

# Explore Fortuna

By NINO BUCCI

THE Defence Department will open the grandiose Fortuna Villa to the public on Saturday, providing a rare glimpse inside the walls of one of Bendigo's most iconic properties.

The public opening forms a vital part of the community consultation process being undertaken by the Defence Department prior to the sale of the Golden Square mansion.

Federal Member for Bendigo Steve Gibbons urged locals to grasp the rare opportunity to visit the former home of mining magnate George Lansell.

"Fortuna Villa is an important part of the city's gold mining past, and I encourage everyone interested in Bendigo's history and the future of this iconic building to go and see it," Mr Gibbons said.

"By doing so, they will be in a better position to comment on the possible future uses of the property."

Villa Fortuna Action Group president Merle Hall said she

expected a large crowd at the opening.

"We're delighted the opportunity has finally come up, (but) we're a little bit disappointed the time there is so limited," Mrs Hall said.

"We're sure the Bendigo community will be delighted to be given the opportunity, and we envisage a very large attendance."

A Defence Department spokeswoman said visitors would be able to guide themselves around the Villa by following a tour route.

"Defence is working to ensure that as many of the significant elements of the Villa are able to be viewed by visitors as possible.

"Defence believes that the community of Bendigo will understand the need to protect the heritage values of Fortuna.

"Some parts of the grounds will not be accessible due to the presence of safety hazards."

Fortuna Villa is located at 22-48 Chum Street and will be open from 9.30am to 3.30pm on Saturday, but visitors will be unable to access the grounds after 3pm.

Car parking on site is limited, and disabled access is not guaranteed.