

MEMORANDUM TO CABINET BY THE HON. MINISTER OF PUBLIC  
BUILDING AND WORKS

Development of Kingsgate Area

Plan No. 13C/55B indicates a plot of land bounded by Kingsway, Ordnance Street, Queen Square, and St. John's Cavalier. It also shows which part belongs to Government and which to private owners. All private property is held by Government under Possession and Use Terms.

The development of this site is tied up with the Royal Opera House project in the sense that the design of the square is part of the project. The Kingsway elevations of buildings put up on the site, therefore, should conform with the designs prepared by the architects of the Royal Opera House project: to some extent this conformation would dictate the treatment of the elevations on the other streets.

On the other hand, a building of considerable size put up on this site would tend to mask St. John's Cavalier from certain viewpoints and would compete with it for importance especially when viewed from outside the walls.

In the opinion of this Ministry, therefore, the building should not rise higher than 25 feet above Queensway level and should stop short of St. John's Cavalier by at least 100 feet. The limitation of height would mean that the Bergonzo/Zavelani Rossi design for the square can not be followed and the restriction in height and area would limit the use of the site. But it is considered that the sacrifice of developable volume is essential if the importance of the cavalier is to be retained. Of course, the presence of the cavalier also imposes a design of building which, though not necessarily classical in lines and inspiration, should not clash with the historic structure.

Unavoidably/.....

Unavoidably, therefore, the building must be designed as one homogeneous whole. Equally inescapable, in my opinion, is the development of this site by Government.

The private land belongs to some thirtyeight different owners and it is impossible to conceive these owners each being allowed to develop his land while still conforming with the design of the block. Equally inconceivable would be the expectation that thirtyeight different owners would reach agreement to build their part of the site collectively and in conformity with the design of the whole block.

Lastly, Government is desperately in need of office accommodation and it should not miss this opportunity of keeping for its own use what is unquestionably one of the best sites in Valletta and practically the only one still unbuilt. There is bound to be great competition among Ministries for this site - such is the pressing need among Government departments for adequate office accommodation: the rival claims would have to be assessed and decided upon by Cabinet.

What is required first and foremost is a firm definition of policy regarding the method of development of the site. There are three alternatives to consider:-

- 1) Development of the entire site by Government - after expropriation of private interests in the site;
- 2) Development of the site partly by Government and partly by the private owners; and
- 3) Development of the entire site by private enterprise - after purchase of the Government land and acquisition of all private property.

The first alternative is not only the most advantageous to Government but the only one that is really feasible.

Only after/.....

Only after this decision has been taken can planning start in earnest.

As this extremely valuable site has already remained unused and unproductive for many years, and at least 18 months must be allowed for designing the structure and commencing work, the decision of Government policy is a matter of some considerable urgency.

24 AUG 1969