

**Location:** Heritage Malta Head Office, Ex-Royal Naval Hospital Bighi, Dawret Fra Giovanni Bichi,  
Kalkrara

**Proposal:** Regeneration of the East Block and Surgical block of Ex-Bighi Naval Hospital (Heritage Malta Head Office). Works involve, restoration of all facades of East Block, restoration of both blocks

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> July 2025

**Verion:** 1.0 – Project Description Statement



## Project Description Statement

### Details of the person wishing to carry out the development

Bighi Ex Naval Hospital is called home by Heritage Malta, the entity entrusted with the care of various museums, collections, artefacts, and sites. The role played by our heritage in shaping who we are and where we stand has been acknowledged, and it is considered Heritage Malta's chief mission to have new life breathed into it, ensuring it is rendered safe, secure, and resilient.

While the management of various sites is also overseen, the upkeep, restoration, and conservation of the artefacts housed within them are carried out by Heritage Malta. Over 3,000,000 artefacts are held within the national collection, which continues to be expanded year after year.

As a result, the various departments and teams of Heritage Malta are placed at the core of its mandate and activity. Through these, the preservation of the Islands' heritage is ensured for posterity—not only as a showcase of the past but as a living legacy with a key role in how 21st-century Malta intends to shape its future.

### A brief description of the project and its general objectives

Heritage Malta's Head Office is structured into several general departments, each of which is further subdivided:

- **Administration:** All necessary administrative functions related to the day-to-day running of the sites and the entity are handled here. These include finance, education, human resources, publishing, business development, projects, IT, and digitization.
- **Diagnostic Science Labs:** Scientific solutions within the national cultural heritage sector are provided by the Diagnostic Science Laboratories. Additionally, scientific analysis requests are addressed from private collectors, conservation companies, the Church of Malta, other government departments, and industrial entities.
- **Workshops:** Support is provided to all other departments through the workshops. General upkeep and activities are facilitated, whether it involves the setting up of new exhibitions or the preparation of transportation boxes for artefacts to be sent abroad. Timber, metal, electrical, HVAC, and stone workshops are included.
- **Conservation Labs:** Physical interventions on artefacts are carried out in the conservation labs. These include treatments for paintings, timber, textiles, objects, and even underwater artefacts.
- **UCHU:** The Underwater Cultural Heritage Unit. The main objectives of the UCHU are the identification and documentation of underwater sites, their valorisation, protection, as well as public access management and public outreach.

Below is a current breakdown of departments and their space allocation based on today's available spaces.

## HM Existing Departments



Administration	Diagnostic Science Lab	Workshops	Conservation Labs
HR	Chemistry Lab	Offices	Painting
Education	Biology Lab	Metal	Timber
Publishing	Chromatography and IR Spectroscopy	Timber 1	Textile
Business Development Unit	Microscopy Lab	Timber 2	Objects
Marketing	XRD Lab	Electricians	Underwater
Design and Branding	XRF and Photography room 4m H	Mastri	
Projects - Periti	XRAD shielded room	Storage	
Exhibitions	Chemical Store		
Senior Management Team	Dry Store		
Finance	General storage and archiving room		
Procurement	Sample preparation room		
Tendering	PCU Office		
CEO + Chairman	3 Offices		
IT	Meeting and presentation room		
Digitization	Kitchenette and Toilets		
<b>1150 sqm</b>	<b>300 sqm</b>	<b>600 sqm</b>	<b>1550 sqm</b>

The current configuration of these uses is not necessarily aligned with the original intention of the building as a historical Naval Hospital. As a Grade 2 listed building, certain interventions that have been carried out across various parts of the property at various points in its lifetime are considered to have detracted from its historical value rather than contributed to it.

For this reason, the main objective being embarked upon by Heritage Malta to have the Naval Hospital restored to its former glory. Any accretions and interventions that have altered the overall appearance and use of the Hospital are intended to be removed. This will result in a reduction of overall floor space and a clearer delineation of services and the overall programme. Consequently, the existing spaces and services currently housed at Heritage Malta are to be reworked to make better use of the newly proposed space and to explore opportunities for expansion into purpose-built areas for specific departments.

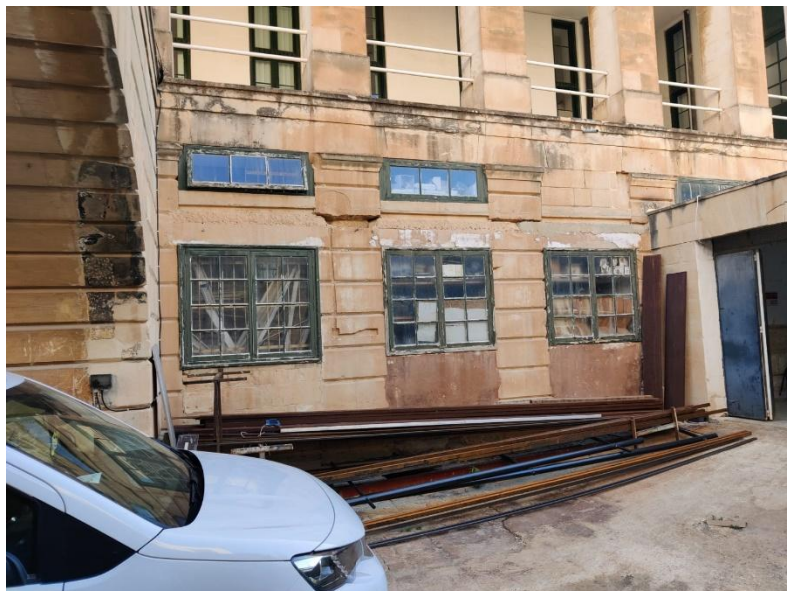
The primary objective is for the Ex-Naval Hospital to be restored to its former state and for Heritage Malta's administrative branch to be accommodated within it, with the potential for aspects of the site to be opened to the general public, particularly close of Villa Bighi and Esplora, both very successful interventions.

