



PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

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Skrivan tal-Kamra

Status report on proposed relocation of the Ministry for Tourism and the Malta Tourism Authority from the Auberge D'Italie in Merchants Street, Valletta to the Museum of Fine Arts (Admiralty House), Casa Scaglia and 8, Old Mint Street, Valletta

Background

Some months ago, MTA was informed that a Cabinet decision had been taken to relocate the Museum of Fine Arts presently located in a building known as Admiralty House in South Street, Valletta to the Auberge D'Italie in Merchant Street.

Concurrently the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, (including the offices of the Permanent Secretary, the Director of Corporate Services), and the Malta Tourism Authority would be located in three adjacent buildings, namely Admiralty House, Casa Scaglia, and another building known as 8, Old Mint Street.

Work on the relocation of both entities was to start with immediate effect. To this end a committee made up of representatives of the entities involved was set up under the Chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary. The sum of Euro 200,000 was allocated to the Ministry for Tourism and Culture for 2012. Heritage Malta took possession of two rooms on the 2nd floor of the Auberge D'Italie which are currently used as offices as well as the ex Café Veneziana in Melita Street which is currently being used as a heritage shop.

Proposed allocation of buildings

As mentioned above, the proposed site, consists of three adjacent buildings with façades on three streets namely South Street (Admiralty house), Old Mint Street (number 8), and MA Vassalli Street (Casa Scaglia). It is important to keep in view that all three buildings have separate entrances and can be accessed independently from street level.

Admiralty House

This building is the most imposing of the three. The architectural style is very similar to the Auberge de Castille only on a smaller scale. The building is spread over three floors namely the basement, ground floor and first floor or *piano nobile*.

The building requires a medium amount of intervention due to the fact that although the building appears to be structurally sound, it lacks air conditioning, an electrical installation that will be capable of accommodating the hardware required to run an office, cabling for a computer network, a lighting system suitable for office purposes as well as the installation of a telephone system. The installation of the afore-mentioned items may be rendered more complicated by the fact that the building is scheduled and that interventions will be limited.

In the style typical of buildings of the age, the rooms are built around a central courtyard and lead from one to another. Partitioning of sorts will be required to make the building fit the

intended use. Ancillary and support facilities such as waiting rooms and kitchen and toilet facilities require to be included as part of the layout on every floor. Admiralty House is already adequately linked to Casa Scaglia and it is not anticipated that any intervention will be required in this regard.

Given the imposing nature of the building, Admiralty House, and more specifically the *piano nobile* is the natural and logical choice to accommodate the offices of the Minister and his private secretariat. It was also proposed that the offices of top MTA officials (Chairman and CEO) be located on this floor.

Since the ground floor of Admiralty House presents the easiest and most immediate access to the building, it is being proposed that this floor to be used to accommodate general purpose meeting/board room/press room while the basement of the building was intended to be turned into offices for MTA Directors/staff.

MEPA permits are required to cover interventions for this building.

Casa Scaglia

This building has its main entrance in MA Vassalli Street but is linked to the first floor of Admiralty House. Casa Scaglia was already being used by Heritage Malta as an administration block to the museum. The building was earmarked to accommodate the Office of the Permanent Secretary, the TSDU and the offices of the DCS. Given its current use, this building was the one that required the least intervention and could be adapted rather quickly to suit the needs listed above.

The works required in this building were undertaken directly by the Office of the Permanent Secretary and I am informed that these are at a very advanced stage of completion.

8, Old Mint Street

Out of the three buildings, this is the one that requires major interventions. Some areas of the building such as the roofs are structurally unsound and require total replacement. As is the case with Admiralty House, such works may be rendered more complicated due to the fact that the building boasts a number of painted wooden ceilings that would require careful handling during any works that may be carried out.

The building also consists of three floors namely a basement, ground floor and first floor. In general the building has serious problems of humidity, the basement being the worst case and is almost certainly unusable. As a result of the huge amount of humidity present, the floors on the ground floor have lifted into mounds and will most certainly require replacing assuming that the humidity problem can be resolved. Electrical systems, plumbing, and all manner of cabling will have to be installed, and all apertures replaced. The building is totally lacking in bathroom facilities which will need to be incorporated into the design. It is probable that in order to accommodate all the MTA staff (assuming current numbers), that some rooms that

have a very high ceiling may need to be divided into two creating a loft level. The building can be linked to the basement of Admiralty House through a minor structural intervention.

8, Old Mint Street is registered as a dwelling and hence MEPA approval for *change of use* to offices is required. It is also pertinent to point out that an application for development needs to be submitted to MEPA for approval prior to the start of the necessary works.

This building is intended for use by MTA staff.

Actions taken to date

As already mentioned the necessary works at Casa Scaglia were undertaken by the Office of the Permanent Secretary and are nearly complete.

In view of the extensive works required in the other two buildings, namely Admiralty House and 8 Old Mint Street, DCS MTA has issued a tender for the preparation of a design as well as the necessary documentation required to enable the MTA or Ministry to submit the necessary applications to MEPA. The brief also includes the preparation of BOQ's to obtain an idea of the expenses required for the conversion of the buildings in order that the necessary funds may be included in the Ministry's/ MTA's budgetary allocation.

The tender has been awarded to AP and work is well underway. So far the firm has produced three documents, namely:

- a detailed design brief
- a property condition report
- a mapping report

It should be pointed out that no scientific study was undertaken to determine whether the space available in the three buildings put together was sufficient to accommodate the needs of the Ministry and the MTA. Given the above, the next stage is expected to be the most interesting one of the lot, as it will determine whether the buildings are sufficient for their intended use.

The target date for the process to be completed up to the readiness for the submission of a MEPA permit is June 2013.

Other issues

Given the extent of the works that need to be undertaken, both with regard to those required to convert the Auberge D'Italie into the Museum of Fine Arts as well as those required to turn Admiralty House and 8, Old Mint Street into habitable offices for the Ministry for Tourism and the MTA, it is clearly not possible that these works are carried out with the occupants still in the building.

It is clear that alternative premises will need to be found for either the Ministry or the Museum of Fine Arts to be relocated to enable the works to be completed on the vacated buildings.

Given the nature of operations of the two entities it will probably be easier to relocate the offices of the Ministry and the MTA to alternative premises as opposed to the Museum of Fine Arts whose requirements will be much more difficult to accommodate.

The cost of this relocation needs to be taken into account.

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