

Head of Planning and Development  
Kirklees Council, Planning and Development Service  
Economy and Infrastructure  
PO Box B93, Civic Centre 3  
Huddersfield, HD1 2JR

Dear Sir,

**Objection to Planning Application No 2018/93591 – 2<sup>nd</sup> scheme**

**“Erection of restaurant/café/bar, six guest rooms, exhibition/interpretation room, WC’s, terrace, car parking and ancillary accommodation (within the curtilage of a listed building)”**

The site of the proposed development - Castle Hill, Almondbury - is a prominent flat-topped hill with a history of ancient and medieval settlement, located in a rural area outside of Huddersfield town centre. It is much used as a walking destination and a place of recreation, being highly valued for its intrinsic character and history ie its open, elevated and exhilarating environment offering panoramic views; and its dramatic and evocative history which can be “read” in the landscape from within and from outside the site. Castle Hill is a unique place within the region and quite special in the national context. Its qualities have been identified and explained in detail in the “Castle Hill Conservation Management Plan” pub. 2006.

The spectacular landscape of Castle Hill and its rich archaeological and built heritage are irreplaceable resources protected through law and planning policy:

- the area classification as greenbelt demands that the openness of this highly valued landscape is safeguarded;
- the hill’s heritage designation as a scheduled ancient monument means that the asset is of the highest significance in the national context – its

evidential and historic value are paramount; legal obligations help to preserve it in the state in which it has come down to us today

- the Victorian commemorative tower a-top adds drama to the distinctive landmark; it is listed at grade 11 in the national context for its historic associations, aesthetic value and communal importance.

**There is a statutory duty to protect heritage assets and their settings (\* see references below) and, in decision making, policy objectives require great weight to be given to their conservation.**

### Proposals

This is the second scheme presented under the same planning reference number, approximately one year later. Although these proposals take a different form, the brief is essentially the same as before and the amount of accommodation appears to have increased. The new scheme is contrary to initial pre-application advice from Historic England and Kirklees Council. In different ways each scheme has demonstrated that it is not possible to introduce a commercial venture of this scale onto and into the monument without causing substantial harm to the character and special significances of the place.

The development does not meet statutory obligations and is contrary to local and national planning policies. The application should be refused for the following reasons:

- Proposals constitute inappropriate development in the greenbelt
- Proposals would fail to protect and enhance this much valued natural environment
- It would cause substantial harm to heritage assets and their settings
- The scheme is of poor quality design – a hybrid and a “ wolf in sheep’s clothing”
- Drawings are inadequate to explain the extent of the adverse impact proposals would have on the character of the site.
- Information submitted to support this latest proposal does not meet the validation requirements set out in the Strategic Committee Report dated 3/1/2019
- There has been no public engagement, although there is a high level of public interest in this much treasured place

- Proposals do not meet the tests for sustainable development as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework

## Green Belt

Castle Hill forms part of the rural setting of Huddersfield and it contributes to the special pre-industrial character of the wider area with its historic villages in hill top locations. Its distinctive form is used as a symbol for Kirklees. The status as Green Belt should safeguard its natural and open character from encroachment by development.

Unfortunately the application constitutes inappropriate development in the green belt by virtue of its size and commercial nature. An education room has been included; but this is not a dedicated space and it would not change the balance of accommodation sufficiently in favour of facilities which are ancillary and complimentary to the primary function of this green belt location.

Proposals do not fall into any of the categories regarded as exceptions (NPPF paras 145,146). Local authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the green belt. “Very special circumstances” do not exist to outweigh the harm.

## Natural Environment

The area is also designated as a Local Nature Reserve and Wildlife Site, with a diverse range of habitats supporting species of local and national importance. It is also of geological importance. In his very descriptive and moving letter (see Consultation Response from Parks and open Spaces) the Castle Hill Ranger explains the special qualities of the natural environment and he provides evidence of how much it is valued. Recent enhancements are also described, such as the creation of accessible paths, the introduction of Interpretation Boards and provision of seating. He elucidates the increased level of positive engagement in the site by business, volunteers, and schools (through repairs to dry-stone walling, habitat protection, litter picking, special events, open days etc). The site was given a Certificate of Excellence in 2015 by Trip Advisor and it was awarded a Green Flag award in 2018. Evidence in the letter reinforces the findings of surveys completed as part of the Conservation Management Plan (2006) which implied a significant increase in visitor numbers following the demolition of the public house 15 years ago.

