

The 7 Most Endangered 2026

Programme run by **Europa Nostra**,
the European Voice of Civil Society Committed to Cultural Heritage,
with the support of the **European Investment Bank Institute**

The British Barracks at Fort Chambray Gozo, MALTA

Report



Photo: Europa Nostra

European Experts Team

Graham Bell and Christopher Hurst

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Foreword and Acknowledgements

The British Barracks at Fort Chambray are at imminent risk of demolition for the private gain of property developers. As this report demonstrates, this building is of outstanding European architectural, cultural and historical significance. And as with other similar buildings of the same era in Malta, it should be scheduled with Grade 1 protection.

The destruction of this iconic building would be a serious loss to the people of Malta and particularly to Gozitans. It cannot be permitted.



Photo: Chris Hurst

Din l-Art Ħelwa, the National Trust of Malta and a long-standing member organisation of Europa Nostra, nominated the British Barracks for the 7 Most Endangered list. We would like to thank the funders of this programme who made our research trip to Malta possible. Thanks are also due for the help received from Europa Nostra.

The visit had exceptional support from Din l-Art Ħelwa, in terms of preparation, background briefings and logistics. Their passion for protecting the heritage of Malta is truly remarkable. They were able to give us a real understanding of the value of this heritage site as well as the relevant institutions in Malta. Our thanks are also due for the very kind and warm hospitality.

Annex 2 gives full details of the meetings held in Malta and Gozo.

Europa Nostra is the European voice of civil society committed to safeguarding and promoting cultural and natural heritage. Since its launch in 2013, the **7 Most Endangered Programme** has become a key civil society initiative dedicated to saving Europe's heritage at risk. The 7ME Programme is run by **Europa Nostra** with the support of the **European Investment Bank Institute**. (<https://7mostendangered.eu/>).

The Europa Nostra team on this project were Graham Bell and Christopher Hurst.

Graham Bell is a Board member of Europa Nostra. He has been a member of the 7 Most Endangered Advisory Board since its inception and has led Mission visits in the UK, Bulgaria and Serbia to three existentially vulnerable sites that now have viable futures. As an architect, he was involved in significant heritage regeneration projects, including being on the executive board of a multi-million six-year transformation of a city centre from market failure to robust investment values across all sectors. He transferred this expertise to an NGO as director and project manager, raising funds, public support and economic investment, including delivery of an award-winning traditional skills training programme for young unemployed.

Christopher Hurst holds academic positions at the Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction at UCL London, and the School of Transnational Governance at the European University Institute, Florence. Here he teaches, amongst other topics, project management and the social-economic assessment of investments. Prior to this he was Director General at the European Investment Bank, Luxembourg. In this capacity he led the transformation of that institution to the "Climate Bank", aligning its strategy and standards with the goals of the Paris Agreement. This is his second 7 Most Endangered project.

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Executive Summary

The British Barracks at Fort Chambray constitute an exceptionally important element of Gozo's architectural, social and European heritage. Constructed as married quarters for British military families at the turn of the 20th century, the building reflects changing attitudes towards soldiers' welfare and the wider transformation of Malta into a strategic British "imperial fortress." Its distinctive two-storey arcades, local limestone construction and passive climatic design represent a notable fusion of British military planning and Gozitan craftsmanship.

The building subsequently acquired important medical functions. Fort Chambray treated servicemen during the First World War, while the Barracks served as Gozo's leprosy hospital for two decades from 1937. The site therefore embodies several layers of history: the legacy of the Knights of St John, British imperial expansion, military family life, wartime medicine, infectious-disease treatment and the development of modern public health.

Despite remaining structurally viable, the Barracks are threatened by an approved development involving their demolition and the reconstruction of the arcaded façade as decoration to a five-storey spa hotel. This would retain only a visual reference to the building while destroying its integrity, authenticity and historical evidence. The report therefore recommends statutory protection, international recognition and preservation through adaptive reuse. This is especially justified given the substantial public funding required to conserve Fort Chambray's fortifications and the present lack of effective public access.

The Barracks could be repurposed for tourism or accommodation while still fully respecting the building's heritage. However, an economically attractive alternative for the Barracks would be as a polyvalent Centre for Innovation and Heritage. This could combine activities such as university and research activities, start-up incubation, coworking and training facilities, conferences and events, together with public interpretation of the building's important historic heritage. A temporary cultural role during the 2031 European Capital of Culture programme could provide an initial high-profile use. Very conservative estimates for such a centre generate a real economic return of approximately 4.4%. The project produces a positive NPV of over €500,000 at a 2% discount rate (equal to the cost of Maltese government borrowing) even before valuing heritage, educational, employment, public-access and regional-development benefits or taking into account the fact that the building will still be a fully functioning asset at the end of this period.

It is necessary to schedule the Barracks with Grade 1 protection now. This has already been done with later buildings in Malta, while Gozo's heritage is ignored. Importantly, such protection in no way limits the development of the Barracks into becoming an important economic asset for Gozo.

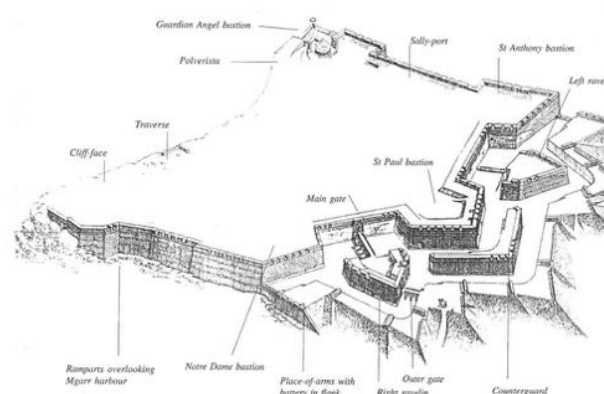
1. Fort Chambray: Origins and history under the Knights of St John

Fort Chambray occupies a commanding position on Ras it-Tafal, the high ground overlooking Mġarr Harbour on the south-eastern coast of Gozo. Its origins lie in the particular vulnerability of Gozo during the period of rule by the Order of St John (1530–1798). Unlike Malta, with the fortifications developed around the Grand Harbour, Gozo remained comparatively exposed to seaborne attack. This vulnerability was demonstrated dramatically in 1551, when an Ottoman force invaded Gozo and carried off most of its population into slavery. Thereafter, the security of the island and the provision of a defensible refuge for its inhabitants remained important concerns for the Order.

For much of the seventeenth century, the principal refuge was the Cittadella at Victoria. The Order also constructed coastal watchtowers, including Garzes Tower near Mġarr, completed in the early seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century, military planners were considering a more ambitious solution: a new fortified settlement overlooking Mġarr Harbour.

In 1716, the French military engineer Louis François d'Aubigné de Tigné, who was advising the Order on the modernisation of Malta's defences, prepared plans for a fortified town at Ras it-Tafal. The site had major strategic advantages. It dominated the approaches to Mġarr, protected communications between Gozo and Malta, and could provide sufficient space for the population and livestock to take refuge during an invasion. The Order's Commissioners of Fortifications and War recommended the project in 1722, but its considerable cost meant that construction was postponed.

The decisive development came in **1749**, when **Jacques-François de Chambray**, a wealthy French knight of the Order who had recently become Governor of Gozo, offered to finance the fortification himself. Construction began in September 1749. The military engineer Francesco Marandon adapted the earlier plans and supervised the works. Construction proved difficult, with problems including shortages of labour and structural difficulties, but the principal defensive works were substantially complete by the late 1750s and the fortress was completed during the **1760s**. It subsequently became known as Fort Chambray after its principal benefactor.



Images: Times of Malta

Chambray was conceived as more than a military fort. The Order intended the enclosure eventually to contain a new fortified town, potentially making it Gozo's principal urban centre. A regular street plan was laid out within the walls, recalling on a smaller scale the planned urbanism of Valletta. The intention was therefore both strategic and developmental: a secure settlement beside Gozo's principal harbour could strengthen defence, encourage commerce between Malta and Gozo, and attract new inhabitants.

This vision was never realised. By the later eighteenth century, the threat of major Ottoman or corsair attacks had diminished, reducing the incentive for Gozitans to abandon established settlements for a new fortified town. Fort Chambray consequently remained primarily a military installation. Maintenance also deteriorated; by 1789 parts of the fortress were reportedly in poor condition, although some repairs were undertaken shortly before the end of the Order's rule.