A dedicated space is to be constructed to house workshops, digitization labs, studios, recording areas, diagnostic science lab spaces, UCHU offices and equipment, as well as a temperature- and humidity-controlled storage facility. This can only be achieved through the development of a purpose-built structure. It should also be noted that the proposal includes the reconstruction of the boundary wall along Kalkara Bay, which was collapsed during Storm Helios in 2023.

Through this project, the existing buildings are intended to be restored, conserved, and adapted to uses more in line with their original design, while also creating a space that future-proofs Heritage Malta's operations and supports the continued consolidation of Malta's cultural heritage.

Images showing the current state and the original state of the buildings.





**An indication of the proposed timing of the project and why this timing was preferred:**

Originally, the relocation of Heritage Malta from its current location at Bighi to a new, purpose-built site in Ta' Qali had been planned. However, by 2023, this option was deemed no longer viable. Following this, and in conjunction with the collapse of the boundary wall as previously discussed, the decision was made for the Heritage Malta Head Offices to remain at Bighi.

Regarding the timing of this particular project, the opportunity to reconstruct the collapsed wall—along with the necessity for excavation to carry out this work—was identified. Therefore, it was considered logical for these works to be undertaken following the reconstruction of the wall.

The ideal phasing of the project is outlined below.

**The location of the proposed development with site boundaries clearly shown on a map**

There are various aspects to the proposed development:

1. Restoration works of the existing historical buildings.
2. Excavation and construction of workshops and the other facilities.
3. General landscaping and infrastructural works related to road access and greening of spaces.



Image showing full extent of Heritage Malta Head Office.

