
    - Integrate environmental education within the park (guided walks, signage, citizen science), because IAS management succeeds better when public awareness and behaviour change are built in.

2. "**Green infrastructure coastline": stormwater, heat mitigation, biodiversity corridors**

    - Develop green infrastructure intervention that prioritises ecosystem services:
    - Stormwater capture & infiltration (bioswales, rain gardens, permeable paths)
    - Heat reduction via native canopy/shrub layers and light/permeable surfaces

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3. **Public Access & Exploration Network** Develop a continuous walking/cycling pathway around the White Rocks site to encourage exploration and connect coastal viewpoints, habitats and cultural nodes. The pathway should use low-impact, permeable materials, follow existing disturbed routes where possible, and function as both a recreational loop and interpretative trail.

4. **Dark-Sky Protection, Safety and Site management and Stewardship** Recognise White Rocks as one of the last remaining dark coastal stretches in Malta and adopt dark-sky principles as a core design objective. Artificial lighting should be minimal, warm-coloured, downward-shielded and time-controlled. Safety should rely on a combination of CCTV, on-site fulltime trained park rangers and stewardship, preserving darkness to protect nocturnal fauna and night-time experience.

5. **Central Cultural Hub with Bookable Spaces** Develop a central cultural hub within an already disturbed footprint, surrounded by bookable rooms for rehearsals, workshops, NGO meetings and youth initiatives. The hub should be publicly managed and accessible. Rentable rooms and facilities can be provided for NGOs, particularly environmental, cultural and youth organisations, reinforcing White Rocks as a civic space.

6. **Open-Air Theatre & Performing Arts** Create a landscape-integrated open-air theatre using natural landforms, complemented by smaller performance spaces for experimental and community-led arts. The area could also be adapted for musical events.

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7. **Community cultural spaces** Provide a single, modest cafeteria space integrated into existing structures serving as a daytime and early-evening social anchor, avoiding over-commercialization. Reuse or adapt present structures as warehouses or studios for bands and creative collectives, operated under license to ensure public benefit and accountability.

8. **Co-creation Cultural Civic Hub through Cooperative Reuse** ACT recognises White Rocks as a space historically associated with alternative culture, youth expression and civic experimentation. The place is also associated with street art culture, with some graffiti present on the site of unique artistic value, attracting street art tourism from across the globe. This character should be safeguarded through the sensitive restoration of existing buildings within already disturbed areas. ACT proposes that these structures be adaptively reused under a cooperative, non-profit model, ensuring public ownership, affordability and community stewardship. Restored buildings should host art and exhibition spaces, workshop and co-creation hubs, band rehearsal spaces and a publicly accessible library, responding to the loss of affordable cultural infrastructure in Malta. All uses must remain low-impact, non-commercial and compatible with White Rocks' ecological sensitivity, dark-sky objectives and protected coastal landscape.

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PROPOSALS FOR FORT CAMPBELL





FORT CAMPBELL PARK
Nature and Heritage Park

Fort Campbell offers the opportunity to establish a nature and heritage park where the conservation of natural habitats and historic assets is the primary objective, supported by carefully controlled public access. This proposal envisions Fort Campbell as a protected landscape that restores indigenous biodiversity, safeguards sensitive coastal and rural habitats, and preserves the fort and its surroundings through adaptive reuse and interpretation. Public access is structured through defined trails, viewpoints and limited recreational areas, ensuring that education, wellbeing and appreciation of heritage are enabled without compromising ecological integrity or the long-term conservation of this nationally significant site.



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PROPOSALS

1. **Access design that protects habitat: trails, lookouts, and mobility without ecological damage**

    - Create controlled trails with defined spurs, using durable surfaces only where needed; keep sensitive areas as "quiet zones." This aligns with protected area planning principles for managing visitation and impacts.
    - Add viewpoints/lookouts that keep visitors off fragile slopes/coastal edges, plus clear signage and enforcement.

2. **Native habitat restoration + IAS removal and control programme, prioritising biodiversity and resilience**

    - Restore the surrounding landscape using mixed native communities (trees, shrubs, flowering natives) and giving priority to local genetic stock, maximising ecosystem services: pollination support, soil stabilisation, carbon storage, microclimate cooling, and landscape resilience.
    - Implement IAS removal and controls using EU/IUCN-aligned protected-area guidance: prevention first, then containment/eradication with ongoing monitoring.

3. **Fort Campbell adaptive reuse: heritage conservation that serves the public and funds maintenance**

    - Use adaptive reuse best practices to give the fort a durable public function while preserving historic fabric.
    - Suggested uses that fit a national-park setting:
    - Heritage + ecology interpretation centre (WWII heritage + surrounding habitats)

- Volunteer/training base for restoration, monitoring, guided education
- Small-scale, tightly regulated concessions only if they directly support park management (e.g., guided tours), avoiding over-commercialisation.

4. **Dark-Sky Protection, Safety and Site management and Stewardship**

- Adopt dark-sky principles as a core design objective. Artificial lighting should be minimal, warm-coloured, downward-shielded and time-controlled. Safety should rely on a combination of CCTV, on-site full-time trained park rangers and stewardship, preserving darkness to protect nocturnal fauna and night-time experience.

5. **Ecological Rehabilitation of Abandoned Fields**

a. Develop a holistic ecological rehabilitation plan for abandoned and degraded fields surrounding Fort Campbell, guided by:
b. historical land-use patterns,
c. soil and hydrological conditions,
d. existing seed banks and remnant habitats.
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CLOSING REMARKS

ACT reiterates its strong support for the establishment of White Rocks, Manoel Island and Fort Campbell as public parks that place environmental protection, cultural heritage and public wellbeing at the centre of their vision and governance. Together, these three sites offer a rare opportunity to redefine how public land in Malta is planned, managed and held in trust for present and future generations.

ACT believes that these parks can serve as a catalyst for other parks around Malta and Gozo, in other similar areas which host sites of historical and natural importance including, the Victoria Lines, the Dwejra Lines, all Santa Margherita lines, Korradino Lines, Fort Benghajsa, Fort Bingemma, Fort St. Rocco, Fort St. Leonardo, Fort Tas-Silġ, Fort Delimara and Fort Rikasoli and surrounding areas.

This submission has outlined a coherent framework based on high levels of environmental protection, restoration of indigenous biodiversity, careful management of public access, adaptive reuse of existing heritage and structures, and community-led stewardship supported by effective enforcement. aningful involvement of civil society. If implemented with ambition and integrity, these parks can become benchmarks for sustainable land management in Malta, enhancing biodiversity, strengthening social cohesion and significantly improving public health and the quality of life.

CLOSING REMARKS

While each site has a distinct character, Manoel Island as a world-class urban park, White Rocks as a community and counter-cultural coastal park, and Fort Campbell as a protected quiet, nature and heritage landscape, all three should be guided by consistent principles of sustainability, inclusivity and long-term resilience.

ACT emphasises that the success of these parks will depend not only on their initial design, but on robust governance, adequate resourcing, full-time trained park rangers, transparent monitoring and meaningful involvement of civil society. If implemented with ambition and integrity, these parks can become benchmarks for sustainable land management in Malta, enhancing biodiversity, strengthening social cohesion and significantly improving public health and the quality of life.