The Knights' period in Malta ended abruptly in June 1798, when Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition occupied the Maltese Islands. Fort Chambray was briefly defended and provided refuge for Gozitan inhabitants, but surrendered to the French. Its fall therefore marked both the end of its first half-century as a Hospitaller fortress and the end of the 268-year rule of the Knights of St John. The ambitious eighteenth-century project to create a new fortified capital for Gozo had failed, but it left behind one of the Order's last major works of military architecture.

2. Fort Chambray under British rule

While Napoleon Bonaparte occupied the Maltese Islands in June 1798 during his expedition to Egypt, French control of Gozo proved extremely short-lived. Resistance to French rule developed rapidly, and in October 1798 the French forces on Gozo surrendered following a Gozitan uprising. Gozo then experienced a short period of autonomous administration before Malta and Gozo came under British protection in 1800. The islands formally became a British Crown Colony in 1814.

During the nineteenth century, Chambray continued to have a military function, although its strategic significance progressively declined. Its position overlooking Mgarr Harbour remained useful for controlling the principal maritime approach to Gozo, but technological developments were transforming warfare. Improvements in naval power and increasingly powerful artillery gradually made traditional eighteenth-century bastioned fortifications less important as a means of territorial defence.

Fort Chambray nevertheless remained an important government and military site throughout the century. Its extensive fortified enclosure, strategic position and separation from the principal settlements of Gozo gave it continuing practical value even as its original defensive purpose diminished. The fortress also formed part of the wider British military presence in the Maltese Islands, whose strategic importance increased substantially during the nineteenth century as Malta developed into a major British naval and military base in the Mediterranean.

By 1900, therefore, Fort Chambray had undergone a fundamental change in significance. The eighteenth-century ambition to establish a new fortified town had long disappeared, and the fortress itself was becoming increasingly obsolete as a defensive installation. Yet the site remained in active use and retained an important institutional and strategic role. Its history up to 1900 thus provides the essential setting for the next phase of Chambray's development, when the use of the extensive area enclosed by the Knights' fortifications became more important than the defensive purpose for which those fortifications had originally been constructed.

3. The British Married Quarters: From military accommodation to hospital

During British rule, though the defensive importance of the fort itself gradually declined, its position overlooking Mġarr Harbour made it valuable for military accommodation and, subsequently, for medical purposes.

The British military presence and married quarters

British troops were stationed at Fort Chambray from the beginning of the nineteenth century. By 1830 the fort could accommodate around 250 soldiers and contained a small military hospital with approximately 20 beds. The site was considered particularly suitable for military occupation because of its elevated position, relative isolation and exposure to fresh air. These characteristics became increasingly important during the nineteenth century as the British Army came to recognise the relationship between overcrowded accommodation, poor sanitation and disease.

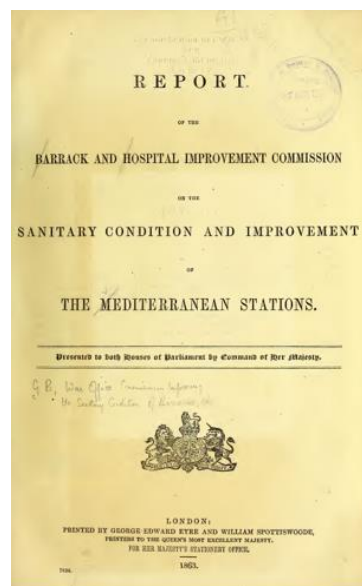
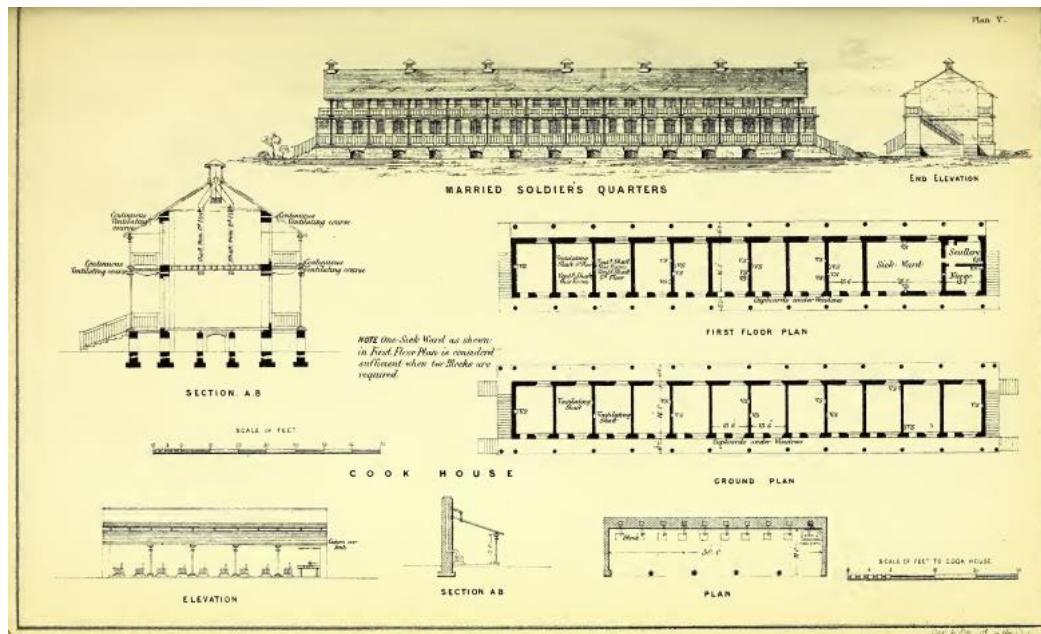
The substantial building that survives as the **British Barracks, or Married Quarters** belongs to a later phase of development. Documentary evidence places the building on an Admiralty plan by 1895, while photographic evidence shows it had been built by 1903/4. The building provided accommodation specifically for married soldiers and their families, rather than being simply a conventional barrack block for unmarried troops.

This function is historically significant. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, rank-and-file soldiers had to ask their commanding officer for permission to marry. The British Army permitted only a small proportion of them (some 6%) to do so. Their wives and children could live in barracks and travel with the regiment, but there was normally no separate family accommodation. The family occupied part of the same room as unmarried soldiers, creating privacy with an Army blanket or curtain.

By the 1840s, some commanding officers were putting several married families together in a separate barrack room. But this was still far from a satisfactory arrangement: several couples and their children shared one room, separated from one another by hanging blankets.

The Crimean War and the sanitary-reform movement produced the decisive change. In the British Parliament in 1855, the Duke of Richmond complained that wives were still sleeping in galleries containing forty or fifty unmarried soldiers and asked that new barracks provide separate accommodation for married soldiers and their families.

The subsequent “Barrack and Hospital Improvement Commission” of 1863 found precisely the conditions described above: married couples in ordinary soldiers' rooms, and elsewhere several families sharing a room with blankets hung between them. The resulting policy was that each married soldier's family should have a separate room. However, these remained very cramped. The Commission recommended a model barracks with separate married-soldier quarters, but each family with only one room of 16 × 13.5 ft.



Images: Extracts from UK archives

Single room accommodation proposed for married soldiers in 1863

From the 1870s onwards, the British Army began to evolve into a more professional organisation. It was moving away from the idea of a soldier living an almost monastic institutional existence towards soldiers with a longer-term professional career embedded in civilian society. At the same time, the Army increasingly had to compete for labour. Living

conditions mattered. The Army could no longer assume that men would tolerate conditions dramatically inferior to those available to civilian workers.

This had an important effect on planning and in 1890 the Barracks Act established a large, dedicated capital programme for rebuilding and improving British Army barracks throughout the Empire. Crucially, married soldiers' accommodation was explicitly included in this expenditure programme.

The Married Quarters at Fort Chambray need to be seen in this context. While new barracks for officers (Cassels Barracks) were built in Hong Kong in 1901, it was not until 1907 that the Lyemun Barracks Block 31 provided multi-room accommodation for common soldiers. Likewise, there were officer and warrant-officer family residences available from the opening of St Andrew's Barracks in Malta in 1905. However, purpose-built residences for married ordinary soldiers, were not built until 1913.

This is a brief synopsis of the evolution of British Barracks during the late-nineteenth century and in the pre-First World War period. Other relevant examples of the transition discussed here are likely to exist across the British Empire. However, what we can say is that the British Barracks at Fort Chambray are an unusually early surviving example of purpose-built multi-room married quarters for ordinary British soldiers and their families. Importantly the structure, including its interior walls, is largely intact. Therefore, the Barracks provide a key example of the late-nineteenth-century transformation of British military housing to dedicated family accommodation.