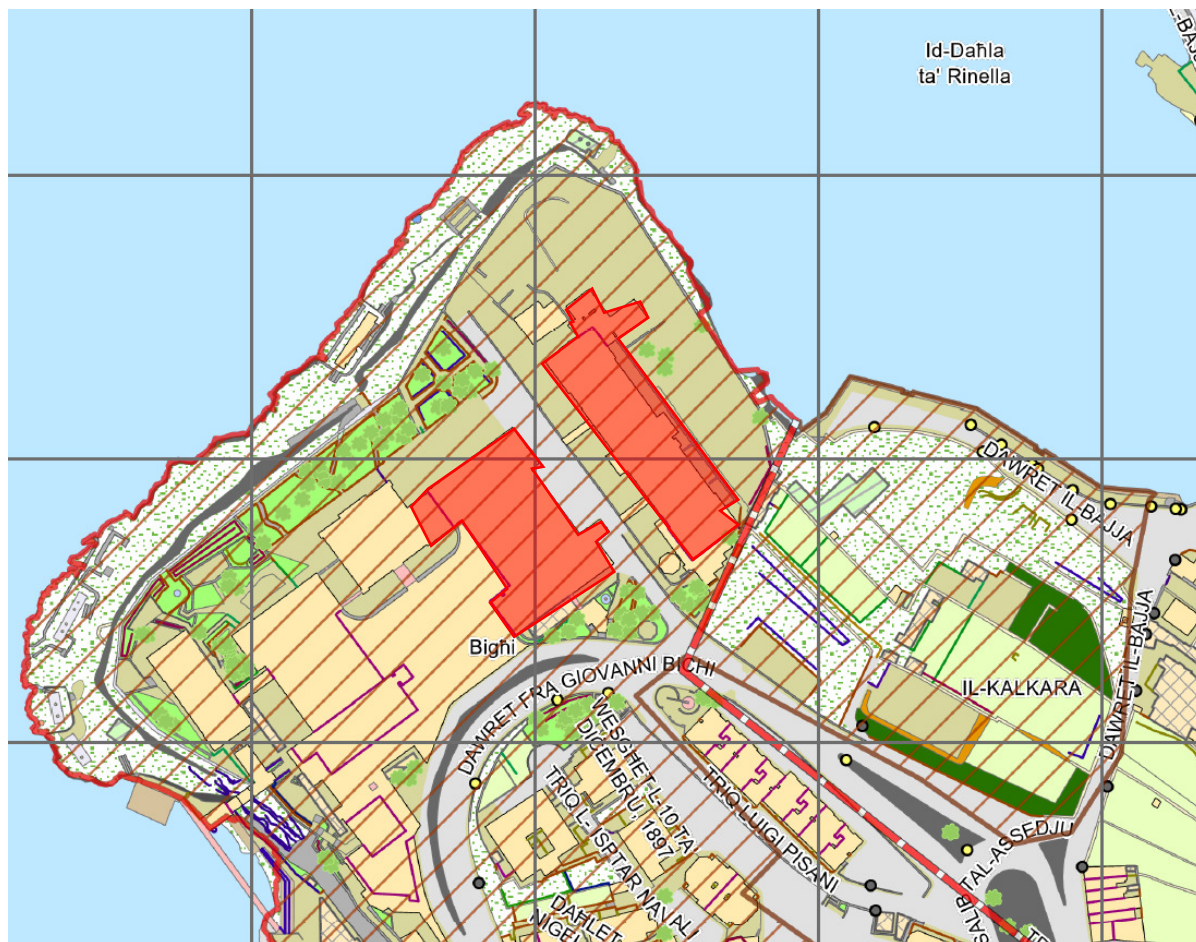


Image showing the original, historical buildings where conservation and restoration to return these to their original proportions are envisaged.





**A concise but reasonably comprehensive indication of the alternative uses, alternative technologies and suitable alternative locations and sites for the proposed development and alternative arrangement of land uses, on the proposed site**

As previously highlighted, Heritage Malta is composed of many departments, each of which is tasked with providing vital services related to general management, upkeep, future projects, education, and underwater cultural heritage. With the current proposal to have the original buildings restored, a spatial limitation has been identified.

It has been determined that the most appropriate uses for the two original buildings are for office and administrative functions, as well as for public access. The conservation labs are to be retained in the old surgical block until purpose-built spaces can be identified. Additional concerns, such as the general lack of facilities and their maintenance at Bighi, have also been noted.

The challenge currently faced by Heritage Malta is the accommodation of the most technically demanding and service-intensive functions, namely:

- Diagnostic Science Labs
- Digitisation and technological advancements
- Workshops

Relocating these functions outside the premises of Heritage Malta has been deemed suboptimal, as their operations are closely integrated with the rest of the team. Housing the entire agency under one roof is seen as a way to streamline workflows and prioritize both artefacts and staff.

The land use strategy was naturally derived once the primary functions of the existing buildings were identified. With these uses aligned to the buildings' original purpose and benefits, the logical next step was to allocate the remaining functions to the opportunity spaces that had already been identified.

**A description of the physical characteristics including size, scale, design and phasing of the development using models, photographs, diagrams, plans and maps where appropriate.**

The project area is to be looked at in 3 different aspects which will also help to explain the phasing of the project.

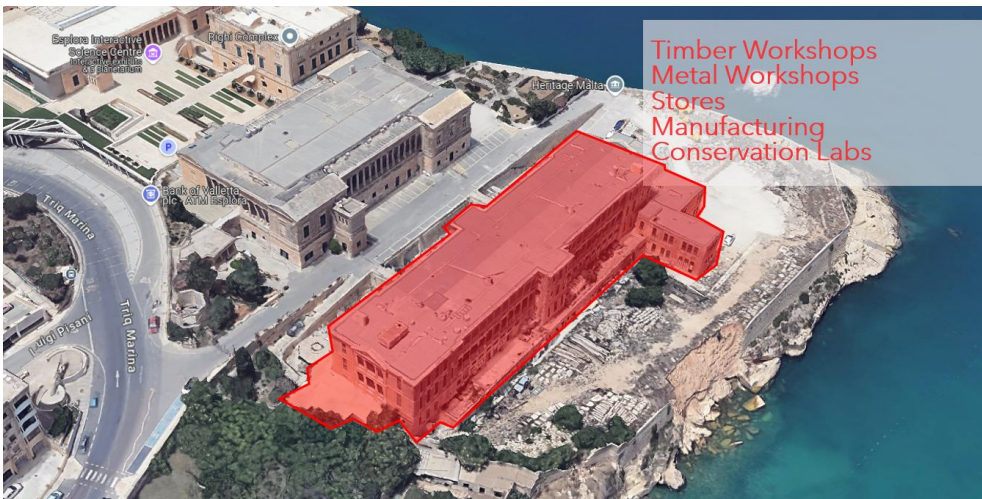
**Current scenario and uses:**

East block – offices, stores, Diagnostic Science Labs, Boardrooms, CEO offices etc.

Surgical block – Labs for conservation (Timber, textiles, paintings, paper, organics), Workshop (Timber, metal, electrical, HVAC)



East block highlight Above



Surgical Block highlighted above.

