

WINNING AWARD

## COSPICUA SOCIAL REGENERATION PROJECT

### LOCATION

Cospicua

### ARCHITECTS

(X,Y,Z) Architecture & Design

### TEAM

*Architectural and Planning Team*

Janice Fiorentino

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Manuel Cassar

Gerald Salerno

Steve Attard

Andrea Rizzo

Michela Micallef

James Cutajar

### PROJECT YEAR

2019

### ARCHITECT'S STATEMENT

The proposed housing project in Cospicua is sited within a sensitive historic context, being close to St Helen's bastions. It is spread over an area over 3,000 square metres and is highly visible when approached from both Fgura and the San Gwann t'Ghuxa neighbourhood. The scheme had to respond to the client's requirements, re-evaluate a previously approved project and introduce new features that would provide added value to the quality of life of the local community.

Following a thorough analysis of the topographic characteristics of the site, its visibility, and links with the surrounding urban fabric, the project was redesigned in such a manner so as to diminish the footprint take-up, reduce to a minimum the excavation that would be required and exploit the considerable changes in levels – while at the same time increasing the number of residential units. The reduction in building footprint area resulted in more space being dedicated to public use. Research was also conducted on the evolution of the urban morphology, especially the war damage analysis and the proposed plans for the location. Although a planning permit had been issued to demolish the entire site, the design team revised the original scheme so that those buildings that were not extensively damaged during the war would be retained and restored. It is envisaged that these restored buildings will eventually host a childcare facility and a community centre.

Provisions were also made to re-use as much as possible the limestone from the original buildings and integrate it in the project. The idea is to introduce environmentally sustainable concepts and promote the re-use of construction material. There is also an aesthetic consideration as the completed building would visually blend in seamlessly with its surroundings. Planning policies and restrictions were studied in detail, in such a way as to utilize existing and approved alignments on site, providing sufficient open spaces and adequate connectivity to the proposed square. This made it possible for all residential dwellings to have the required frontage.

The proposed six residential blocks are modest in terms of scale and arranged in such a manner that they create an intimate setting where all the individual blocks have apertures overlooking the surrounding streets and square. The unit typologies were designed in response to the housing unit demand as provided by the client. A modular design approach was adopted, providing flatted and duplex accommodation, thus maximizing the opportunities presented by the nine-metres change in level from one side of the site to the other. A social housing project cannot be treated like a private sector residential development. A more participatory approach involving the local community and various stakeholders had the positive effect of creating a sense of ownership.

During excavation works various small rock-cut cisterns and wells were uncovered, documented and wherever possible retained. There were other instances of large underground reservoirs dating back to the sixteenth century which were accidentally discovered. A decision was taken to maintain, restore and integrate them within the project. (X,Y,Z) Architecture & Design's overall objective was to establish a new benchmark in terms of social housing design.