By 1909, the married quarters at Fort Chambray were sufficiently well regarded that they were reportedly popular with military families based in Malta seeking a temporary “change of air” in Gozo. This illustrates one of Fort Chambray's recurrent advantages: its separation from the densely populated and heavily militarised areas around the Grand Harbour and its relatively healthy, exposed location.



Photo: Chris Hurst

View from the portico

The military hospital and conversion to civilian hospital use

Medical use of Fort Chambray has a long history. A small military hospital already existed within the fort by the early nineteenth century, and Chambray was used for military medical purposes at different points during the nineteenth century. During the Anglo-Egyptian conflict of 1882, for example, the fort was again used for sick and wounded servicemen, with accommodation for approximately 150–200 patients.

Its medical role became particularly important during the First World War. Malta developed into a major centre for treating British and Allied casualties from the Mediterranean campaigns, earning the description “Nurse of the Mediterranean.” Fort Chambray was used as a convalescent depot, particularly for servicemen recovering sufficiently to return to active service. Between October 1915 and March 1916, approximately 1,579 men passed through the fort before returning to duty. The medical staff even produced their own publication, *The Fort Chambray Gazette*. The convalescent depot closed in March 1916.

A major change occurred in 1934, when Fort Chambray was transferred to civilian medical use and became the principal institution in Gozo for people suffering from mental illness. This function continued for almost half a century, until 1983. At its peak the institution reportedly accommodated as many as 200 chronic psychiatric patients.

Within this wider hospital complex, the former British Barracks (the Married Quarters) acquired a particularly important and distinctive function. The building was repaired and adapted for use as a leprosy hospital, or leprosarium, serving patients from Gozo who had previously had to be accommodated in Malta. On 9 December 1937, fifteen Gozitan patients — thirteen men and two women — were transferred from Malta to the new facility at Fort Chambray. The institution was known as **Sacred Heart Hospital** and had a capacity of approximately 27 beds.

Leprosy, also known as Hansen's disease, carried an exceptional social stigma. During this period public-health policy still relied heavily upon the segregation of patients. The isolated position of Fort Chambray therefore made it particularly suitable in the eyes of contemporary authorities. The former married quarters offered substantial accommodation within a controlled institutional environment while remaining physically separated from Gozo's principal settlements.

During the Second World War, Chambray continued to function as a hospital complex. Air-raid shelters were provided for the different categories of patients and staff, including separate shelters associated with male and female patients, leprosy patients and the medical superintendent. The surviving evidence therefore demonstrates that hospital activities continued despite Malta's exceptionally difficult wartime circumstances.

The end of the leprosy hospital

The medical understanding and treatment of leprosy changed significantly during the twentieth century. Effective drug treatments became available, while recognition of the

relatively low infectivity of the disease undermined the rationale for compulsory lifelong isolation. In Malta, compulsory segregation was largely abolished in 1953.

The leprosy hospital in the former Fort Chambray Married Quarters finally closed in 1956. Its patients could increasingly be treated without the isolation that had characterised earlier approaches to the disease. The building's period as a leprosarium had therefore lasted for approximately nineteen years, from 1937 to 1956.

The wider Fort Chambray complex nevertheless continued as a psychiatric hospital. The institution survived Malta's independence in 1964 and remained an important element of Gozo's health infrastructure during the 1960s and 1970s. Proposals were made around 1970–71 to convert the Fort to tourism, but these were initially abandoned and the mental hospital was refurbished instead. However, use of this refurbishment was limited as all patients had left Fort Chambray by 1979. At this point the idea to develop the Fort for tourism came back on the table.



Photos: Maltese National Archives

The Fort and Barracks in 1979

The history of the British Barracks is consequently unusually rich. Constructed in the late nineteenth century as family accommodation for married British servicemen, the building reflects an important development in British military and social history. It subsequently formed part of Chambray's First World War medical role and, most distinctively, served between 1937 and 1956 as Gozo's leprosy hospital. Its history therefore extends well beyond its architectural interest. The building connects the military history of the British Empire with the history of military families, the “Nurse of the Mediterranean”, changing approaches to infectious disease and the development of public health and institutional care in twentieth-century Malta and Gozo.

The remaining patients in the psychiatric hospital were transferred to other facilities in 1979. By 1980, therefore, Fort Chambray stood at the transition between almost two centuries of public and institutional use and its proposed redevelopment for tourism.

4. Architectural features of the British Barracks at Fort Chambray

The British Barracks at Fort Chambray are a substantial late-Victorian military residential building, constructed at the turn of the 20th century within the south-western part of the fortified enceinte. Their principal elevation faces approximately south, overlooking the Gozo Channel towards Comino and Malta.

Architecturally, the British Barracks belong to a long Mediterranean classical tradition. Their most distinctive feature—the two-storey sequence of semicircular limestone arches—has its distant origins in the Roman arcade and its more immediate architectural ancestry in the loggias and arcaded façades of the Italian Renaissance, traditions subsequently absorbed into Maltese architecture under the Order of St John. The British adapted this established architectural vocabulary to the nineteenth-century military veranda. The result is not simply a piece of imported Victorian military architecture, but a distinctive synthesis of British military planning, Renaissance-derived Mediterranean architectural forms and traditional Maltese construction.

Construction materials and methods

The building is constructed from local Globigerina limestone. This relatively soft limestone is readily worked and was extensively used in Malta for both structural masonry and architectural detailing. The material gives the building its characteristic warm honey-coloured appearance.

The walls are constructed from regularly coursed blocks using traditional Maltese masonry techniques. Doors and windows are supported by deep window and door openings, reflecting the substantial thickness of the load-bearing masonry walls, while larger internal openings employ semicircular masonry arches that transfer the loads above into the adjoining walls. The same principle is used on a much larger scale in the external arcades, where repeated limestone arches transfer loads into substantial masonry piers.

The horizontal construction uses metal beams between the load-bearing masonry walls, with large limestone slabs spanning between adjacent beams. The use of metal beams in this way had been introduced to Malta in the middle of the 19th century. The underside of these slabs forms the visible ceiling, while the beams transfer their loads to the substantial masonry walls.



Photo: Chris Hurst

View of the supporting structure for the roof



Photo: Europa Nostra

View of the supporting walls and arches

The arcaded façade

The building is characterised by its strong horizontality, regularity and symmetry. Rather than relying upon applied ornament, its architectural effect derives primarily from repetition, proportion, and masonry construction. The most distinctive element is the two-level arcaded frontage. At ground-floor level, a regular succession of masonry arches supported by

substantial piers or columns forms a continuous covered arcade. A corresponding sequence at first-floor level produces a second open gallery.

The resulting elevation is therefore composed of a repeated structural module which is repeated along the entire length of the building. This produces the unusually strong architectural rhythm.



Photos: Maltese National Archives

View of the architectural detail

Residential organisation

The original specification for 20 married families and the long building was internally subdivided into a series of individual family units rather than organised around large communal dormitories. Each apartment had a living room, scullery and either one or two bedrooms. As discussed before, the innovation with Fort Chambray was to provide a cellular domestic plan, providing each soldier and his family with separate multi-room living accommodation.

The regularity of the façade strongly expresses this internal modular organisation. Repeated door and window openings correspond to repeated residential units, producing what can be understood as an early form of purpose-built military apartment building.

The two-storey configuration also allowed a relatively large number of families to be accommodated while maintaining a narrow building depth. A narrow plan was advantageous because rooms could receive daylight and ventilation from external walls rather than depending upon deep internal spaces.

