

## Restoration of Fort St Elmo depends on ERDF funds

by Scott Grech

The government is “very confident” that it will be awarded European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) money later this year, which would pave the way for the derelict, historic Fort St Elmo in Valletta “to be transformed into one of Malta’s main attractions”, Austin Gatt, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport & Communications, told the media yesterday.



With the government intending to fund only 10% of the total cost for Fort St Elmo’s regeneration, ERDF funding is crucial.

“The government wants Fort St Elmo to become alive. We don’t want visitors to spend simply 30 minutes going around the place and walking away. There has to be something going on 24/7 at Fort St Elmo which would attract the interest of both Maltese and tourists alike,” Dr Gatt said.

Asked what the government’s plans are should the ERDF application prove unsuccessful, Dr Gatt replied that “we are very confident of acquiring the ERDF money, like we have done for so many projects in the past, most notably for the restoration of the bastions in Valletta, Vittoriosa, the Cittadella and Mdina. I see no reason why this application should be any different.”

He emphasised, however, that the regeneration of Fort St Elmo will be an “enormous challenge”, but shows the government’s commitment in attempting to restore Valletta to its former glory in time for 2018, when Valletta will be the European Culture Capital.

“Besides the regeneration of St Elmo, works are gaining momentum on the transformation of the bus terminus, the new Parliament building and Opera House, the restoration of the bastions and on buildings and palaces such as the Presidential Palace and the Auberge de Castille, while we are also working hard to have more open and public spaces in Valletta, as we did with St George’s Square two years ago. We are putting our money where our mouth is,” Dr Gatt stated.

Architect John Ebejer, who is coordinating the ERDF project, said the call for applications will be issued “imminently”.

“Once we submit our application, for which we have compiled a series of restoration method reports, the ERDF board will analyse all applications

and we will know in around five months' time whether our application is successful. As yet, however, we do not have a clear idea of how much money we will be awarded should our application prove successful," Mr Ebejer commented, adding that because of St Elmo's current dilapidated state, restoration works could take as long as two years to complete.

### Three museums planned

Architect Chris Paris, from the Grand Harbour Regeneration Corporation (GHRC), gave a detailed explanation of the government's plans for St Elmo.

Mr Paris explained that the area covered by the development brief includes the original fort and the later additions at the Carafa esplanade, the extended outworks along the bastions, the ditch and granaries in front of the fort, the Evans building, the Examinations Centre and the foreshore.

Although stressing that no idea "is cast in stone", the objectives for St Elmo are to highlight Malta's historical relevance, to provide leisure facilities and also to serve as a catalyst for employment creation and revenue generation in the area.

"Restoration plans include the chapel near the 'Porta del Soccorso' and St Anne's Church, the rehabilitation of the imposing three-storey Pinto stores for commercial uses including tourist accommodation, food and beverage outlets, retail outlets, office accommodation and educational purposes and the possibility of expanding the War Museum, using existing historic structures along the Enceinte, which are to be duly restored for this purpose or other cultural uses.

"Other plans include the reinstatement of the Knights' botanical gardens in the land-front ditch, which serviced the medical school of the Knights' Order and a Military History Museum and a Story of Valletta museum," Mr Paris said.

He added that, although Malta's national war museum is only a stone's throw away from Fort St Elmo, "we feel that the museum right now is set in a very constrained space, hence the idea for a sister war museum at the new Fort St Elmo".

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