

SAVE VALLETTA SKYLINE APPEAL

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PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cost of saving Valletta Pro-Cathedral is more than double original estimate

The cost of saving the St Paul's Pro-Cathedral structure and spire has doubled to more than €7 million, the committee tasked with raising funds said as it announced that restoration works are expected to begin very shortly.

Speaking at a press conference held at the Cathedral's recently restored Undercroft, co-chairman of the Save Valletta Skyline appeal Martin Scicluna said that over €1 million had been raised privately to date and an application had been made for a further €5 million in EU funding.

Prince Charles and billionaire theatrical producer Sir Cameron Mackintosh – who owns a home in Valletta – are among the hundreds of private donors. Some €1.2 million has also already been received in EU funding, but substantial sums are still required to achieve the new campaign target of over €7 million.

The reasons for the additional costs arise from the deeper expert analysis and scrutiny of the structure and fabric of the tower, spire and roof which has been possible over the last 18 months since the Appeal was launched.

The Cathedral is situated at the epicentre of the government's regeneration plans for the West flank of Valletta between Lower Fort St Elmo and Mattia Preti Square. Major regeneration work will also include the restoration of the roof and ceiling to its former Victorian glory, the timber structure inside the tower, installation of disabled access to the church and Undercroft, as well as several ecological environmental improvements.

Mr Scicluna said: "The project to restore the Cathedral aims to contribute significantly to the regeneration of the area by turning it into a thriving and attractive communal and tourism centre.

“It seeks to be the social hub not just for the Cathedral’s congregation, but also for the local community, related groups and third party users for a range of activities from musical concerts to meetings and exhibitions, lectures and seminars.”

Mr Scicluna said the committee will hold a briefing session for Valletta residents this evening as part of its Good Neighbour strategy to update them on the project, as well as providing an overview of the works which will begin once all the required permits are in hand.

A permanent crane will not be required, and the tower structure is to be screened. But the committee still envisages that the works – expected to take around three years – will cause some inconvenience for those in the immediate vicinity, which they will aim to mitigate to the greatest extent possible.

Italian experts were in Malta recently to carry out non-invasive investigations under the overall direction of Architecture Project in order to provide further information regarding the tower fabric to aid in the architects’ analysis of the Cathedral’s structural state and to establish the best course of action to save Valletta’s iconic 60-metre spire.

The project is being overseen by leading Maltese architectural firm Architecture Project (AP). The firm’s founding partner, Konrad Buhagiar, said:

“This is a very complex and exciting project, the first major restoration project on the Cathedral and its Spire since its construction in the early 19th Century. AP is honoured to contribute to saving Valletta’s iconic skyline and to ensure its survival into the future. Moreover, people living close to the Cathedral will be able to enjoy the communal benefits that this regeneration project will bring.”

The 175-year-old Pro-Cathedral has deteriorated dramatically in recent years. Various interventions have taken place to repair the roof, but urgent restoration is now required, while the new structure will also re-establish the authenticity of the roof assembly to bring it closer to its former historical state.

Recent investigations have also revealed that the Cathedral’s tower was struck by a bomb or shell during World War II, which in all likelihood affected the structural integrity of the tower and spire. These will be painstakingly repaired and restored.

Work is expected to start on the internal scaffolding of the tower in late-summer and safety hoarding will be put in place shortly. Meanwhile, the external scaffolding around the tower will be erected early next year.

Ends.

Caption: Photo showing a shell strike and loss of stone-work at the top corner of the tower in 1943.

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