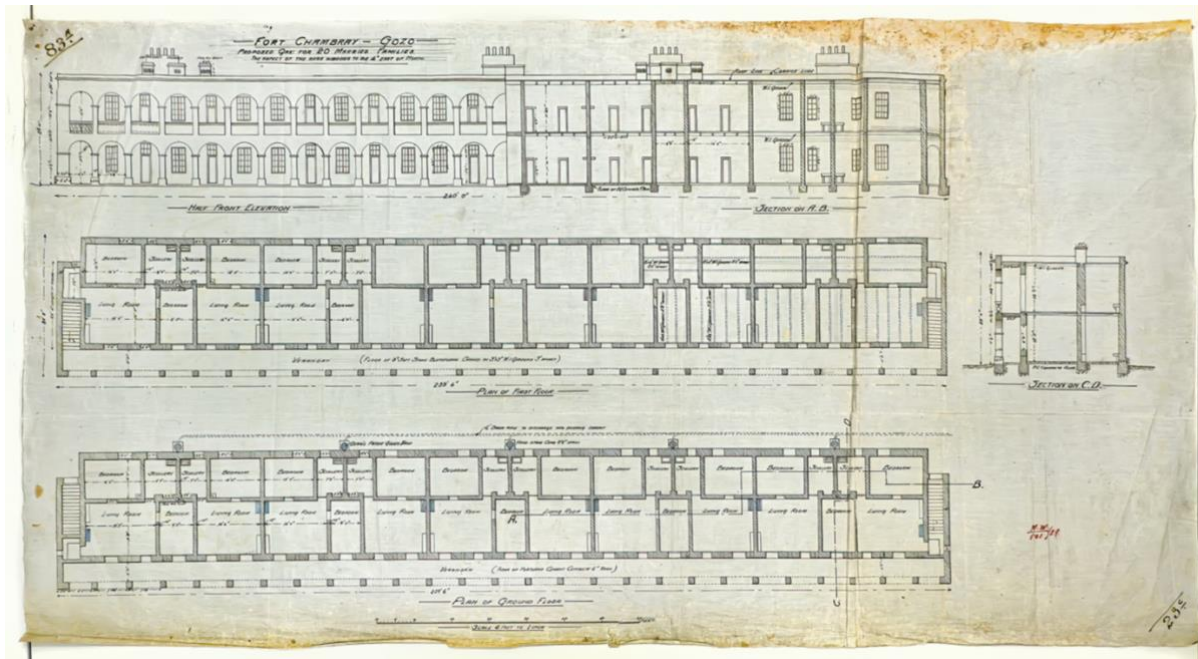


Image: Project House, Public Works Department, Malta

Internal layout of the Barracks

Climatic design

The principal elevation of the Barracks faces approximately south, giving the accommodation extensive exposure to sunlight and sea air. The original design was unusually precise about orientation: it specified that the rear windows should have an aspect of 4 degrees east of north. This orientation appears to have been an integral part of the environmental design of the building. The combination of a south-facing arcaded elevation and openings on the opposite elevation permitted both solar access and cross-ventilation. The exposed elevated location of Fort Chambray further enhanced natural ventilation.

The galleries therefore act as a climatic buffer between the exposed external environment and the residential rooms behind them—a highly appropriate architectural response to the Mediterranean climate.

Other characteristics contribute to its adaptation to climate. The thick limestone walls and stone floors provide substantial thermal mass, moderating changes in internal temperature.

In combination:

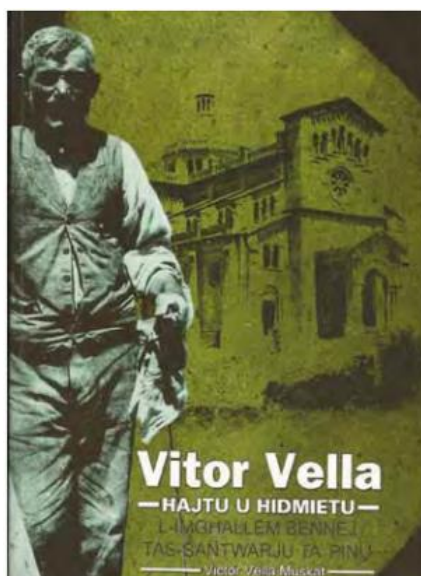
- the elongated and relatively shallow building form;
- its carefully specified orientation;
- openings on opposing elevations;
- extensive external galleries;
- deep masonry arches;
- high ceilings and relatively generous internal spaces.

act together to provide a passive environmental control system long before mechanical cooling became possible.

Anglo-Maltese architecture by one of Gozo's greatest masons

The Barracks are notably restrained architecturally. There is little elaborate decoration. Their visual quality instead comes from the proportions of the elevation, repetition of arches, depth of the galleries, regular masonry construction and relationship between solid wall and open arcade. This is characteristic of nineteenth-century British military architecture, where economy, durability, hygiene and functionality generally took precedence over elaborate architectural display. At Fort Chambray, however, these British planning principles were realised through Maltese construction materials and Gozitan masonry craftsmanship. The result can therefore reasonably be characterised as **Anglo-Maltese military architecture**, rather than simply an imported British building type.

The workmanship has particular local significance as the master mason, Vitor Vella, is associated with the project.



Cover of a book on the life of Vitor Vella

Vitor Vella (1878–1956), commonly known by his family nickname *Vitor tal-Qanfuda*, was one of Gozo's most accomplished master masons. Born in Żebbuġ into a family of builders and stoneworkers, he learned his profession through the traditional apprenticeship system. His father, Ġużepp Vella, and his brothers were also engaged in construction.

One of Vella's earliest major commissions was the construction of the British Barracks at Fort Chambray. Although still only about twenty years old, he reportedly assumed the role of master mason. Working from plans prepared by the Royal Engineers, Vella translated the military drawings into reality. The carefully executed construction demonstrates both the quality of Gozitan craftsmanship and Vella's ability to interpret technically demanding plans.

Vella subsequently became associated with ecclesiastical architecture. He participated in the construction or enlargement of the parish churches of Kerċem, Sannat, Nadur, Qala and Xewkija, as well as churches at Santa Luċija and Mgarr in Malta. He also worked on the Gozo Cathedral, the convent of St Anthony in Għajnsielem and the dome of Żebbuġ parish church.

His greatest achievement was the construction of the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Ta' Pinu. Beginning in 1919, Vella directed the masonry work over approximately seventeen years, including the building of the sanctuary's imposing bell tower. His career illustrates the importance of the master mason in Maltese architectural history: not merely a contractor, but a skilled interpreter of drawings and expert practitioner in local limestone.

Vella's work at Fort Chambray is therefore an early and particularly significant example of the craftsmanship that later made him celebrated throughout Malta.

Structural significance

Indeed, the excellent surviving condition of the building provides evidence of the quality of its construction. Despite decades of abandonment and the removal of doors, windows and fittings, the masonry structure is still in good condition.



Photo: Europa Nostra

View of the Barracks today

This reflects the inherent durability of traditional load-bearing limestone construction when its principal structural elements remain intact. The arcades are not merely a façade applied to an independent building behind them: they form part of the architectural and structural composition of the building. The relationship between the front arcade, transverse walls, rear elevation, floors and roof is therefore important to understanding the building as a coherent structure. This point is particularly significant from a conservation perspective. **Treating the arcaded elevation simply as an ornamental "screen" risks losing much of the evidential value of the building.**

The importance of the Barracks therefore lies not in any single innovative construction technology, but in the integration of military planning, domestic accommodation, structural masonry by skilled Gozitan masons using local limestone, and passive climatic design.

5. Grade 1 scheduling

The conclusion of the above discussion is clear: the British Barracks at Fort Chambray have an outstanding European architectural, cultural and historical significance. A statement issued by Europa Nostra to this effect is available at: <https://www.europanostra.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/202607-Statement-British-Barracks-Malta.pdf>

A planning update for Fort Chambray in 2005 specified that *“the scheduling of the British Barracks will be considered following the outcome of pending applications”*. However, this has not been done, and the Barracks have no heritage protection at the current time.

This contrasts with the treatment of other military married quarters from the early 1900s. While the heritage value of these buildings has been recognised both in Malta and elsewhere in the former British Empire, it is **completely ignored in Gozo**. For example, consider the examples mentioned before: In St Andrew's Barracks in Malta, the Soldiers' Married Quarters Blocks A–C are protected at Grade 1, while in Hong Kong both Cassels Block and Lyemun Block 31 are Grade 1 historic buildings and have been retained for adaptive reuse. These examples were built after Fort Chambray.

Consequently, it is now the time for **the British Barracks to be scheduled Grade 1**. It should be underlined that scheduling as Grade 2 would not provide the necessary protection to this unique building – including the largely intact interior – as substantial changes would be possible that would undermine its heritage value.

It should also be emphasized that the heritage significance of the British Barracks is not confined to the physical fabric of the building. It also derives from the building's prominent location within Fort Chambray, its relationship with the surrounding fortifications, and the views through which its scale, form and historical function can be understood. The open land around the barracks, particularly in front of their principal elevations, provides the visual space necessary for the building to be appreciated as a coherent architectural composition and as a landmark within the fort.

