

Yesterday in the conference hall of the island's dependent care centre, the Formentera Council called together the economic, neighbourhood, tourism and environment sections of the local league of community leaders to debate a liminal version of a measure to reshape zoning and create what is being called Formentera's “ceiling on tourism”. Attendees at the encounter represented a wide slice of local social and associative strata.

Findings of recent research were communicated to Consell d'Entitats attendees by land secretary Alejandra Ferrer. The figures provided insight as to what portion of Formentera's population could be considered actual “residents” (13,345, according to the municipal register) and where to position the island's populational tipping point (between thirty-eight and forty-two thousand inhabitants during three to four months) when short-term and long-term residents are counted together. Approximately 14,500 beds have been green-lighted for rental using the established legal channels, while estimates suggest another ten to twelve thousand might exist.

Based on those figures, and as part of a two-pronged effort, not only to place limits on lodging for vacationers so that year-round residents can be guaranteed housing themselves, but also to ease the strain that the island's summer boom places on people and resources, the Council proposes licencing five thousand beds of the twelve thousand today commercialised without permits, effectively drawing a line in the sand for tourist-use beds at 20,000. Council officials say the permits would be distributed across multifamily residential buildings in es Pujols, la Savina, es Caló, es Ca Marí and rural areas.

According to Ferrer, the additional five to six thousand permits would mean “regulation of 50% of the rentals which are currently off the books”. The proposal hinges on the notion that certain traditionally residential neighbourhoods—Sant Francesc, ses Bardetes, Sant Ferran and la Mola, for instance—would stay residential. This is all the more significant because, in the secretary's words, the neighbourhoods in question tick all the boxes for family housing, “not to mention represent important avatars of local identity”. “What this really is,” Ferrer confided, “is a model that will let Formentera re-establish a balance between economic activity which is necessary and our residents' quality of life”.

The proposal was discussed at length. While various concerns were voiced, there was general

consent surrounding the need to cap tourist-use rentals if Formentera is to maintain its status as a quality destination.

At the close of the session, secretary of community participation Sònia Cardona indicated local groups would soon have access to the abovementioned research data in its entirety, enabling people to draw their own conclusions. Ensuing proposals will be considered in forthcoming sessions of the tourism planning commission. Those proposals, in turn, will feed into a final proposal, presented and debated at the Consell d'Entitats' plenary assembly.