Saint-Denis, June 18th, 2018 – SPIE is soon to complete its upgrade and compliance work on the security and emergency lighting installations of the Château de Fontainebleau. Here we look back on the strategic transformations of a jewel in the crown of French heritage, listed in its entirety as a historic monument and as a UNESCO World Heritage site – a site whose unique challenges SPIE was able to understand and overcome.

Drawing nearly 500,000 visitors a year, the Château de Fontainebleau is the 4th most visited castle in France. As part of its renovation master plan funded by the French Ministry of Culture, the castle is undergoing works over a 15-year period to ensure compliance with current standards and upgrade its infrastructures.

The focus of the urgent works that are being carried out as part of this programme is on upgrading the security and emergency lighting system, a job awarded to SPIE following a public tender process. “Our teams had already worked at the site and have also been working at the Château de Versailles for 10 years”, reveals Olivier Besançon, Head of Tertiary Department at SPIE. “Because of our perfect knowledge of the site and our experience, we were ideally placed to understand the needs, expectations and challenges of the Public Establishment of the Château de Fontainebleau.”

Security: intervening without compromising quality

The security installations were entirely revamped with the aim of putting in place an intelligent surveillance system. Stage 1 involved creating a network dedicated to ensuring the security of the site. SPIE laid 5 kilometres of fibre optic cables to connect the 15 main and secondary cabinets to which the surveillance equipment is linked. SPIE also supplied the new supervision stations, as well as the new cabinets, the video servers and the cameras. As for the patrol route (the fixed itinerary followed by the security guards), it has been replaced with a digital system operated via name badge readers connected to the central surveillance system. This new centralised management system means that it will now be possible to manage the security facilities on an area-by-area basis, allowing each area to be activated or deactivated as the need arises. The second challenge taken on by SPIE was to migrate the 600 alarm points to the new installations – an operation successfully carried out while maintaining an optimal level of security. Around ten people were assigned to these operations from October 2016 to July 2017.

Security lighting: major challenges to ensure the harmonious integration of installations in monumental settings
In order to welcome visitors in optimal security conditions, the Château de Fontainebleau and the OPPIC (France’s Operator of Heritage and Cultural Building Projects) chose SPIE for the task of upgrading the security lighting system and ensuring the compliance of the control cabinets. 22 cabinets had to be replaced, while a further 22 were upgraded to current standards.

To avoid damaging the artworks and having to close public access to the site as a result of its work, SPIE collaborated closely with the lead architect for historic monuments, the contractor in charge of the operation (working as part of a consortium with the technical consulting firm ALTERNET) and the museum’s curators. A number of trades, including carpenters, masons and painters, teamed up to install the high-voltage security lights and lighting units on the itinerary taken by visitors. The area-specific works began in November 2016 and should be completed by June 2018.

“This contract is a great example of collaboration in a place steeped in history”, rejoices Olivier Besançon. “Our teams took account of the architectural constraints of the palace by working to a very detailed schedule designed in partnership with all the stakeholders involved in the project, the aim being to ensure the works could be moved seamlessly. This meant we were able to carry out the operations without having to close the site to visitors.”

According to Arnaud Amelot, Director of Buildings and Gardens at the Château de Fontainebleau, the collaboration with SPIE has been one of the success factors of the refurbishment project: “SPIE was able to carry out the works in harmony with the collections and museum curators. Meeting deadlines was a key factor because we were keen to maximise visitor access as much as possible.”

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