Therefore, protection of the building without protection of the setting would be inadequate. New construction could leave the historic fabric untouched while nevertheless causing substantial heritage harm by obscuring the building, and by severing its historical relationship with the fortifications. Accordingly, development within its curtilage and on surrounding land should be strictly controlled. Important public views should be identified and maintained.

The figure below illustrates this in more detail. It shows the prominent position of the Barracks on the arrival to Gozo. In order to respect this heritage setting, any new construction to the rear of the building should be height limited to be no more than the Barracks themselves, and any development to the front (south) should not be visible over the fort walls.



Photo: Din I-Art Helwa

The view of the Barracks on the approach to Gozo

The open foreground, the most **heritage-sensitive** area beyond the building, is indicated in red on the figure below.



Satellite image: Apple Maps; Photo: Europa Nostra

Minimum envelope requiring protection

The objective is not an absolute prohibition of development throughout the wider area, but a clear presumption against development that would obstruct, dominate or materially diminish the barracks and their historic setting.

6. Fort Chambray: Development and Redevelopment Plans since 1980

From around 1980, Fort Chambray entered a new phase in which its future was increasingly considered in terms of **tourism and residential development**. The transition was difficult and prolonged. Over more than four decades, a succession of development schemes were proposed, abandoned, revised and partially implemented. This process has progressively

transformed the historic interior of the fort and has now created a **serious threat to the survival of the British Barracks**.

The first tourism proposals

The idea of converting Fort Chambray to tourism predates 1980. In the late 1960s, the Maltese government considered developing the site as a tourist complex incorporating a 320-bed hotel. These plans were abandoned following the change of government in 1971, and the existing mental hospital was instead refurbished.

The policy changed again towards the end of the decade. In 1979, patients were moved from Fort Chambray and work began on converting part of the fort for tourism and recreation. National Archives photographs record construction work in 1979–80, including a restaurant immediately in front of the former Barracks and the installation of a large swimming pool and associated equipment. These works provide important documentary evidence of the physical state of the site, including the Barracks, immediately before the major redevelopment initiatives of subsequent decades.

The proposed tourism complex was never completed. The fort therefore entered the 1980s without a sustainable long-term use. One particularly damaging intervention was the clearance of the former Garrison Cemetery during the mid-1980s. The human remains were subsequently transferred to Santa Maria Cemetery at Xewkija in 1991, while the surviving gravestones were removed from their original context. The episode illustrates the vulnerability of historic elements within the fort when unprotected.

Shortly before the 1987 general election, the government transferred Fort Chambray to a private company for tourism development. This began a long and complicated process of private-sector redevelopment that would continue, under changing ownership and development concepts, for several decades.

The 1992 Development Brief

A much more systematic approach was established in **January 1992**, when the Planning Services Division of the Ministry for Development of Infrastructure published the **Fort Chambray Development Brief**.

The importance of this document for the British Barracks should be emphasised. The planning objective was not simply to preserve the external walls of Fort Chambray while allowing the interior to be comprehensively redeveloped. The Development Brief envisaged the **retention and reuse of significant historic structures within the fort**, specifically including the barracks, bakeries, chapels and hospital complex as well as the outer bastions.

The concept was therefore one of **adaptive reuse**: new economic activity would make the redevelopment viable, while historically important buildings would be incorporated into the new functions.

The Development Brief further added:

“ The relationship between the Knights and British barracks buildings set in a commanding position with uninterrupted views over the sea must be retained. In particular, the view of the Fort and these two main buildings from the seaward approach situated in an imposing position on top of the cliffs must be retained. No new development will be allowed to intrude into the foreground views of the two buildings.” Article 22.

These principles, consistent with the scheduling of the building, were carried into the master planning undertaken from **1993 onwards**. The development objectives included restoration and reuse of historic buildings, a high-quality tourism and residential development, and new construction whose scale and design would respect the historic setting. The proposed development included approximately 236 residential units, together with commercial and tourism facilities. Importantly, the British Barracks were intended to be incorporated into a new hotel, rather than demolished. Other historic buildings were similarly assigned new functions.

A Master Plan was approved in 1995, but implementation proved difficult. Financing and ownership problems delayed development, and the project passed through a succession of investors. The development effectively stagnated for several years.

Revival of the project after 2004

A major change occurred in 2004, when responsibility for completing the project was transferred to Gozitan businessman Michael Caruana. The development subsequently began to advance more rapidly, and the developers took possession of the site in 2007. The first phases concentrated principally on residential development. Apartments and villas were constructed within the fortified enclosure, accompanied by landscaped areas and a large communal swimming pool for residents.



Photo: Europa Nostra

Current view showing the residential development

A revised Master Plan for subsequent phases was approved in 2012. By this stage the commercial basis of the project had changed considerably from that envisaged in the early 1990s. Residential property had become a major component, while a hotel remained an important element of the proposed final phase. The result has been a substantial physical transformation of the interior of Fort Chambray and large areas have become a modern residential development. The fort now functions substantially as a private residential complex rather than as an accessible historic military site.

The changing position of the British Barracks

The evolution of the treatment of the British Barracks is particularly important.

The original conservation-based development strategy recognised the building as an historic structure to be retained and adaptively reused. Under the 1990s master planning proposals, it was intended to form part of the proposed hotel development. This approach was consistent with the 1992 Development Brief, which explicitly identified the historic barracks among the structures that should be retained.

The building nevertheless remained unused while residential development proceeded elsewhere within the fort. This prolonged vacancy inevitably increased its vulnerability. Doors, windows and other fittings disappeared or deteriorated, and the building increasingly acquired the appearance of abandonment. Importantly, however, deterioration through disuse is not equivalent to the loss of the building's architectural or historical significance. Its principal masonry structure, characteristic two-storey arcades and overall architectural form remain identifiable and in good condition.

<i>1760s</i>	Fort Chambray is completed by the Order of St. John, financed by Jacques-François de Chambray, Governor of Gozo
<i>1798</i>	French occupation of Malta and Gozo. Fort Chambray is occupied by the French for some months.
<i>1800</i>	British occupation. The British make military use of the fort progressively shifting from defensive to administrative roles
<i>Between 1895 and 1903 (exact date uncertain)</i>	The Barracks are built within Fort Chambray as some of the very first multi-room accommodation for British married soldiers.
<i>First World War</i>	Additional use as a military hospital for soldiers wounded in the Eastern Mediterranean
<i>1937</i>	Conversion of the Barracks to a civilian hospital as an isolation ward for leprosy patients.
<i>1956</i>	The isolation ward at the Barracks is closed in 1956. By 1979 all hospital patients had left Fort Chambray.
<i>1980</i>	Conversion of the Barracks to a hotel initiated by private developers but then abandoned.
<i>2004</i>	The building is part of the concession awarded to a new developer. It is left abandoned to the present day.

The evolution of the site and the Barracks within it.

The present threat of demolition

The most serious change has come with the latest proposals for the redevelopment of Fort Chambray.

In **December 2024**, planning permission was granted for a scheme that would entail the demolition of the historic British Barracks as an integral building. The proposal envisages dismantling the characteristic two-storey arcaded façade and reconstructing it as part of the frontage of a new five-storey spa hotel positioned further back within the fort.

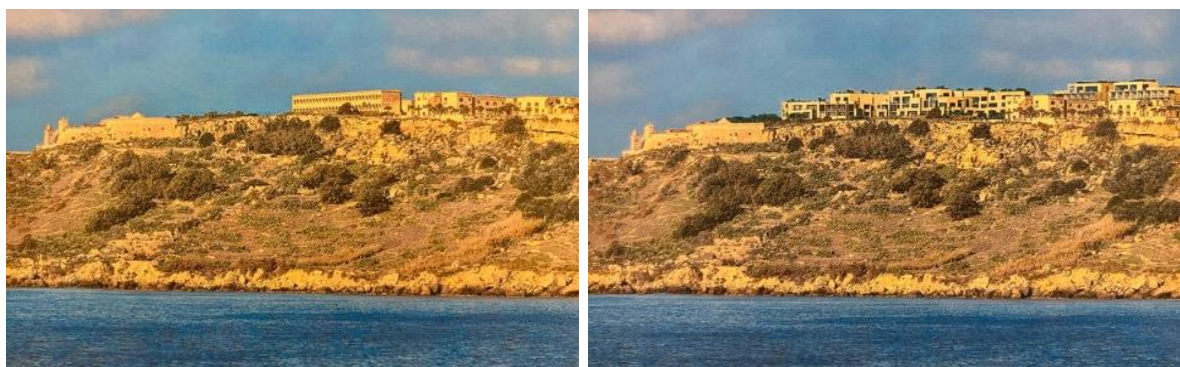
However, reconstructing a façade is not the same as preserving a historic building. The heritage significance of the Barracks lies not only in their arcaded elevation but in the relationship between that façade and the building behind it: its original masonry construction, structural system, internal divisions, circulation galleries, room proportions, orientation and relationship to the surrounding military landscape.



