

Pullicino Orlando hits out at St John's Museum plans



Restoration of Fort St Elmo would cost a fraction of the costs for the extension of St John's Museum.

Nationalist MP Jeffrey Pullicino Orlando has called on the government to divert EU funds allocated for the 'extravagant' underground extension of St John's Co-Cathedral Museum to the urgent restoration of Forts St Elmo and St Angelo.

Speaking in Parliament this morning, Dr Pullicino Orlando said sections of these historic forts were in a shameful state. Architect Edward Said, who had inspected Fort St Elmo had found that parts could collapse with just a kick. Parliamentary Secretary Mario deMarco had also rightly drawn attention to the urgency of restoring this fort.

Dr Pullicino Orlando said he could not understand how the government had sought €14 million from EU structural and cohesion funds for the controversial St John's project when the two forts could be restored with a third of that amount. The country, clearly, needed to recognise its priorities and he was appealing to the Planning and Priorities Division in the Office of the Prime Minister to reconsider.

Indeed, one had to wonder how the St John's project was selected for EU funding in the first place. This would take more funds than the archaeological conservation project of Heritage Malta and the tourism zones upgrade of the MTA.

The proposed project at St John's would cause major inconvenience while works were in progress and it was difficult to believe it would not damage the Co-Cathedral itself. The responsible architect himself was not giving guarantees.

And once the Cathedral foundation itself had stopped a neighbouring shop from digging a small hole for a safe, because of the risk of damage to the Cathedral, how could it then apply to dig a whole quarry outside St John's?

Furthermore, was it true that there would also be tunnels under the Cathedral itself for access purposes? And did anyone believe these would not cause damage to the historic edifice? The development would probably also damage Valletta's historic tunnels.

Dr Pullicino Orlando said he also disagreed with changes proposed to the churchyard where the knights were buried.

The new museum would also have huge maintenance costs. Surely it made more sense to use such funds on restoration works? The environment impact assessment on its own would cost €50,000. And at the same time other historic jewels were in real danger of being lost for ever.

Dr Pullicino Orlando urged the foundation to seek cheaper and more viable alternatives, including exhibiting some of the museum items in a nearby *palazzo*.

"Should the government go ahead with this project, it would be acting like a father who lets his children run about in old, torn clothes, while he buys a BMW to impress his friends. Given its limited resources, this country clearly needs to set its priorities," Dr Pullicino Orlando said.

The Nationalist MP welcomed government plans to cover Hagar Qim and carry out works at Tarxien and Ggantija temples, St Paul Catacombs and sections of the ramparts at Cottonera, Mdina and Valletta.

Comments

Robert Caruana (3 hours, 23 minutes ago)

Irrespective of any past controversies, JPO is making a lot of sense. His case is very well argued and it is difficult to disagree with what he is saying (perhaps unless one has vested interests of some sort or another).

v.pulis (3 hours, 56 minutes ago)

The more I read about the St. John's project the more I'm convinced that the idea is crazy. How can the architect in charge sleep at night when according to JPO he can't guarantee the safety of the cathedral if work is done underneath it? the thought alone makes me break into a sweat.

Priorities, or lack thereof have always been the achilles heel of all the governments.

we tend to embark on hairbrained ideas and neglect our strengths. Culture and history are our only redeeming factors. We don't think twice to build five star hotels then we abandon those factors which are important to attract the tourists. Let's restore what's falling to pieces not endanger what we have not lost yet..

joe morana (4 hours, 16 minutes ago)

The MRRA workers are doing a good clean-up job at Lower Fort St Elmo and they have already removed 70 tonnes of rubbish. However this job is not finished yet as there are still truckloads of rubbish to be cleaned up. In the meantime tourists are daily wondering inside Lower Fort St Elmo taking pictures of the shameful state of this historical heritage.

joseph spiteri (5 hours ago)

prosit jeffrey, but you did not solve the required space for the cathedral. Three months ago, i did put a solution. Build the old opera site, a COURT PALACE, and transform the present Courts into a Museum, just 20 metres off the Cathedral.

Marco Cremona (5 hours, 8 minutes ago)

Let's not kill the messenger (tempting as it may be).

The argument being brought forward by JPO is reasonable and very sensible. He has managed to put forward very valid arguments on why government should reassess its priorities and re-distribute funding to certain projects and not others, if the country's priorities have changed, or if we can better use of the limited funds at our disposal.

There is no doubt that the St. John's Foundation project is extravagant and risks damaging the very structure it is duty-bound to protect.

One also wonders how what is essentially an NGO (St. John's Foundation) managed to get Euro 14 million for its pet project, to the detriment of other (more important) projects. What track record does the Foundation have in project management? What criteria did the project proposal satisfy to qualify for these huge funds? What other projects were sacrificed because of this project and never made it for funding?

I call on government to immediately put a stop to this flagrant misuse of EU (read as public) funds, and re-allocate the funds into more worthy causes.

Now is certainly not the time to be capricious with the hard-earned EU funds.

Alfred Zahra de Domenico (5 hours, 50 minutes ago)

Prosit JPO. At long last somebody from the Government side has had the courage to speak up about the St. John's museum extension project and place it within the context of Valletta's needs and our heritage requirements. Again well done JPO.

Ian Vella (5 hours, 58 minutes ago)

I totally agree with the idea of the new museum built at the OLD OPERA site. Shame on all the administrations for leaving this site in such a mess! Surely does anybody care that this shambles is the first thing that tourists view as they walk into Valletta?

