

The 7 Most Endangered 2013

Project Fact Sheet

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| <u>Project Title</u> | Vauban's Fortifications in Briançon, FRANCE |
| <u>Location</u> | Briançon, France |
| <u>Initial input date</u> | 10.10.2017 |
| <u>Current status</u> | Follow-up |
| <u>Latest update</u> | 30.09.2018 |

Summary, status, prognosis

The project concerns the restoration of a group of internationally important 17th century fortifications above the town of Briançon: Fort des Têtes (Site: 41 Ha, Built area 10 040 sq.m.). Fort du Randouillet (Site: 15 Ha, Built – 5 051 sq.m.) Fort Dauphin (Site 4 Ha, Built area – 660 sq.m.), Fort des Sallettes (Site 4 Ha, Built area N/A sq.m.), Communication Y (Site area 4 Ha; Built area – 835 sq.m.). Estimated cost to stabilise and rebuild: 40 – 50 M.EUR.

Some works have been carried out to stabilise some critical areas, but the resources required are far beyond the capacity of the Commune. The Commune is small, the region poor, but in addition to the fortifications, it also has a range of historical and bequeathed former military structures to maintain and manage.

The fortification sites are important, not least because of the status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, but there is a choice to be made. Either the sites are stabilised or they are fully developed, but neither simple stabilisation nor a compromise development would generate the desired economic and financial benefits needed for long term sustainability. The site, and arguably the Commune, will only be sustainable if the fortifications can generate enough direct revenues, or otherwise demonstrate their economic value directly or indirectly.

Some efforts have been made to generate new ideas to valorise the town's historic resources but these have largely failed. This may be partly attributed to the existing depressed state of the local economy, as well as to the poor state of conservation of the properties which have recently been transferred from the army to the commune. However, there may also be a need to bring in appropriate expertise and experience to drive a campaign of regeneration and fund-raising.

Classification: C Slow Progress

Basic data

Nominator:

Robert de Leotoing d'Anjouy, Europa Nostra, France.

Current Contact: Birgit Wallborn, birgit.wallborn@besancon.fr, Vincent Faubert, Commune of Briançon (v.faubert@mairie-briancon.fr)

Brief description:

17th Century fortifications, barracks and associated military buildings.

Owner:

Commune of Briançon, France and Ministry of Defence, France.

Administrator:

Commune of Briançon

Context, description

Briançon is a small commune of some 12 000 people. The town itself is split between the upper, old, walled town, the Cité Vauban, and the newer town below. Although Briançon has an historic past, it is relatively unknown internationally, and despite all of the main fortifications being listed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO, it is its ski-resort neighbour, Serre Chevalier, which is better known. In the past, the town benefited economically from its strategic location on key trade routes through the alps, the downside of which being that they were also the routes invading armies would choose to take. Apart from a silk spinning industry in the lower town, which died out in the 1930s, Briançon did not develop a diversified economy. Briançon was a garrison town, and the departure of the army had a serious impact on the economy of the town from which it is still recovering.

The project comprises four sites with limited water, limited electrical power and no other utilities:

- ❖ Fort des Têtes Site area 41 Ha; Usable built area – 10 040 sq.m.; Readily accessible; Only site still owned by the government which is undertaking basic works to keep it safe.
- ❖ Fort du Randouillet Site area 15 Ha; Usable built area – 5 051 sq.m., Cut off in winter; Cost to stabilise secure: EUR 15 million¹
- ❖ Fort Dauphin Site area 4 Ha, Built area – 1 420 sq.m., Usable Built area – 660 sq.m.; Cut off in winter; Cost to stabilise: EUR 6.5 million;
- ❖ Fort des Sallettes Site area of site – 4 Ha, Built area – ? sq.m., Usable area – ? sq.m. Cut off in winter; Stabilised;
- ❖ Communication Y Site area 4 Ha; Usable built area – 835 sq.m.; Readily accessible; Cost to stabilise: EUR 5.5 million;

Issues, problems, threats

The key issue is the ability of the Commune, or any other interested party, to identify sources of funding for the redevelopment of the various sites. The system of fortifications and the threat to its continuing existence is partly attributable to the general economic weakness of the period, and partly to the structural economic weakness of the region. The economic shocks outlined above means the town depends heavily on seasonal tourism: walking and other outdoor pursuits in summer and some peripheral skiing in winter. Efforts are being made to diversify the economy, but these will take time to mature.

The threat to the fortifications is natural and beyond the control of legislators. There may be some man-made negative impacts on the structures, but the enemy is the weather, particularly the cycle of freezing and a hot sun, lubricated by wind, rain and snow. These threats can only be mitigated by continuous maintenance and repair – the costs of which are beyond the local budget. At present the Commune can only try to keep the sites safe for the public, sometimes by excluding them, and carry out ad-hoc restoration work as and when budget funds are available.

Status pre-mission

With the exception of the successful use of focused resources on the Fort des Salettes, some targeted some work, mainly safety related, on the Fort des Têtes, and some goodwill funding made available by the army and the Ministry of Culture, very little work had been carried out on the overall site following the army's departure. There is strong support from the local community, but the scale of the site means that only the most serious issues can be addressed, with a focus on safety rather than redevelopment.

Summary EN/EIBI mission recommendations, action programme:

Two principal lines of action were recommended:

- Firstly, the scale of the project is such that they should be seen as a new, fourth "Quarter" of the town, and be the object of a full urban planning and zoning review;
- Secondly, a Development Agency should be established to carry out the whole stabilisation process and manage the redevelopment activity, incorporating experienced staff from the Commune but also importing new skills such as professional fundraising, urban and wider economic development and tourism, which is the principal mechanism by which the sites can become sustainable.