Images: Planning Authority; Architect Antoine Zammit

Views of the proposed development

Demolition would therefore remove much of the physical evidence through which the building's history can be understood. Reconstructing the arcade in front of a substantially larger modern hotel would preserve a visual reference to the original building, but it would no longer preserve the Barracks as a coherent historic structure.



Images: Planning Authority

Current and proposed future views of Fort Chambray from the arrival route to Gozo

A significant change in conservation philosophy

The history of Fort Chambray's redevelopment since 1980 therefore reveals an important evolution in the treatment of the site. The 1992 Development Brief sought to reconcile commercial development with conservation by retaining and reusing the principal historic buildings. The British Barracks were explicitly included within that approach. More recent proposals move towards a substantially different model in which the visual characteristics of the Barracks would be reproduced within a much larger new development while most of the original structure would disappear.

The issue is therefore not simply whether the familiar arcaded façade survives. It is whether the **British Barracks survive as a historic building**.

This distinction is fundamental to the heritage significance of Fort Chambray. The fort is not solely an eighteenth-century monument of the Knights of St John. Its subsequent British military use, its accommodation of soldiers and their families, its role during the First World War, and its later medical history form successive layers in the history of the site. The Barracks are one of the principal surviving physical records of those later layers.

As mentioned before other military barracks from the same era have benefitted from scheduling as Grade 1. Against these precedents, the potential loss of the Fort Chambray married-quarters block, would be particularly difficult to understand. Their destruction would remove an important component of the historical development of Fort Chambray. **The present redevelopment proposals do not retain the authentic historic structures that allow its successive periods of European and Maltese history to remain legible.**

7. Public Investment in the restoration of Fort Chambray

The future of Fort Chambray involves a substantial commitment of **public funds to the repair and conservation of its eighteenth-century fortifications**. The scale of the problem extends beyond normal maintenance of historic masonry. The limestone walls have suffered from prolonged deterioration, including weathering, open joints, cracking and loss of stonework. More seriously, parts of the fortifications, particularly on the western side of the site, are affected by **instability in the underlying geological formations**. Investigations have identified fissures and movement affecting the area between the Polverista, St Anthony's Bastion and the western curtain wall. As a result, conservation requires not only cleaning, replacement of deteriorated stone and repointing but potentially substantial structural engineering works, including piling, anchoring and stabilisation of the ground supporting the fortifications.

Some €650,000 was reportedly spent between 2005 and 2014 by the concessionaire for protection of the walls. However, under the amended concession arrangements, the **financial risk has effectively shifted to the Maltese State**. The developers can undertake restoration and stabilisation works up to an initial ceiling of €6 million, but the expenditure is reimbursed by Government. Furthermore, the contractual ceiling may be increased by agreement. The €6 million figure is therefore best understood as an initial contractual

provision rather than a restoration budget. There is presently no reliable, published estimate establishing what the complete programme of conservation and geological stabilisation will ultimately cost, but it may be very much more than €6 million.



Photos: Chris Hurst

Existing extensive damage to the *Polverista* (gunpowder magazine) and fort walls, May 2026.

There is a strong public-interest justification for this intervention. Fort Chambray is an important eighteenth-century fortified complex and the survival of its bastions and curtain walls cannot reasonably be made dependent solely upon their commercial value to the residential development inside them. Moreover, the geological instability affecting parts of the fort requires intervention irrespective of whether further private development proceeds.

However, the commitment of potentially substantial public resources raises questions about the public benefits obtained in return. Fort Chambray has been developed for private residential and tourism purposes. More importantly, despite provisions for significant public access in the earlier concession and planning framework, effective public access to the fort has not been permitted. Reports have repeatedly drawn attention to the closure of the gates and the resulting inability of the general public freely to experience a major historic monument whose conservation will now require substantial public expenditure. In fact, a large swimming pool has been built exactly blocking one route specified for public access.

The substantial commitment of taxpayers' resources to protect the structure strengthens rather than weakens the case for treating Fort Chambray as a **public heritage asset**. Public expenditure on its preservation should be accompanied by an equally strong commitment to preserving the complete historic character of the site and ensuring that the public can obtain meaningful access to the heritage that it is being asked to finance.



Image: Houses of Representatives, Parliamentary Archives, Valletta

*Public access as specified in the concession
(solid blue, areas open to the public; blue dashed, public right-of-way).*



Satellite image: Apple Maps

Intended public right-of-way from the Knights' Barracks to the Bastion wall

8. Alternative futures

As argued above, the Barracks should be scheduled Grade 1. This protection would not prevent the adaptive reuse of the Barracks for private purposes – for example for accommodation or for tourist facilities. This has been done for other Grade 1 buildings including military barracks.

However, the absence of private development does not mean the building need remain abandoned as it has for the last several decades. Annex 1 considers some alternatives in more detail. These include a dedicated university centre; a stand-alone start-up hub; and a museum or heritage centre.

The analysis concludes that an economically attractive future for the British Barracks at Fort Chambray is as a polyvalent centre that would combine many elements of the above: university and research activities, start-up incubation, coworking and training facilities, conferences and events, together with public interpretation of the building's important historic heritage.

Such a Centre is likely to be preferred to alternative single uses because it combines heritage conservation with economic development while reducing dependence on any one source of demand. A dedicated university centre would face utilisation risks; a stand-alone start-up hub could duplicate the existing Gozo Innovation Hub at Xewkija; and a museum or heritage centre would be unlikely to generate sufficient revenue to cover its operating costs. The proposed Centre instead combines the strongest elements of these alternatives. It could also complement the Gozo Innovation Hub by concentrating on research, entrepreneurship and early-stage businesses, with successful firms subsequently moving to larger commercial premises.

Outside of the building itself, the public space that would be created in front of the Barracks would have a valuable use for exhibitions and displays, festivals, fairs and similar events.

While this is a clear longer-term public role for the Barracks, the site would also be ideal as a facility for Victoria's likely choice as a **European Capital of Culture in 2031**. It could accommodate temporary exhibitions, performances, installations, workshops, lectures, visiting artists and international cultural exchanges. The historic character of the building would make it particularly suitable for activities exploring Gozo's European connections, military and social history, architecture, cultural identity and the adaptive reuse of heritage.

The Barracks have an estimated gross floor area of 1,580 m², providing approximately 1,050 m² of net usable space. Renovation is provisionally estimated at €1.264 million, based on €800/m² gross. Rehabilitation of the approximately 2,000 m² park in front of the building is estimated at a further €600,000, giving total initial capital expenditure of €1.864 million. The cost of acquiring the property is not included and nor is the cost of ensuring the safety of the fort walls.

Clearly, these costs are only indicative at this stage, and a detailed survey of the building and its renovation requirements is needed.



Photo: Din I-Art Helwa

Mock-up of a renovated Barracks dedicated for public purposes

At an assumed market rental value of €180/m²/yr of net space, the building has an estimated annual rental value of €189,000. After allowing for building maintenance, park maintenance and utilities, the estimated annual net economic benefit is approximately €124,000.

Over a 25-year appraisal period, with the very conservative assumption of no residual value attributed to the building or park, the investment generates an estimated real Economic Rate of Return of 4.4%. At a 2% real discount rate equivalent to the Maltese Government's long-term funding cost, the project generates a positive surplus of approximately €550,000 over the assessment period.

These results exclude likely significant additional benefits from heritage preservation, education, innovation, employment creation, public access and the wider diversification of the Gozitan economy. In other words, even a minimum valuation of the new space generates an acceptable economic return from its rehabilitation. The true economic and social value should be significantly more.

The conclusion is that under Government ownership the Barracks can be developed into a valuable economic asset for public use.

9. Recommendations

- 1) The first priority should be to **secure Grade 1 scheduling** for the Barracks and their essential setting. This will require a combination of formal legal and planning measures and a wider public campaign to raise awareness of the building's importance, particularly within Gozo.

The case for protection should explain that the significance of the barracks lies not only in their architectural fabric but also in their prominent position within Fort Chambray, its open foreground and the views through which the building can be appreciated from inside and outside the site.

