

# Environment group wants Parliament to move to MCC

Flimkien ghal Ambjent Ahjar welcomes the project to remodel Valletta's City Gate and the Opera House site.

Such rehabilitation calls for major courageous changes but the end-use of the buildings, as well as their design, should be submitted to public consultation. Although an important institution, FAA maintains that

Parliament dominating the entrance to Valletta could deliver the wrong message.

While an exclusive opera house may not be sustainable, a well-run multi-functional National Theatre could be self-funding as is the Mediterranean Conference Centre (MCC) which does not receive any state funding.

It has been said that the Opera House site is too small for a full theatre, and yet British theatre designers confirmed that it could accommodate a 1,500-seat theatre. The space available could also be maximised with the use of rotating stages.

The success of such a venture depends on a holistic management plan for all Valletta's theatres. The Mediterranean Conference Centre's inadequate stage and poor acoustics make it unsuitable for large-scale musical productions. There is also a strong demand for concerts which is encouraging repeat tourist visits to Malta, however the Manoel Theatre is too small for large productions such as concerts for cruise passengers.

Neither the MCC nor the Manoel are easily accessible; moving such performances to a National Theatre close to public transport would boost attendance and ensure viability.

Having freed up the Mediterranean Conference Centre, this would make an honourable House of Parliament, the organisation said. Furthermore it includes a back wing which can accommodate more parliamentary staff than the Palace.

The great hall is the only room that could suitably accommodate all the St John's tapestries in one space, as has been called for. This will add to the prestige of Parliament at the MCC and spare Valletta the digging of a quarry in its centre, thus saving millions of euros.

Heritage rehabilitation goes hand in hand with social integration and the whole of Valletta must be treated holistically if the project is to be accepted and succeed, FAA added. Moving Parliament to the MCC would trigger the rehabilitation of lower Valletta which has been neglected for a century. A time of financial crisis might not be ideal to

spend e80million on a non-essential building, but it would be different if it served to regenerate a whole depressed area.

These relocations would tie in with the restoration of St Elmo as a mixed-use cultural centre accommodating museums and artists' workshops along with cafes and restaurants servicing both tourists and offices.

The construction of a hotel at the Evans' Laboratories site would complete the project of creating a hub to draw tourists down to St Elmo, therefore distributing tourist earnings much more equitably. Parliament would create a demand for the accommodation of visiting dignitaries in lower Valletta, making a hotel there a much more attractive investment.

The rebuilding of the Opera House site should serve as a symbol of national unity and identity, raising Malta's cultural standing overseas. The development should be in harmony with the magnificence of Valletta and possibly of the former site (not necessarily in design but in grandeur) and should also encompass Freedom Square. A National Theatre would save money in being rebuilt with the help of EU funds, pay for its own running costs, give our young performers a future and boost tourism all over Malta, none of which can be achieved by Parliament at City Gate.

Ultimately building a national theatre would not eliminate Parliament from Valletta as various alternative venues exist.

Rather than piecemeal solutions, this is a unique opportunity to tackle Valletta's many long-standing and important issues and, if handled with courage and vision, could transform Valletta and provide our country with a further means to compete internationally, while serving as an example of holistic, innovative, participatory

and sustainable development – the sort of development which Flimkien ghal Ambjent Ahjar would be happy to support.

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