

Valletta is 443 years old

The Valletta local council has prepared a special programme of events for the capital city's birthday this year, which will be celebrated between today and Saturday. Valletta started to be built in March 1566.

The first event, today, is an official visit to outgoing President Edward Fenech Adami by the Valletta council.

Tomorrow, there will be a tree-planting ceremony at Hastings Garden to mark the event, and on Wednesday, local councillors will visit former Valletta residents currently living at St Vincent de Paul.

On Thursday, Valletta mayor Alexiei Dingli will visit the St Elmo primary school. He will spend half the day with the children, who will be given the opportunity to discuss the mayor's and local council's work, and put forward suggestions regarding ways of improving the



state of the capital city.

An international conference about fortified cities will be held on Friday, and on Saturday there will be a number of activities all day long.

At 9.30am, the Wallace Pipes and Drums band will start marching from St John Square to Castille Place. This will be followed by a wreath-laying ceremony and a thanksgiving Mass at the Our Lady of Victory Church, where the foundation stone of the capital was laid.

Valletta councillors will then visit the Valletta FC nursery at the Salinos ground, and in the evening, there will be a reception for Valletta associations at St James Cavalier. Dr Dingli will also present the Gieh il-Belt Valletta prize to a person nominated by Valletta residents.

Addressing a press conference on Friday, Dr Dingli encouraged the public to help bring Valletta to its former glory. He said the government, by means of the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee, has been investing in projects aimed at improving the capital's infrastructure – churches, pavements, street lighting, squares and a number of important buildings.

The government is also investing in a number of capital projects, such as the rebuilding of City Gate and the old opera house site, the restoration of the Palace, and the St Elmo project.

Dr Dingli said, however, that more needs to be done. He mentioned, among other things, the need to make Valletta a safe environment and a moulding ground for families, and the need to create opportunities for vulnerable people.

The mayor said Valletta should be turned into an open air museum and a canvas for artistic installations.

Valletta's foundation stone laid in March 1566

The foundation stone for the capital was laid on 28 March 1566. Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette, the gallant hero of the Great Siege of 1565, realised that if the Order of the Knights of St John was to maintain its hold on Malta, it had to provide adequate defences.

He drew up a plan for a new fortified city on Mount Sceberras. Pope Pius V and Philip II

of Spain showed interest in the project. They both promised financial aid and the pope lent the knights the services of Francesco Laparelli, a military engineer, who drew up the necessary plans for the new city and its defences.

Work started in earnest in March 1566 – first on the bastions and, soon after, on the more important buildings. The new city was to be called Valletta in honour of Grand Master la Valette.