A proposed scheduling boundary should therefore be defined through a detailed "red line" plan. This should include the building, its curtilage, the open land needed to preserve its principal setting and any associated historic features. The objective would be to prevent new construction from obscuring, crowding or dominating the barracks. The awareness campaign should involve local organisations, heritage bodies, residents, educational institutions and the Gozitan media, building public support for protection and reuse.

- 2) A second step would be to prepare an application for the **European Heritage Label**. The application should demonstrate the barracks' wider European significance, including their relationship with British military history, the development of accommodation for soldiers' families, Malta's role in Mediterranean military and public-health history, and the movement of people and institutions across the British Empire and Europe. The application should also present a credible programme for conservation, interpretation, education and public access.
- 3) Third, the Government should consider recovering the barracks and the essential surrounding land for **public ownership** and control. The scale of the conservation work required for the walls raises questions as to the public benefit of these investments if the entire site is purely for private profit. Public ownership could offer the most realistic means of securing the building's restoration, appropriate reuse, continued maintenance and public accessibility.

This decision should be supported by a detailed feasibility study. It should include full structural surveys; a conservation-led renovation plan; more detailed capital and operating cost estimates; discussion of possible uses with local authorities; governance and funding arrangements; and a phased implementation programme. The study should also define the functional area needed to the north of the barracks and address access, parking, deliveries, utilities, emergency access, accessibility and servicing without compromising the historic foreground.

- 4) Finally, if the preferred use includes a new cultural or civic public space, the project should be incorporated into the **European Capital of Culture 2031** programme. This

would give the restoration a clear timetable, strengthen the case for public and European funding, and ensure that the Capital of Culture leaves a permanent heritage and community asset rather than a temporary programme of events

ANNEX 1: Economic analysis of alternative future uses of the British Barracks**1. Possible Uses**

The table below includes the options considered together with a preliminary screening:

Possible use	Fit with building	Economic & social value	Revenue potential	Overall assessment
Diversified Centre for Innovation & Heritage	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	Strongest option
University / research centre	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	Very strong but small size
Start-up / innovation incubator	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	Strong, but should complement Xewkija
International education / summer-school centre	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	Very strong complementary use but seasonality
Training / skills centre	★★★	★★★★	★★★	Strong if linked to an incubator
Digital / remote-working centre	★★★	★★★	★★★	Good, but insufficient alone
Heritage centre, museum	★★★★★	★★★★	★★	Important component, weak standalone economics
Creative industries centre	★★★★	★★★	★★★	Possible
Government offices	★★★★	★★	★★★	Easy to implement, limited additionality

The principal alternatives considered are a dedicated university or research centre, start-up incubator, international education centre, training centre, digital coworking facility, heritage centre, creative industries centre, government offices and museum.

A dedicated university or research centre would be compatible with the character of the building and could contribute significantly to skills development and economic diversification in Gozo. However, the approximately 1,000 m² of estimated usable space is insufficient for a substantial conventional university campus, while reliance on a single academic institution would create considerable utilisation risk. A mixed model with other uses would allow several universities and research organisations to use the building for teaching, ad hoc research projects, summer schools and visiting programmes without requiring a permanent institution to occupy the entire property.

In the same way, an international education or summer-school centre could exploit Gozo's attractiveness as a destination and the distinctive setting of Fort Chambray. Such programmes could attract international participants and generate significant expenditure in the local economy. Their principal weakness as a stand-alone use is seasonality and intermittent occupancy.

A vocational training and skills centre could address local labour-market needs and provide a clear social benefit. Nevertheless, conventional training activities do not require a heritage building of this significance and could generally be provided more economically in existing educational facilities. Training is therefore better incorporated selectively into an innovation and entrepreneurship programme.

A dedicated start-up incubator would support the objective of developing higher-value employment. However, Gozo already possesses purpose-built business accommodation at the Gozo Innovation Hub in Xewkija. Creating another conventional technology hub could duplicate existing publicly funded infrastructure and would depend on uncertain demand from a relatively small local start-up population. However, there does seem scope to concentrate on generating new businesses through research, education and incubation, with successful firms subsequently able to move into larger premises at Xewkija.

A digital coworking or remote-working centre could attract independent professionals and provide facilities for Gozitan residents working for companies elsewhere. It could also generate relatively straightforward rental income. However, coworking space alone would provide limited additionality and insufficient justification for substantial public expenditure on acquisition and restoration. Coworking on the site should instead support the wider innovation community.

A heritage interpretation centre or museum would provide the clearest direct connection with the historic importance of the barracks and ensure public access. The weakness is financial sustainability. Visitor numbers are unlikely to support the operating and maintenance costs of approximately 1,000 m² of usable historic space. A relatively smaller centre within an economically active building can achieve the principal heritage objectives at substantially lower continuing public cost.

Conversion to government offices would probably provide stable occupancy and could facilitate restoration. It would, however, largely represent the relocation of existing public employment rather than the creation of new economic activity. The additional economic benefits would therefore be modest relative to the investment required.

Several of the alternatives above contain worthwhile individual elements. A less risky approach is to draw on multiple elements to reduce the demand, utilisation and financial risks associated with reliance on any single use.

2. Preferred Option: Fort Chambray Centre for Innovation and Heritage

From this initial review, the preferred use of the restored British Barracks at Fort Chambray appears to be as a polyvalent Centre for Innovation and Heritage, that could be used for university and research activities, start-up incubation, coworking and training facilities, conferences and events, and public interpretation of the building's heritage. This mixed-use approach offers a stronger economic, social and cultural case for public investment than any of these functions pursued independently.

The principal advantage is that it gives the building a productive economic role while respecting its historical significance. Restoration would preserve the heritage of the Barracks, while public exhibition and interpretation space would ensure that the building remains accessible and its history is communicated to residents and visitors. Heritage conservation would therefore be integrated into the building's everyday use rather than requiring the creation of a stand-alone museum, which would be likely to require substantial continuing public subsidy.

The innovation and education functions would simultaneously contribute to the longer-term diversification of the Gozitan economy. Gozo remains relatively dependent on tourism, construction, public services and other locally oriented activities. Developing higher-value activities in research, digital technologies, entrepreneurship and professional services can create skilled employment and provide greater opportunities for younger Gozitans to work on the island. A Centre at Chambray could accommodate visiting university programmes, researchers, postgraduate and executive education, summer schools, start-ups and small innovative businesses.

Importantly, this would complement rather than duplicate the existing Gozo Innovation Hub at Xewkija. The latter provides approximately 9,000 m² of business accommodation, with individual units suitable for established companies. Chambray could concentrate instead on the earlier stages of the innovation process: university collaboration, research projects, entrepreneurship, incubation and very small start-ups. Successful businesses requiring larger premises could subsequently move to the Innovation Hub or other commercial accommodation in Gozo. Chambray would thus help generate demand for existing innovation infrastructure rather than compete with it.

The relatively modest size of the barracks also favours this model. With around 1,000 m² of usable space, they are too small to function as a major university campus or large technology park. They are, however, well suited to a compact innovation community in which teaching rooms, research and start-up spaces, coworking facilities and conference rooms are shared between different users. International summer schools, executive programmes and conferences could further increase utilisation while bringing academics, students and professionals to Gozo and generating expenditure in the local economy.

The mixed-use model also provides greater financial resilience. Rental income from start-ups, coworking, universities, training programmes, conferences and events could contribute towards operating and maintenance costs without requiring every activity to be commercially

self-financing. Public support can therefore be concentrated on the activities producing wider benefits, particularly heritage conservation, research, education and entrepreneurship.

A Fort Chambray Centre for Innovation and Heritage would consequently transform preservation from a cost into a regional-development opportunity. It would safeguard an important European heritage asset while creating a distinctive place for knowledge, entrepreneurship and international collaboration. The historic character and setting of Fort Chambray would itself differentiate the Centre from conventional office accommodation and could help attract universities, researchers, entrepreneurs and international programmes to Gozo.

3. Temporary use as a cultural centre for the 2031 European Capital of Culture

A creative industries centre, accommodating design, digital media, architecture, arts and cultural enterprises, could combine heritage and contemporary economic activity effectively. However, the potential market in Gozo is relatively limited and concentrating exclusively on creative industries would unnecessarily restrict the potential tenant and user base. This being said, Victoria's likely choice as a European Capital of Culture in 2031 provides a clear window for the restored British Barracks to operate as a cultural centre during this event.

