

€2 million restoration work on Fort St Angelo



Mepa had applied for EU funding on restoration works to be carried out in Fort St Angelo (above) and Fort St Elmo.

Parliamentary Secretary Mario de Marco told Parliament yesterday that plans have been concluded to apply for EU funds to carry out restoration works on Fort St Angelo, converting it into a major tourist attraction with the use of advanced technology.

Introducing the motion for the House to approve this year's estimates of Heritage Malta and the Superintendence of Cultural Heritage (SCH), Dr de Marco said urgent restoration works amounting to €2 million had been carried out on the fort last year.

Between 15 and 17 per cent of tourists visited Malta because of its cultural history. Some 1,042,000 people, mainly foreigners, visited heritage sites in Malta and Gozo last year, with the largest amount - 133,000 - visiting the staterooms in the Palace and 110,000 visiting the Mnajdra temples.

Dr de Marco said it was necessary to strike a balance between the use and abuse of heritage sites, which were also a source of revenue which could be utilised for more investment in restoration works.

Heritage Malta had undertaken various restoration projects including the Ġgantija heritage park, the construction of a protective tent at the Tarxien temples and a visitors' centre at St Paul's Catacombs. The three projects, to be co-funded from EU structural funds, were to cost €10 million. The SCH was also involved in these projects.

He tabled a list of restoration projects undertaken by Heritage Malta, including the restoration of six kilometres of bastions, also co-funded by the EU, at an expense of

€36 million. Much needed to be done to change museums into tourist attractions and make them more appealing to foreigners who visited Malta.

The agency was also working to increase cultural appreciation with a number of exhibitions. Malta was to form part of the international circuit of roving exhibitions. The SCH had embarked on a programme to establish an extensive and detailed national inventory.

Inventories on the national collections of works of art, artistic and historic works, a number of maritime sites and churches in towns and villages had already been compiled.

Dr de Marco said that greater collaboration between the superintendence and local councils and NGOs was needed for networking and conservation purposes. These had to act as guardians of local heritage and use these sites for education and tourism purposes. An agreement on the conservation and care of wartime shelters in Tarxien had been concluded with the Tarxien local council. A similar agreement was to be concluded with Din l-Art Ħelwa for the Victory church in Valletta.

Another challenge for Heritage Malta was to create a museum for modern and contemporary Maltese art. In this regard, the site adjacent to the Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta was a necessity.

Later, concluding the debate, Dr de Marco said that the Heritage Protection Unit within Mepa was doing sterling work on the inventory of heritage sites and was working closely with the SCH on scheduling of properties. Measures had to be taken to help owners maintain these properties.

Personnel with the SCH were to increase from six to 13 by the end of the year with the employment of cultural executives.

He agreed that reports on the state of the national heritage ought to be published on time, adding that the reports for 2008 and 2009 were to be published this year. Speaking on draft cultural policy, Dr de Marco said that consultation was underway. The way forward was to move from planning to developing. A lawyer had been engaged to propose amendments to update laws relating to cultural heritage. He referred to social inclusion, adding that the number of non-paying visitors to heritage sites had doubled to 100,000 in 2009 from the year before.

A study had been undertaken by cultural personnel and officials from the finance ministry to establish the contribution to the economy from the culture and art sectors. The commission responsible for the programme to commemorate Valletta as a European capital in 2018 was meeting regularly. The programme would include targets to be reached. The spending of money to inaugurate St George's Square in Valletta was value for money.

When Parliament would move to another location, the Palace and St John's Co-Cathedral would become the main attractions in the area. The armoury would be moved back to its original location and the present armorial hall would be used for exhibition purposes.

Mepa had applied for EU funding on restoration works to be carried out in Fort St Angelo and Fort St Elmo. Part of the €36 million allocated for bastions restoration would go to restore bastions in Mdina and the Cittadella in Gozo.

Concluding, Parliamentary Secretary de Marco said heritage should not be a political issue because both sides agreed on its importance.
