

Turning a car park into the jewel of the city

by **FRANCESCA VELLA**

Minister for Resources George Pullicino said yesterday that Valletta shouldn't be a traffic magnet, and announced that the government wants to transform it into a cleaner, more beautiful capital for the people.

The minister was giving a presentation at the Casino Maltese on the regeneration of St George's Square, popularly known as Palace Square.

Its artistic designer, Carlo Schembri, intends to put soul back into the square by turning it from a car park into a public space, with a multi-coloured water jet, light fittings that would also serve as Wi-Fi hotspots, fixed parameter benches, a drinking water fountain, a bicycle stand, and removable street furniture such as flexible seating modules scattered around the square.

The €1 million project, which was given the green light by the Malta Environment and Planning Authority on Thursday, forms part of a comprehensive plan to regenerate the capital.

Part of Old Theatre Street, alongside the square, will also be turned into a pedestrian zone, and traffic will be diverted through Archbishop Street. Volcanic rock such as porfido and lava will be used to pave the surface of the square and the street.

One of the main features of the square will be the water installation (which will be flat on the ground to allow for parades and other activities), indicative of the old fountain that had been built when water was first channelled to Valletta along the system of aqueducts built at the beginning of the 17th century.

The project gets underway the day after the Sette Giugno commemoration and is expected to be ready by the end of November, possibly in time to set up a Christmas market.

The Sette Giugno monument will be lowered by 0.3 metres from the upper level, and 0.5 metres from the lower level, and will be moved slightly.

However, Mr Pullicino said that because the monument is closely linked to the history of Parliament, should the Renzo Piano plans provide for Parliament to move from the Grand Master's Palace to some other site, then the government might consider moving the Sette Giugno monument closer to the new location.

Mr Pullicino said the ministry is holding talks with the Malta Transport Authority regarding the relocation of the shelter for the horse drawn cabs (karozzini).
