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The new La Samaritaine will open its doors to the public late 2018

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After nearly three years of legal wrangling, the restructuring and renovation of La Samaritaine is progressing according to schedule, with an opening to the public scheduled for late 2018, the LVMH group, owner of the property, said on Thursday.

"We are targeting to open to the public at the end of 2018," with the aim that the buildings – covering 70,000 m² - open simultaneously, said the chief financial officer of LVMH, Jean-Jacques Guiony, on Thursday at the reopening of the Maison du Projet (Showroom) on Rue du Pont-Neuf, designed to introduce every element of the renovation to the public.

Created by Ernest Cognacq in 1869, the La Samaritaine department store closed in 2005, originally for fire safety compliance work. The project evolved, adding offices, a luxury hotel, social housing and a creche to the retail element. Originally started in 2012, the works were then blocked by several rounds of legal challenges raised by heritage preservation societies supported by local residents, who objected in particular to the planned installation of a contemporary facade on one side of the building.

The legal battle lasted three years, before being finally terminated by a decision in June 2015 by the *Conseil d'Etat*, or State Council, approving the building permit and the plan for the entire restructuring and renovation project. Work resumed a few weeks later, and is planned to last 36 months. The multi-use project includes 96 social housing units, offices, a Cheval Blanc palace hotel with 72 rooms and suites, a creche for 80 infants, and the return of the La Samaritaine department store, with a retail area of 21,000 m². Previously the creation of a shopping arcade or two medium-sized retail spaces had been mentioned.

While the new department store returns to the original spirit of the location in terms of its architecture, it will become a high-end retail outlet, similar to the Bon Marché department store, which also belongs to the LVMH group. It will offer fashion, jewellery, leather goods and beauty products, but also wellbeing and food, according to the luxury group.

The overall restructuring and renovation of the site, representing an investment of €500 million, should create 4,400 direct and indirect jobs on the site and in the neighborhood, says LVMH.