As has been discussed, Heritage Malta has outgrown this space and the existing premises do not offer enough space of quality for the operation to expand further. The proposal to address this including phasing is as follows:

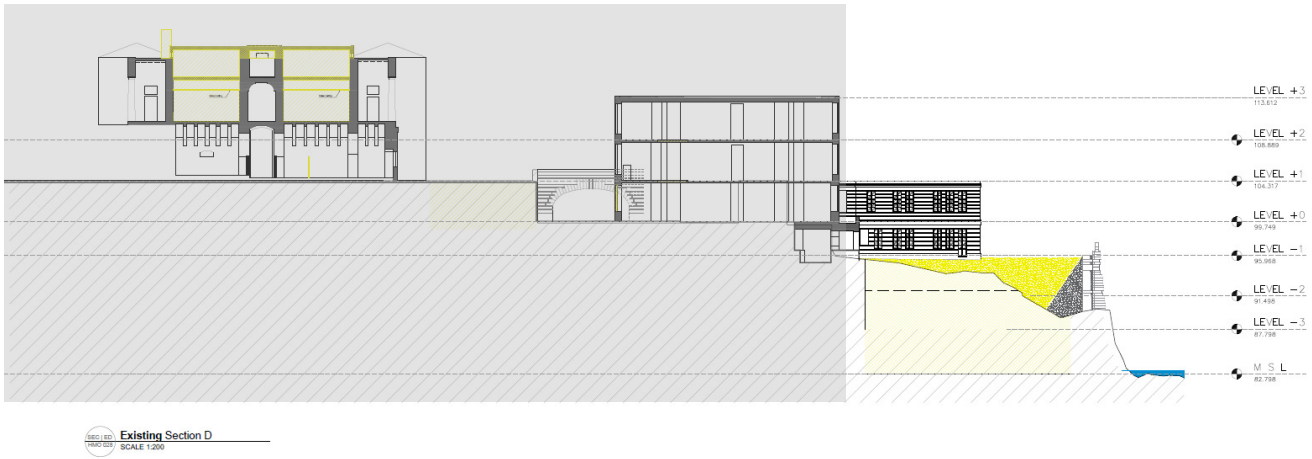
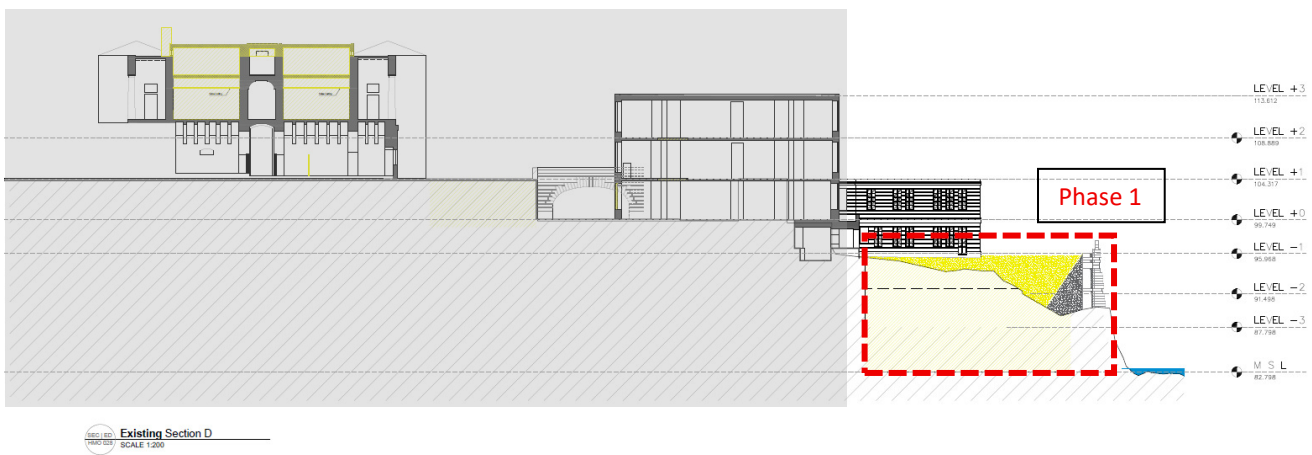
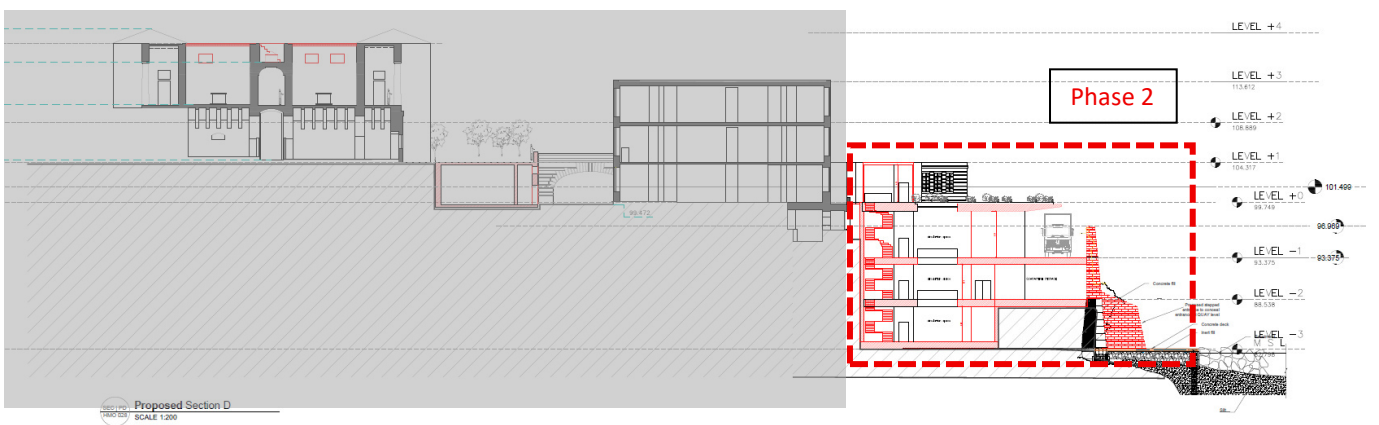


Image 1 – Existing buildings in section. – The area marked in yellow is the area highlighted below is the proposed excavation and construction of the new dedicated spaces.

