

Co-Cathedral extension: ‘other buildings should be considered’

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The use of other historical buildings in Valletta to house the Flemish tapestries and other artefacts found in St John’s Co-Cathedral’s museum should be considered in a forthcoming environment impact statement on the proposed extension of the cathedral museum.

A project development statement by Bencini and Associates on behalf of the St John’s Co-Cathedral Foundation, states that the EIS should indicate which buildings can be considered for this purpose.

The proposal to house the tapestries in other historical buildings was originally made by Flimkien Ghall-Ambjent Ahjar spokesperson Astrid Vella.

But the PDS explicitly states that the Foundation disagrees with this option, because the artefacts in question are directly connected with St John’s Co-Cathedral, and the Flemish tapestries, which require the largest space in the extension, were given as a gift to Grand Master Perellos.

“Exhibiting these tapestries elsewhere in Valletta would be a departure from established trends in museum management,” the document states.

In fact the document focuses on the two proposals favoured by the Foundation, namely extending it by four underground exhibition halls, and constructing a three-storey structure on the existing courtyard.

Therefore it is not clear what the Foundation, which will be paying for these studies, will do if an alternative historical building to house the tapestries is found.

The document also notes that excavations needed for the construction of the underground halls has to be considered with “substantial caution” because of their impact on known and unknown underground structures.

It also warns of the possibility of damage caused by vibrations which could have an adverse impact on the Cathedral itself and calls for geological, hydrological and geotechnical investigations in the EIS.

The document also acknowledges that the other alternative, that of building on the existing courtyard, will have a significant visual impact which can only be mitigated by the quality of the architectural design.

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St John's Co-Cathedral

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