

Chief Minister's Speech
on the occasion of the opening
of the King's Bastion Leisure Centre
on Thursday 28th February 2008

Your Excellency, fellow Ministers, distinguished guests welcome to this formal inauguration of the King's Bastion Leisure Centre.

The King's Bastion is one of the most important parts of Gibraltar's historical, military and architectural heritage. It was General Elliott's command post during the Great Siege of Gibraltar, and without it Gibraltar's defenders would never have survived the Franco Spanish attack upon Gibraltar with floating batteries on 13th September 1782. It forms, therefore, a vital part of our history that has enabled today's Gibraltar to exist at all.

In 1896, after it had ceased to enjoy its frontline military role as one of the key parts Fortress Gibraltar's defensive fortifications, work begun on the construction in the King's Bastion of Gibraltar's first small Power Station. In 1960 modern engines were installed in the new building that was erected to the North of the Bastion, on what is now the forecourt.

King's Bastion power station was decommissioned as a generating station in 1982 although it continued to house vital electricity distribution infrastructure until 2005. This 1960 building was demolished in 2005 and 2006 – together with all other non-original buildings that stood within the Bastion itself, where this new building now stands. This exposed the Bastion internally, and its Northern facade, in its original state.

This demolition represented the start of the Government's project to achieve two objectives – Firstly, to recover and restore this very important heritage asset, which had lay decaying and derelict in the very heart of our city since 1982; and secondly, to provide Gibraltar with a Leisure centre of which it could be proud. What is more, by doing the two together, heritage has been put to sensitive and sustainable modern use – it is brought back to life – but without doing it harm. Today the King's Bastion, once again becomes a central and important part of the daily life of Gibraltar, as it was, militarily and defensively over the centuries.

I believe that we have achieved both objectives with considerable success. I am no expert on such matters, but I have travelled extensively. I believe that the recovery and restoration of the Kings Bastion as a heritage monument, and the sensitivity and care with which the Leisure Centre has been built and integrated into the Bastion, is by global standards, an outstanding achievement in the management, conservation and putting to use of heritage.

This brings me to the first of many people who I must acknowledge, congratulate and thank on this exciting occasion. The project Architect Stephan Ritzen, and his colleague Zorica Jovanovic are here with us today. Stephan, I know that I have made a bit of a nuisance of myself, and that I

probably rank as your most difficult client ever, but I thank you for your patience. The result has been worth it. Thank you for this wonderful building – you have certainly left your mark on Gibraltar's heritage, and on Gibraltar's Leisure Scene. Thank you and many congratulations to you, and to the whole design team, on what you have achieved here.

While still on the heritage aspects of this project, I would like to acknowledge the important and passionate role of Carl Viagas, who now takes care of the heritage aspects of projects for No6 Convent Place. His has been a labour of love, to which we owe the care and attention to detail with which the Bastion has been restored.

I know that some people genuinely interested in heritage in Gibraltar have been unable to agree with the Government's decision to demolish the Rosia Tanks to make way for affordable housing. I hope that they will accept this magnificent recovery of the King's Bastion as some (though I understand, insufficient) compensation. The Government remains committed to the uncluttering and refurbishment of our walls and bastions as has already happened at Casemates, Orange Bastion, Chatham Counterguard and now here at King's Bastion. From King's Bastion we will continue to move south to Wellington Front – the whole of which will be refurbished, restored and put to modern civic uses.

I turn now to the splendid leisure centre itself. Following the Government's £10 million investment in the equally impressive Bayside Sports Centre, this £12million investment provides Gibraltar with a leisure centre that few communities of our size can boast about. They represent the principal, but not the last pieces of the Government's structured programme for the enhancement of Sport & Leisure facilities in Gibraltar.

The leisure facilities themselves, and their physical environment, have been provided to a high standard. Just as the refurbished Casemates Square became the focal point of outdoor café leisure in Gibraltar, so this Leisure Centre will become an important focal point in Gibraltar for leisure for people and families of all ages. This is the Government's vision.

The Centre currently contains adult and children bowling facilities, a real ice skating rink, a well equipped amusement games arcade, a pool and snooker tables lounge, a multi-station internet lounge, a youth lounge and bar with further games and entertainment facilities such as big screens and others, a discoteque, and an adult terrace bar. It will shortly also contain a two screen cinema and a personal fitness centre.

The Government's vision and objective is to make this Leisure Centre a place of safe and enjoyable entertainment for all the family, where people of all ages can come and enjoy the amenities in a relaxed and safe environment. It also represents a very big financial investment by the taxpayers of Gibraltar. Accordingly, misbehaviour that spoils the enjoyment of others, or causes wanton damage to this Leisure Centre will not be tolerated.

There will be uniformed security personnel on duty, and full CCTV coverage around the clock, as well as a duty manager. Parents must know, with confidence, that they can allow their children to attend the Centre. Right of admission is reserved. Thus, anyone misbehaving, causing a nuisance or causing damage will be evicted, and suspended or barred from future access to the Centre. Smoking is not permitted anywhere in the Centre, except the terraces. Alcohol consumption is limited to persons aged 18 or over. The youth lounge bar is alcohol free.

I hope that a small minority will not seek to spoil the fun and enjoyment for the majority, or cause mindless damage to this expensive facility. They will not be allowed to do so. The Centre management have instructions from Government to practice a policy of zero tolerance in this respect. Only those who are prepared to abide by the rules of the Centre, which are designed to ensure safe and enjoyable use by everyone, will be allowed to enter and use the Centre.

The Restaurant, bar and Bowling facilities are operated by private sector operators. The rest is operated by the Centre's own management and by the Sport & Leisure Authority.

As I said earlier, there are many people to thank for their very considerable input in making this Government project a reality – too many to mention them all in utility companies, Government departments, commercial suppliers and service providers. But there are a few whom I must acknowledge. I have already mentioned the Architects, and the rest of the design team. I would also like to thank the Contractor, Volker Stevin and all their very professional personnel that have been involved here – but especially Jack Hop and Duco Bergwerf, the Project Managers.

Many thanks and appreciation also to Nigel Pardo and his technical team at Commercial Developments Investments Limited that have so successfully and expertly driven this project on behalf of the Government.

And finally to some of my own staff at No6, who never quite knew whether I was Chief Minister, Assistant Architect or Clerk of Works. Particular thanks and acknowledgement to my private secretaries Martin Figueras and Vanessa Ramos Israel who have taken the strain, particularly in the last few months to make today's opening a reality.

I hope that everyone in Gibraltar will enjoy this great facility, that it becomes a focal point of individual and family leisure, and that it will allow us all to strengthen with each other, the bonds of community which so enrich the quality of life in Gibraltar.

It therefore gives me real, heartfelt pleasure to declare OPEN the King's Bastion Leisure Centre.