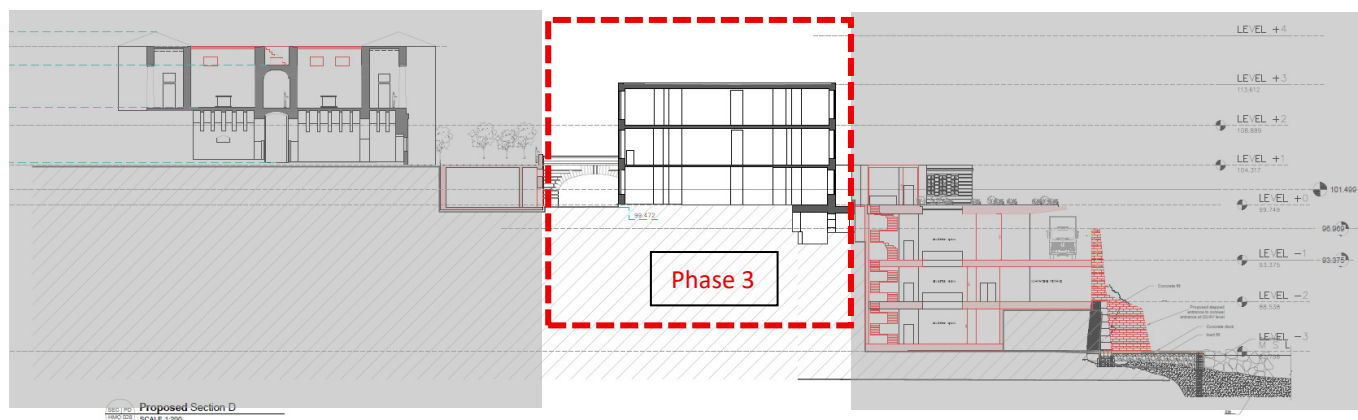


Phase 1 – Excavation of fill material and possible trimming of rock.

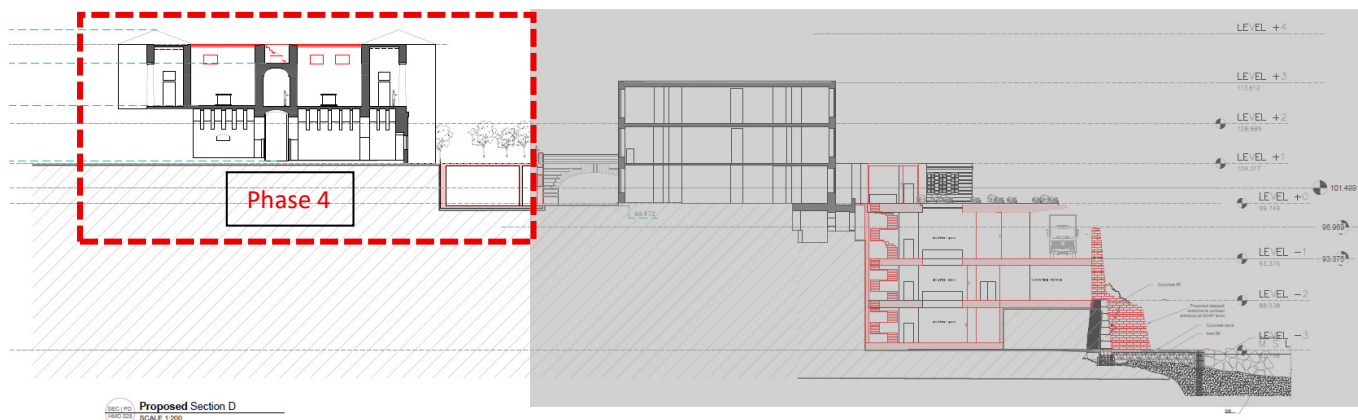


Phase 2 – Construction of spaces spread over 4 floors. Top down the uses are as follows:

- A. At Existing terrace level – A formal roof garden, accessible to all employees, offers various benefits to the overall space.
- B. At existing ditch level – This floor is accessible by vehicle which is required for the workshops. Currently occupying small, haphazard spaces the workshops require large open space to be able to work comfortably as well as be able to bring in and take out materials.
- C. Proposed intermediate floor – This floor is flexible. It can be used as storage with adequate temperature and humidity control for artefacts, house the Diagnostic science labs
- D. At sea level – Workshop, offices and lab for UCHU facilities – to complement their use by boat, ease their movement and overall have a dedicated space relevant to their day-to-day activities.