C Calleja (6 hours, 7 minutes ago)

i do agree with jpo...but

the days when he was considered as a green politician and a heritage lover are over

mario mifsud (6 hours, 27 minutes ago)

JPO is right

BUT

Is this an attempt to revive yourself JPO?

a. sciberras (6 hours, 34 minutes ago)

I fully agree with JPO! The St John's Cathedral foundation should look for an abandoned Valletta buildings and house the tapestries there. St Angelo and St Elmo are forgotten gems.

R Axisa (6 hours, 36 minutes ago)

Considering the priority issue in this case, I wonder how correct are the other priorities this government is taking into consideration!

v.pulis (6 hours, 36 minutes ago)

@ James hamilton

That is news to me. last time I visited fort St. Angelo in September the place was still a mess even more so in fact. the ramp that leads from the main gate to the first level was covered in concrete spills obviously from trucks driven into the fort. tthe saluting battery on top of the cavallier is still a heap of broken concrete and twisted metal. The bastions are still decorated with weeds and caper bushes.Granted the rooms beneath the cavallier have been cleared of rubbish but that's about it. Forts St. Angelo and St. Elmo are jewels in our fortification system which are crying out to be rescued from the depredations of time and man. In the future our children will either bless us or curse us according to the action we take

Stephen Evans (6 hours, 41 minutes ago)

Having mentiond this earlier in your letters section, the 20th October 2009 will see the two hundredth anniversary of the death of Sir Alexander Ball, Malta 's first Governor. Given the state of both Sir Ralph Abercrombie and Balls graves in the salent of St Elmo, now would be a great

time to start any restoration work. I'm sure the authorities involved would receive any assistance from the Royal Navy if requested. As a member of the Nelson Society this would be a great start and a worth wise cause into this islands past. Pullicino Orlando has my vote.

Stephen Forster (6 hours, 41 minutes ago)

Lets hope sense prevails.....This is worth far more kudos than the St Johns "débâclé" Well done JPO.

Steve Borg (6 hours, 45 minutes ago)

Anyone who has been following the controversy related to the extenstion of the St John's Co-Cathedral Museum knows perfectly well that the claims being made by JPO have already been clarified or categorically denied by the Foundation for St John's Cathedral. Basically, JPO is repeating these claims in a bid to revive his political career. I am afraid it's too late Jeffrey!! Also, I cannot understand how certain individuals keep linking St Elmo with St John's. It's like saying to Government not to pay the salaries of its employees instead of raising water and electricity rates. My appeal to Jeffrey is to respect the people and the nation.

Stephen BALDACCHINO (6 hours, 45 minutes ago)

For once I agree with JPO. Fort St.Elmo is much of a need to be restored. nice move

pierre borg (6 hours, 58 minutes ago)

i totally agree with JPO, and i think that the new museum to host the tapestries that are being restored in Belgium should be built on the OLD OPERA SITE.

J BALDACCHINO (7 hours, 3 minutes ago)

"Should the government go ahead with this project, it would be acting like a father who lets his children run about in old, torn clothes, while he buys a BMW to impress his friends. Given its limited resources, this country clearly needs to set its priorities," Dr Pullicino Orlando said." May I ask JPO if he is refering to Dr Austin Gatt? Because that's what Dr Austin Gatt just did.

James Hamilton (7 hours, 4 minutes ago)

I agree with Dr Pullicino-Orlando, it's imperative that we look after what we already have. It really is shameful that most of our heritage has been neglected for so long.

I would also question the need of an underground extention for St Johns Co-Cathedral after all these years, why the need now?

On the subject of Fort St Angelo, I was under the impression that renovation work was well in hand, at least is was when I last visited the place about 18months ago, has work stopped?

I would urge the authorities to start renovating St Elmo immediately otherwise the fort will collapse through neglect.

This country is drenched in culture, it's such a shame that the presentation is so pathetic.

ray pace (7 hours, 7 minutes ago)

@c.chircop

Maybe JPO did what surprised you.

This project should be shelved moreso since there are alternatives. Leaving St Elmo in its present state is unbelievable....when immediate action could be taken so as to prevent further damage.
JPO -keep up the pressure.

Anthony Briffa (7 hours, 11 minutes ago)

So this explains the complete silence from the side of the government when the controversy on this underground extension was the topic in all newspapers with only the Cathedral Foundation and its architects talking in favour of the project. Is it possible that the government is not sensitive to the inconvenience the public and the business community had to endure during the paving works in the area, not to mention the funds that were invested in this embellishment project?

Franco Farrugia (7 hours, 17 minutes ago)

I am mighty glad that an MP is speaking some sense about St John's, for a change. Perhaps all those know-alls will learn that those of us, myself included, who stamped our feet and cried FOUL about the proposed plans, will now have the decency and the fairness to say that they were wrong and we were right all along.

St John's Museum plans WILL be shelved.

C Chircop (7 hours, 19 minutes ago)

JPO is right - we need to prioritise on sites which urgently require funding for restoration. However, I am surprised that he has not approached other fellow members of the PN Cabinet to discuss this in private first, rather than going public.

Mark Bonello (7 hours, 24 minutes ago)

This makes a lot of sense.

But who on earth is choosing which priorities are to prevail over others in this Island?

A Grech (7 hours, 24 minutes ago)

I have recently been to Fort St. Angel as part as my university degree. It is a shame that it is not open to the public and the government should try to allocate money for the improvement of such an important heritage place.
