

Plans for the transformation of Fort St Elmo raise hopes

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Fort St Elmo is in a very bad state of repair. Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi

Plans to transform Fort St Elmo in Valletta into a tourist venue are positive but they have to be economically viable to ensure long-term success, according to hoteliers.

While welcoming the recommendations listed in the recently published draft development brief for the abandoned fort, George Micallef, president of the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association, said it was extremely important for the project to be sustainable.

The Malta Environment and Planning Authority released a reviewed draft brief last week which, among other things, recommends transforming the dilapidated fort into a major tourist attraction complete with accommodation and catering facilities.

“This, without a doubt, is really positive because Fort St Elmo is a historic gem and transforming it into a tourism venue makes sense,” Mr Micallef said. However, the whole place would be very expensive to restore and maintain. “The ideas are really good but the plans have to be economically viable for the long term, something which is not easy to do,” he said, adding the association had still to examine the draft recommendations in more depth.

The revised brief is up for consultation for six weeks. It was drawn up following a review on the 1997 draft development brief for the fort and takes into account the new

government initiatives for the urban regeneration of Valletta. It proposes the restoration and re-use of the existing structures as a museum and related facilities such as souvenir shops, restaurants and tea rooms. The possibility of locating an audiovisual facility within the barracks is also indicated. The piazza, on the other hand, would be ideal for outdoor activities in summer.

The draft brief was also welcomed by two heritage organisations, Din I-Art Ħelwa and Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, which pointed at the need for focus on the fort.

“The restoration and use of this important historic landmark can also attract economic activity to the lower end of Valletta, which holds huge potential for improvement. The regeneration of this area will greatly benefit the city as a whole, also looking ahead to Valletta as European Capital of Culture in 2018,” Din I-Art Ħelwa president Petra Bianchi said.

She said the final plans should be as “holistic as possible” and would include proposals on transport and parking issues, the nearby Mediterranean Conference Centre, the Evans Building and the Examinations Centre.

“Din I-Art Ħelwa will study the development brief and give more detailed reactions during the consultation period, which has just begun,” she said.

Mario Farrugia, from Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna, appealed for a multi-faced action plan.


“Without going into the full merits of the Mepa brief, which we will be examining in detail at a later stage, we just wish to say we firmly believe that, given the sheer size of the fort, no one-size-fits-all solution can be found for its future use,” Mr Farrugia said.

The foundation is all in favour of a collection of different uses as long as these are “sympathetic to the special historic and architectural nature of the monument”.

Fort St Elmo is one of the most significant historic landmarks in Malta, occupying a strategic position at the tip of the Sceberras peninsula upon which the Order of the knights of St John founded the city of Valletta.

The original fort was constructed by the knights in the mid-16th century and played an important role not only during the Great Siege of 1565 but even during World War II.

Comments

Charles.C.Brown(1 week, 6 days ago) 

This magnificent fort and its glorious history is one of the attractions that make Valletta stand out. Fort St Elmo should be to Valletta what the tower of London is for London. Whats worrying me is the word transformed. Does this mean that its going to be done

up to its former self or does it mean that its going to suffer the same faith as fort tyne in sliema ,ruined by some ugly monstrous block of flats!

Raymond Sammut(1 week, 5 days ago)

The answer to your question lies in these two quotes from this report:

MEPA recommends: "...transforming the dilapidated fort into a major tourist attraction complete with accommodation and catering facilities." And:

"This, without a doubt, is really positive because Fort St Elmo is a historic gem and transforming it into a tourism venue makes sense..."(George Micallef, president of the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association).

This is 500-year-old world listed heritage the likes of which isn't found anywhere else in the world. The magnitude that it represents --one cannot find anything in the history books that would match it. Tourists will actually be living inside and desecrating this heritage because hoteliers (not historians and economists) know what is best for Malta's heritage and Malta's national economy.

It's an immensely sad thing to say that some two or three years ago, a small group of concerned Maltese citizens met just outside Valletta (from memory) in the hope that they would establish a Not-For Profit Foundation to restore this fort in all the dignity that every Maltese man and woman deserves and is entitled to. As I understand, the Maltese government flatly dismissed the gesture and turned them away.