Phase 3 – Once the new dedicated spaces and workshops are ready, the next phase of works will look at improving the existing connections with the existing buildings, restoring and bringing up to date services, internal spaces etc.



Phase 4 – once the surgical block has been fully restored and adapted to its new use, and the East block can be emptied and restored and adapted to its new, proposed uses.





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2 min read



A section of the Bighi peninsula wall crumbled into the sea.



Images showing the fill material proposed to be removed and excavated.

## A brief description of surrounding land uses, their nature, their extent and their environmental characteristics

Heritage Malta, forms part of the Bighi Naval Hospital complex. Throughout the years various aspects and sections of buildings have been adapted and redeveloped into several other projects. Going through the below image we can see:

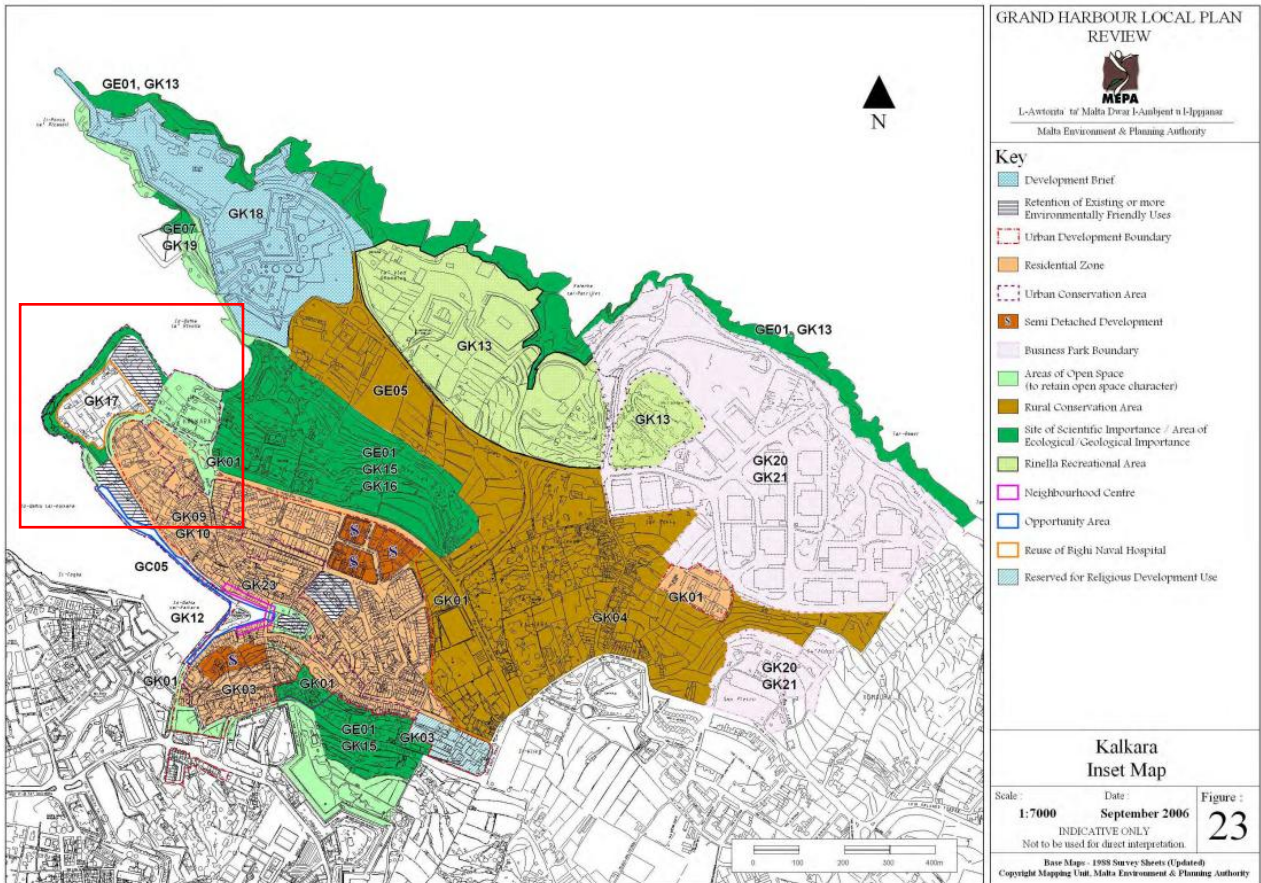


1. **Villa Bighi** – Originally, the oldest part of the complex, today Villa Bighi has been transformed into a multipurpose venue, be it weddings, fairs, conferences. From their own website:
  - a. “Nowadays Villa Bighi also functions as a stunning event venue for anyone wishing to enjoy its glorious charm, esteemed architecture and breath-taking views. It has been refurbished and repurposed and given a new lease of life as a top-notch event venue, to be rented by anyone wishing to organize an event in one of most history-rich buildings. Choices can be made from a wide array of spaces for glorious weddings of any size, inspirational meeting rooms, a vast conference hall, stunning open-air gardens and extensive terraces where to host events year-round. The venue is particularly sought after for weddings, corporate events, conferences and also cultural events, particularly due to its unique personality and architectural beauty. Villa Bighi also features full facilities to cater to MICE (Meeting, Incentives, Conference and Event) groups.”
2. **Esplora** – Housed in the West wing of the Ex Naval Hospital, Esplora is located at Villa Bighi in Kalkara overlooking the Grand Harbour. The building was formerly used as a hospital by the Royal Navy. It consists of several buildings and outdoor spaces which are all interconnected following an extensive restoration and development process which is now complete.