Given the timing of the current selection process (due to conclude this autumn), it would not be possible to incorporate Fort Chambray into the European Capital of Culture bid. A more credible approach would be to introduce the project at a later stage, once the 2031 programme has entered implementation. From around 2028, there should still be sufficient time to introduce Fort Chambray as an additional venue, complete the necessary restoration work, and develop a cultural programme for the building and adjoining park.

The Barracks could provide both indoor space and a substantial landscaped external area. During 2031 these could accommodate exhibitions, performances, installations, workshops, lectures, visiting artists and international cultural exchanges. The historic character of the building would make it particularly suitable for activities exploring Gozo's European connections, military and social history, architecture, cultural identity and the adaptive reuse of heritage.

The principal advantage of this approach is that the cultural use would be temporary but the investment permanent. The European Capital of Culture programme could provide a strong public rationale and fixed deadline for completing the restoration, while also introducing the building to a wide Maltese and international audience.

Following 2031, the Barracks could transition to their proposed permanent function as the Fort Chambray Centre for Innovation and Heritage, combining research, education, entrepreneurship, cultural activities and public access. The 2031 cultural programme would therefore serve as an initial high-profile use of the restored building rather than its ultimate purpose.

4. Preliminary Economic Assessment

A preliminary economic assessment has been undertaken to determine whether the proposed public investment in the British Barracks at Fort Chambray can be justified on the basis of the economic value generated by the restored property, before taking account of the potentially significant wider benefits associated with heritage conservation, innovation, education and regional development.

The assessment assumes that the building has a gross floor area of approximately 1,580 m², of which around 1,050 m² would constitute net usable space following renovation. Renovation costs are estimated at €800 per m² of gross floor area, equivalent to approximately €1,200 per m² of net usable space. This produces an estimated building renovation cost of €1.264 million.

The proposal also includes rehabilitation of the approximately 2,000 m² park immediately in front of the building, based on dimensions of approximately 25 m by 80 m. At an assumed rehabilitation cost of €300 per m², this represents a further €600,000 investment. Total initial capital expenditure is therefore estimated at €1.864 million, excluding the cost of acquiring the property.

Area measure	Approximate area (m ²)	Comment
Gross floor area	1,580	Two main floors based on a 790 m ² footprint
Less: structural walls/columns	200	Allowance for thick historic masonry and structure
Less: circulation/stairs	200	Corridors, stairs and circulation
Less: toilets/services/plant	130	Sanitary, service and plant areas
Net usable area	1,050	Approximately 66% of gross floor area

The economic benefit attributable to the building is initially valued using its potential market rental value. A rental value of €180 per m² per year is applied to the 1,050 m² of net usable space, producing a gross annual rental value of €189,000. This approach provides a readily observable market-based measure of the economic value of the accommodation created by the investment, irrespective of whether all areas are ultimately let commercially.

Annual building maintenance is assumed at 1.5% of the building renovation expenditure, equivalent to approximately €18,960 per year. Maintenance and irrigation of the landscaped park are estimated at €20,000 per year. Utilities are assumed at €25 per m² of net usable building area, equivalent to €26,250 per year. After these costs, the project generates an estimated annual net economic benefit of approximately €123,790.

The appraisal is undertaken over 25 years in constant prices, so all revenues and operating costs are expressed in real terms and no allowance is made for general inflation. A deliberately conservative assumption is made that the building and landscaped area have zero residual value at the end of year 25. The resulting cash-flow profile therefore consists of

ANNEX 1: Economic analysis of alternative future uses of the British Barracks

an initial investment of €1.864 million followed by a constant annual net economic benefit of €123,790 for 25 years.

On these assumptions, the project generates an estimated Economic Rate of Return (ERR) of approximately 4.4% in real terms. At a real discount rate of 2%, the project has a positive Net Present Value of approximately €0.55 million. The NPV remains positive at discount rates of 3% and 3.5%, at approximately €0.3 million and €0.2 million respectively. The ERR represents the discount rate at which the present value of the project's benefits is equal to its investment and operating costs.

Real social discount rate	25-year NPV (€)
2.0%	+553,000
3.0%	+292,000
3.5%	+176,000
4.4% (ERR)	≈ 0

With long-term nominal Maltese government borrowing costs of approximately 4% and inflation of around 2%, the corresponding real financing cost is approximately 2%. The estimated 4.4% real economic return therefore provides a material margin over the real cost of public capital. With 2% inflation, the 4.4% real return is equivalent to a nominal return of approximately 6.4%. The surplus generated above financing costs is over €0.5 million.

The calculation should be interpreted as an economic rather than purely commercial property appraisal. The €189,000 annual benefit represents the estimated market rental value of the restored accommodation. Some areas of the proposed Centre for Innovation and Heritage may deliberately be made available to universities, start-ups, researchers, heritage activities or other users at below-market rents. In such circumstances, the difference between market and actual rent represents the resources devoted to achieving these wider public-policy objectives rather than necessarily an economic loss.

More importantly, the preliminary calculation excludes several potentially significant benefits. No monetary value has been assigned to preserving an important historic building at Fort Chambray; maintaining public access to the building and landscaped area; supporting university teaching and research; encouraging entrepreneurship and start-up creation; generating higher-skilled employment in Gozo; attracting visiting researchers, students and conference participants; or contributing to the diversification of the Gozitan economy.

These benefits would appropriately be considered in a fuller economic cost-benefit analysis. The assumption of zero residual value after 25 years is also deliberately conservative. A properly renovated historic building should remain serviceable well beyond the appraisal period, particularly when annual maintenance expenditure is explicitly included in the model. The state would therefore continue to own a valuable operational asset after year 25. Assigning even a conservative residual value would increase both the project's NPV and its estimated economic return.

ANNEX 1: Economic analysis of alternative future uses of the British Barracks

The preliminary assessment consequently indicates that the physical investment can produce an acceptable economic return without relying on the monetisation of heritage, innovation or wider regional-development benefits and without assigning any residual value to the asset.

This calculation does not include the cost of acquiring the land and the existing building. Excluding the underlying development value of the land is reasonable if the barracks is designated as a Grade 1 scheduled building and new construction on the park area in front of it is prohibited. Under these circumstances, the site cannot appropriately be valued on the assumption that the historic building could be demolished or that the open area could be developed for alternative residential or commercial purposes.

ANNEX 2: Details of the Europa Nostra mission to Malta

Meetings in Malta

A visit to Malta by Graham Bell and Christopher Hurst representing Europa Nostra took place between 18 and 23 May, 2026. The visit had excellent support by Din I-Art Ħelwa, the National Trust of Malta, both in terms of preparation, background briefings and logistics. Din I-Art Ħelwa is a long-standing member organisation of Europa Nostra and nominated the British Barracks for the 7 Most endangered list.

The following meetings were held:

- Tuesday 19 May 2026, 14h, Meeting with Mr Ivan Falzon, Chief Executive of Gozo Regional Development Authority, Victoria, Gozo



- Tuesday 19 May 2026, 15 h, Meeting with Mr Mario Borg, Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Gozo and Planning, Victoria, Gozo



ANNEX 2: Details of the Europa Nostra mission to Malta

A site visit to Fort Chambray was also possible giving considerable insights into the current state of the British Barracks.



Chris Hurst and Graham Bell assessing the Barracks' principal façade. Credit: Europa Nostra



ANNEX 2: Details of the Europa Nostra mission to Malta

- Wednesday 20 May 2026, 8h30, Meeting with Mr Johann Buttigieg, Executive Chairperson Planning Authority and Mr Silvio Farrugia, Director Development Management Directorate, Planning Authority Office, Marsa, Malta



- Wednesday 20 May 2026, 10h, Meeting with Mr Kurt Farrugia, Superintendent Cultural Heritage, Office of Superintendence Cultural Heritage, Valletta, Malta



ANNEX 2: Details of the Europa Nostra mission to Malta

- Wednesday 20 May 2026, 15h Meeting with the Chamber of Architects:
Architect Andre Pizzuto, President
Architect Andrea Bianco, Chairperson Policy Committee on Heritage
Architect Fabio Scicluna, Policy Officer
Office of Din l-Art Ħelwa, Valletta, Malta



- Thursday, 21 May 2026, 16 h, meeting with interested individuals:
Reuben Grima, Associate Professor Conservation and Built Heritage, University of Malta
Luke Said, Engineer and Research Support Officer, University of Malta, NGO member
Godfrey Vella, Engineer, NGO member, Din l-Art Ħelwa Għawdex
Office of Din l-Art Ħelwa, Valletta, Malta