

Lifestyle & Culture



Photo: Ramon Portelli



Upper St John's Gardens

A historic revival: The €35 million St John's Gardens project

Phoenicia Malta Ltd is submitting plans to the Planning Authority for a transformative €35 million project aimed at revitalising St John's Ditch, adjacent to the iconic Phoenicia Malta hotel.

Breathing New Life into Valletta's Historical Landscape

This ambitious initiative, known as the St John's Gardens project, promises to turn the St John's Ditch into a beautifully landscaped extension of The Phoenicia Malta's grounds. The project includes new accommodation and facilities that will not only enhance the renowned five-star hotel but also enrich the entrance into Valletta.

Led by Mark Shaw, the owner of Phoenicia Malta Ltd which owns and operates The Phoenicia Malta, this proposal could become a landmark project for the island. It intertwines historical preservation with luxury accommodation, staying true to the hotel's reputation for elegance



Lower St John's Gardens

and sophistication. Despite existing permits allowing for more extensive development, the new plans focus on sensitivity and sustainability, setting The Phoenicia Malta apart in its commitment to cultural and environmental conservation.

A Historical Perspective: Valletta's Legacy

The Phoenicia Malta, located at the city's entrance, has long been a symbol of luxury and history, welcoming guests since the 1940s. The St John's Gardens project seeks to further this legacy by restoring and enhancing a historically significant but neglected area.

St John's Ditch forms part of Valletta's formidable fortifications. Over the centuries, as the city expanded and modernised, parts of these fortifications fell

into disuse and disrepair. The St John's Gardens project aims to revive this historical site, honouring its past while adapting it for contemporary use.

"The transformation of St John's Ditch has been a long time coming," says Mr Shaw, who acquired the hotel in 2013 and has continuously invested in its improvement. "We are thrilled to finally bring it to life – not just as an extension of the existing Phoenicia Malta, but to enhance the city's rich heritage and 'Product Malta' as a whole. The project aligns perfectly with our commitment to enrich Valletta's cultural and historical landscape while offering an unparalleled experience to our international and local guests."

Key Elements of the St John's Gardens Proposal

The St John's Gardens application includes several key elements designed to respect the historical context of the site while introducing contemporary amenities. Central to the project is the restoration of the Old Stables and Coach House, currently in disrepair, to create 28 additional guest rooms and suites. Additionally, the dilapidated old Laundry industrial building will be demolished and rebuilt to provide 23 new guest rooms and suites. The project will also entail substantial restoration works to the various historical walls and

other structures on the property.

David Felice, executive director of AP, the architectural firm behind the project, highlights the meticulous planning involved. "Our goal has been to develop a master plan that respects the heritage of the site while enhancing its functionality and beauty," he states. "The transformation of St John's Ditch into St John's Gardens is not just a restoration project; it's about creating a legacy for future generations to enjoy."

Enhancing the Guest Experience

The newly landscaped gardens will extend and enhance the existing grounds of The Phoenicia Malta, creating a lush, tranquil environment for guests. "With improved pathways and the introduction of electric buggies, accessibility throughout the hotel grounds will be significantly improved, ensuring that all guests can enjoy the serene beauty of the new gardens," explains Mr Felice.

Environmental Sustainability at the Forefront

Sustainability is a cornerstone of the St John's Gardens proposal. The project will protect existing trees and introduce new indigenous plants, based on comprehensive environmental studies, while sustainable construction practices will be implemented

throughout. Efforts to reduce energy and water consumption and minimise waste are integral to the design, reinforcing The Phoenicia Malta's commitment to eco-friendly operations.

Minimising Disruption, Maximising Benefits

The project is designed to be carried out in carefully planned phases to ensure minimal disruption to current hotel operations. Construction traffic will utilise separate access routes, preventing any increase in congestion around the hotel and ensuring a smooth continuation of guest experiences and hotel events.

A Broader Impact on Valletta

Mr Shaw emphasises the broader positive impact the project is expected to make. "We take this next phase of The Phoenicia Malta's development very seriously and believe it will not only enhance our hotel's offering but also contribute to the broader appeal of Valletta as a destination. As with the legacy of the existing property, we are privileged to play a part in preserving and enhancing Malta's cultural heritage. Should this proposal be given the green light, we trust it will become yet another aspect of The Phoenicia Malta that the local community can be proud of."

A Future Steeped in History

The St John's Gardens project is more than a restoration initiative; it is a testament to the enduring legacy of Valletta and The Phoenicia Malta. By blending historical preservation with modern luxury, the project promises to enhance the capital's cultural landscape and provide an exceptional experience for visitors. As Valletta continues to evolve, projects like this ensure that its rich history is not only preserved but celebrated, offering a vibrant future for the generations to come.

