

The Boboli - Belvedere Manifesto

February 2021

It seems that the local administration in the heart of Florence's UNESCO historical centre has green-lit a massive development plan proposed by a wealthy private citizen. The plan, which involves a "simplified" urban style and disregards Strategic Environmental Evaluation, is set to impact the area encompassing the Boboli renaissance garden, Pitti Palace and Belvedere Fort, which is situated on the hill housing the Bardini Villa and Garden. The case has now been brought to the attention of national public opinion. The intervention could lead to profound architectural restructuring and to a radical change in destination for a vast complex of priceless former convents dating back to medieval times. For decades, these buildings have been the seat of the military Health School, situated in the grand mosaic of Florence's and the world's most prized treasures. A large luxury hotel is expected to be built on over 90% of the area's 16,000 square metres of surface. Judging by the schematics presented at Florence town hall, digging work will take place for "essential" car parks, tunnels, shops and services within the fragile "hill of ruins". Furthermore, for the sole benefit of 300 projected rich clients (judging by the number of beds), mechanised transport links (Funiculars? Railways? Elevators?) are to be erected to connect Pitti Palace and the Boboli Garden (with right of way which is incompatible with state-owned property) with Belvedere Fort on the stone wall delineating the boundary with the Garden.

In exchange, the collective would receive access to the complex's restored structures of historical, artistic and architectural value. However, the Old Palace's endorsement contains no specification on when or how the project will proceed. The same communal technical offices responsible for mobility have categorically ruled out intervening on this part of Florence, which risks becoming the epicentre of heavy, unsustainable construction work. Alone among Florence's panorama, the Belvedere hill is a fortunate exception: the steep slope of Costa San Giorgio along the ridge, the sweet and winding Via San Leonardo, far from touristy areas, extending from the foot of Belvedere Fort to the streets of the Poggi, allow a standard of living characteristic to the area. Here, it is still possible to roam and see, smell and hear things rooted to the area's history, including artefacts and walls bearing imaginative graffiti. It is absolutely essential to preserve and defend these valuables from defilement inspired by touristic models that have – up until the eve of the pandemic – scarred Florence.

For all these reasons, we deem it important and urgent that the local Administration provisionally suspend the development plan in question and to open a public debate which will allow the citizenry, the associations and the intelligentsia, who have been left in the dark over the details of the proposal and prevented from intervening, to intercede with their own observations, and to regain lost ground in terms of knowledge, transparency and participation when making decisions that touch upon a context which is so precious to an historical city.

**To show your support, write to bobolibelvedere@gmail.com:
"I support the Boboli-Belvedere Manifesto, February 2021", adding your name, surname and eventually title and role.**