Esplora is Malta’s Interactive Science Centre aimed at educating families and children in Science through interactive activities. It has become a major tourist attraction. One of the very many benefits of looking at this project from a holistic view of having the building interact with each other and serve different functions that enhance the overall experience.

3. **Land currently occupied by Cottonera Waterfront Group** – This area includes what was previously the Surgeon Rear Admiral’s House and private gardens. Today it can be seen to be overgrown and the house remains in ruin.

Zooming out of the immediate surroundings, one can look at the Kalkara local plan:

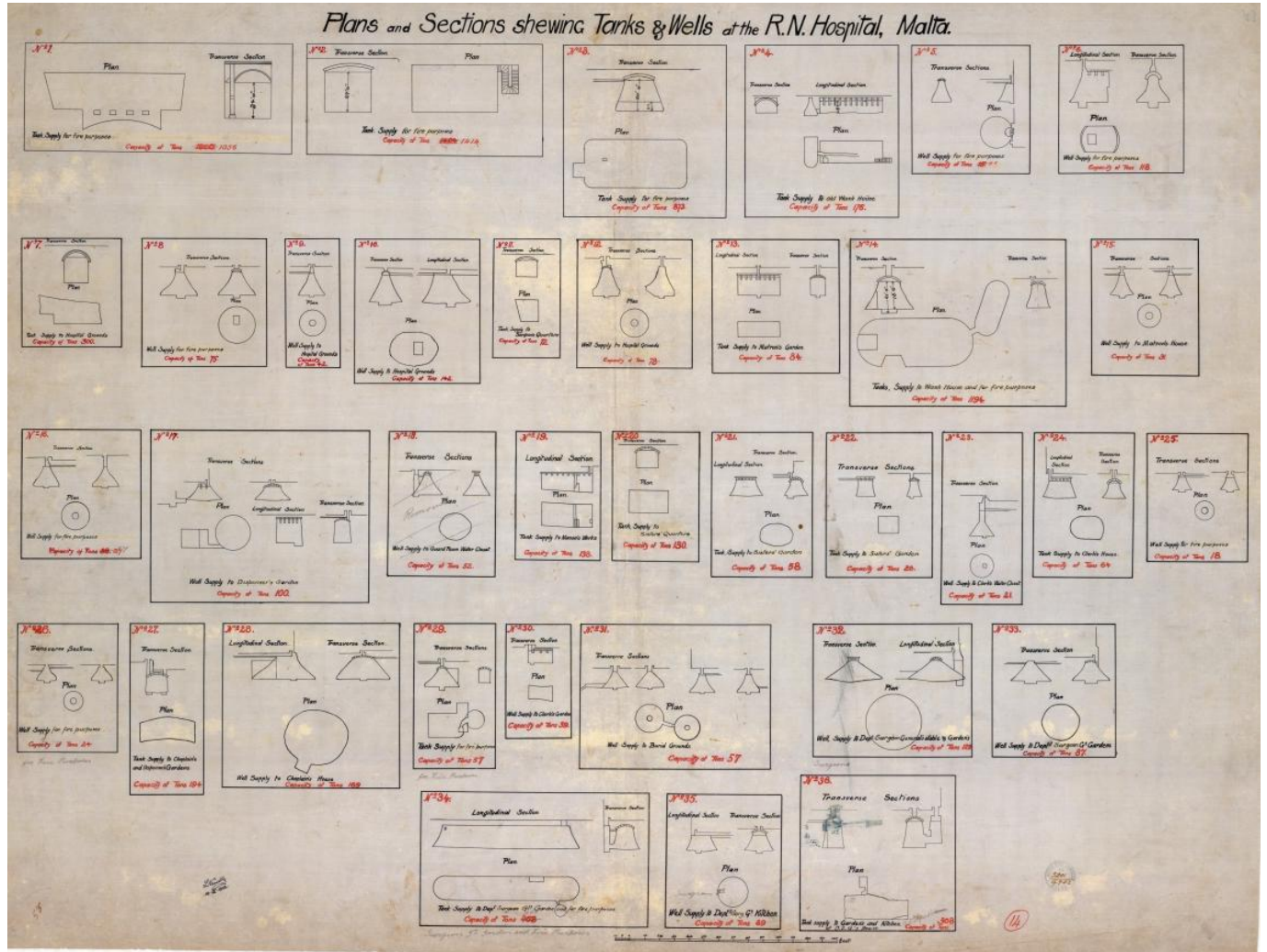


The local plans can show the surrounding areas to be predominantly:

- Areas of open space – To retain its character
- Retention of existing or more Environmentally Friendly uses.
- Residential zones
- GK17 – Reuse of Bighi Naval Hospital
- Site of scientific importance / Area of Ecological / Geological Importance.