Progress on recommendations and latest status

The Commune has very limited resources. Even with dedicated staff, support from the wider region, some continuing practical support from the Ministry of Defence, and the backing of the Réseau Vauban, the resources are too limited to meet the challenges of the fortifications. Some incremental progress has been made, and contacts have been developed with academic organisations and potential private sector investors. However, the resource constraints, and unforeseen problems within the old town of Briançon itself, has limited the Commune's ability to drive the project forward.

The EIB Institute supported a piece of analysis by undergraduate students into potential alternative uses of the sites, but this has not progressed further than their report. Similarly, the EIB Institute has offered its analytical services in the event of a serious investment proposal but, so far, these services have not been called on.

There is currently only one serious proposal for any of the sites: the Fort des Têtes. A small development group has been working for some time on a project to create a combined hotel, real estate and small commercial centre development. The group has created a redevelopment plan for the site, centred on two hotels and supporting infrastructure and real estate, and has in-principle agreement for a range of non-cash financial incentives. In principle the proposal offers a way forward for the site, but as yet no appropriate operator/manager has been identified, no funding is in place, and the extent to which the architectural proposals would be acceptable to both planning authorities and the UNESCO World Heritage Organisation has not been tested.

The development is also waiting for a transfer of ownership, via a 1 Euro cession, from the French State / Ministry of Defence to the Commune of Briançon. The Commune could then sell the Fort to the development group referred to above, in line with their redevelopment plan, so that the project might be launched as quickly as possible.

Impact of EIBI/EN intervention

Nominator's Comments:

The recommendation to establish a local Development Agency is well noted. However, the existing administrative structures within the region do not contain the necessary skills. However, EUR 1.5 million per annum will continue to be invested in the restoration of the most endangered areas.

The company "Next Financial Partners" has been working for two years on a plan to sympathetically redevelop the Fort des Têtes, the only fort still owned by the State. at an estimated cost of EUR 60 million. The municipality has deliberated on the principle of acquiring the Fort des Têtes for the symbolic price of one euro from the current owner, the Ministry of Defence. It would then lay in services to the site (water, electricity, sewers, roads), before selling it on to the group of investors. The implementation of this exceptional initiative has been delayed by administrative and fiscal obstacles, e.g. allowing tax exemptions for investments in commercial buildings, but not for structures and infrastructure. In fact, the official launch of the undertaking procedure was in suspended when, very recently, the tax authorisation was obtained.

Next also plans to redevelop Dauphin and Randouillet forts thereafter, and has expressed the desire to benefit from analytical services which might be offered by the EIB.

Appraisal Team's Comments:

The scale of the project means that the redevelopment of the site will be a long-term project, even if funding can be found in the short term. The simple size of the Fort des Têtes site makes it a long-term project, involving the development of a new "quartier" to the town, while the accessibility and scale of the Fort du Randouillet means a major investment will be required if the site is to be more than just stabilised. The other sites pose fewer problems. However, they have to be seen in the context of the Commune as a whole. There are historic structures in the old town and legacy structures and buildings in the lower town which have been taken over by the Commune. While the staff of the Commune have the skills, experience and willingness to develop many of these projects, the total work required is beyond the financial and human resources which the Commune has available.

An appeal to the private sector: both financial and technical, would be appropriate for some of the structures. However, the local economy is such that experienced investors would require significant incentives to be involved, and investors who are willing to be involved lack the necessary skills, experience and financial resources to make the redevelopments a success.

There is no simple solution to the needs of this project. Incremental projects may be able move the project forwards, but the timescale will be long.

Lessons learned:

- The problems of Briançon are not unique. It is not the only example of a central government organisation transferring historic structures – which might be classed as assets, but are actually liabilities - to a local body with limited resources, without providing any financial support even for a bridging period.
- The work on the Fort des Salettes demonstrates what can be achieved with very limited financial resources provided there is imagination and a team dedicated to an integrated development of a resource involving the local community.
- Bringing in private sector resources is often seen as an attractive solution to the problem of a lack of resources in the public or third sectors. However, there are two critical risks. Firstly, unless the private sector is getting involved as part of a community responsibility programme, it will require a quid pro quo, i.e. an adequate financial return on the capital they are putting at risk. This means that, ex ante there must be

demonstrable markets for their goods or services. Secondly, potential investors without the skills or adequate capital will make proposal which require unrealistic levels of grant or commercial bank support.

- The biggest challenge for the sites will be to make them sustainable. Restoring the high-level Forts might be achieved, but they must be capable of generating enough social benefit or financial revenues each year to cover their operating and maintenance costs.

| Data on inputs & timing | Dates, Participants |
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| Appraisal: | |
| Nomination form submitted | 14 March 2013 |
| Project selected as 7 ME: | June 2013 |
| Questionnaire from EIBI | June 2013 |
| Response to questionnaire | September 2013 |
| Appraisal mission | 23 -24 September 2013 |
| Participants:- EN EIB Institute | Charles Pictet Isik Aydemir Campbell Thomson |
| Feedback letter post mission | n/a |
| Response to further questions | n/a |
| Technical report issued | November 2013 |

Follow-up:

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| Request for progress report | n/a |
| Response on progress | n/a |
| Follow-up visit | n/a |
| Participants: EN EIB Institute | n/a n/a |
| Report on follow-up visit | n/a |
| Fact sheet prepared by | n/a |