A description of the services, water, foul water sewers, surface water drainage, including storm water drainage, and energy sources available on site

As a British-designed and constructed Naval Hospital, the services for water, heating, ventilation, and drainage were all planned and mapped out. Today, remnants of these services are still present, and their redevelopment and reutilization are being proposed as part of the project.



Images are provided to show the number of wells and tanks distributed across the Bighi site. As part of the proposal, all available wells and tanks are intended to be utilized for surface runoff collection and the watering of vegetation. In collaboration with energy consultants, the incorporation of existing water collection systems—as well as the site's proximity to the sea—is being explored to introduce new technologies, such as water-based cooling systems.

By having the new build effectively sunken into the ground, environmental consciousness in terms of cooling and heating is being prioritized. A Building Management System (BMS), roof garden, and other passive heating and cooling systems are planned to be incorporated in order to reduce the reliance on active infrastructure and minimize overall energy consumption.

### Estimates of the number of persons to be employed with estimates for each phase of the development

With the works being envisaged to be phased the intensity of each phase will require varying number of persons on site. At a maximum during the construction and finishing phase it is estimated not more than 50 people at one go would be working on the site.

With regards to employees of Heritage Malta, there are around 80-120 personnel on site at any given time.

### The nature and quantities of raw materials and energy to be used, and wastes generated during construction and operation the proposed method of storage or handling of materials and wastes, and machinery needed during both the construction and operational phases

With regards to the **new build aspect** of the project the raw materials to be used as expected to be as follows:

Precast concrete – 1350 m<sup>3</sup>

Concrete bricks - 1800 m<sup>3</sup>

Asphalt / paving works - 3900 m<sup>2</sup>

With regards to the **Restoration** of the existing blocks, the raw materials to be used as expected to be as follows:

Franka Stone work – 350 m<sup>3</sup>

Timber beams – 500 linear metres

During the restoration and finishing phases of the project, M&E waste materials—such as conduits, wiring, gypsum finishes, and tiling—will be separated, stored in designated areas, and recycled where possible. If recycling is not feasible, the waste will be discarded at appropriate dumping sites.

The waste expected to be generated during the demolition and excavation phase is anticipated to consist mainly of inert material. This waste will be continuously removed and transported to licensed dumping sites. Any raw material that can be reutilized, such as soil suitable for agricultural use, will be assessed and potentially reused at one of Heritage Malta's existing sites.

Inert materials, including concrete and franka stone, will be separated and reused on-site when feasible, or otherwise transported off-site by licensed carriers following proper waste management procedures.

With regard to machinery, the following equipment is expected to be used: excavators and loaders, trenchers, dumpers, saw-cutting equipment, mobile cranes, tower cranes, and ready-mix trucks.

During the operational phase, the installation of two gantry cranes near the conservation labs is envisaged to facilitate the movement of heavy artefacts.



**List of the major environmental impacts likely to be generated by the project, including reference to cumulative impacts, proposals for mitigating the negative effects of the development**

Below is a list of the potential major impacts likely to be generated during the project phases.

Environmental Aspect	Potential impact	Mitigation
	Dust emissions from on going works	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Air quality monitoring</li> <li>2. Constant removal of debris and dust from the site at regular intervals.</li> <li>3. Hoarding and management of waste material in appropriate zones to limit dissipation into other areas.</li> </ol>
Water quality	Contamination of waters	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mitigation of works and closing off of the site and drainages ways to prohibit any overflow into the sea.</li> </ol>
Noise	Generation of excessive noise generation.	Avoidance of works that involve generation of noise during periods indicated within SL 552.09.
Traffic	Increase in traffic	Management of vehicle entrance, exits and drop off zones within the site.
Waste	Generation and discarding of waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Segregation of wastes generated, and storage in designated areas prior to disposal</li> <li>• Transport of waste off site as soon as possible, utilising waste carriers licensed under LN 106/07</li> <li>• Disposal of wastes at licensed facilities</li> </ul>
Visual impact	Visual impact of the proposal	Consideration from Valletta taken into account during design and considerations put in place to ensure no negative impact

## Conclusion / Summary

The key objectives of this project as listed below:

1. Restore the Ex-Naval Hospital to its previous glory
2. Capitalize on the space being presented behind the collapsed wall to create new, purpose built spaces to aid and enhance Heritage Malta's current departments
3. Future proof the existing building by providing them with appropriate uses both for the buildings themselves and the entity.
4. Update and future proof the existing infrastructure.
5. Landscaping of the existing surroundings, create an overall better working environment for employees.

The proposed redevelopment of the Heritage Malta Head Office at Bighi represents a **strategic and respectful intervention** into a historically significant site. By restoring the Ex-Naval Hospital to its former architectural character and integrating modern, purpose-built facilities, the project aims to **future-proof Heritage Malta's operations** while **enhancing public access and engagement**.

The phased approach ensures that **continuity of operations is maintained**, environmental impacts are mitigated, and the site's **cultural and historical value is preserved**. Ultimately, the project is positioned not only as a restoration effort but as a **visionary investment in Malta's cultural infrastructure**, aligning heritage preservation with contemporary needs and sustainable development.