The site is exposed and natural habitats would be vulnerable to loss from increased pressures introduced by the proposed commercial development (eg excavation, building work, increased human and vehicular activity, extension of hard-landscape, noise, light and air pollution).

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes and sites of biodiversity and of geological interest (NPPF para 170). Proposals would fail to respect the intrinsic character of the site and the high value placed on its natural living characteristics by the general public.

### Heritage Assets

Proposals constitute substantial harm to the ancient monument by causing a huge amount of excavation and removal of fabric from the monument in the location of the middle bailey of the former “castle”. The working area required to form the two subterranean levels (including retaining walls, tanking, artificial berms) would extend well beyond and below the area previously disturbed. It would far exceed the volume of the previous cellar which is the only significant area excluded from the schedule. The proposed level of destruction is surely unprecedented and could only be supported in the case of a national emergency.

The high level of intrusion would probably result in much loss of evidence of previous settlement activity. The level of damage or loss has not been assessed by preliminary investigative archaeological work. The previous consent is inadequate for this purpose. Additionally the proposals include the creation of passing places inboard of the vehicular access road, extensions to the car park and remodelling of a section of the upper rampart. Excavations for these would result in further loss, some resurfacing and significant re-profiling of the distinctive hillside.

**Please confirm whether the relevant applications have been made for scheduled ancient monument consent. Please also confirm whether the conditions required for the previous investigative work have been met.**

Proposals to reform the landscape of the central area (middle bailey of medieval site) and merge the accommodation with the adjacent earthworks , particularly on the north perimeter, would be harmful to our understanding of the monument. The confusion of modern bunding with earlier earthworks

would further reduce the legibility of the site and undermine the historic and evidential significance of the heritage assets.

The presence of the raised platform supporting the restaurant/bar building would interrupt important views across the site and restrict direct pedestrian access to paths and views northwards looking out from the site. The form of the hill and one's ability to perceive it as a whole from within the site, are integral to understanding its historic development. Proposals fail to take account of the "Castle Hill Setting Study" pub 2016 which identifies key views and explains why important relationships between elements in the view must be maintained.

No levels have been provided on proposed sections and plans. An accurate assessment of the impact of "above ground" built forms ie the terrace and restaurant/bar is not possible. Similarly the new plans are not shown in relation to the previous footprint. So the full impact of the scheme on the profile of the hill and on the setting of Jubilee Tower cannot be determined. Similarly long distance views have not been provided. Whilst the building seeks to be physically less obtrusive in views than previous proposals, it would add another element into the setting of Tower, thereby diminishing the dramatic impact of the Tower as a stand-alone landmark.

One of the concluding paragraphs of the Castle Hill Setting Study (sectn. 6) states, " *the profile of the upper slopes of Castle Hill and its rural and essentially undeveloped character are key characteristics of the site and contribute to its setting and significance. These aspects would be adversely affected by small scale development and it is unlikely that such development could be accommodated on the hill itself*".

Proposals would be destructive of the physical and evidential significance of the monument itself; they would re-profile the inherited landscape thereby reducing its legibility as a historic monument; the building would intrude in views between key elements of the monument; and the presence of the new building would reduce the dramatic effect of the Victoria Tower as a stand-alone landmark in an open landscape. Proposals fail to preserve the cultural heritage of Castle Hill for current and future generations.

## Building Design

The building is an extraordinary combination of subterranean rooms on two levels situated below a low building of domestic character with raised external terraces. It appears that a reaction to the sensitivity of the site's prominence has resulted in the majority of accommodation being buried underground which in turn is highly damaging to the archaeology itself. There would be very little outlook from working areas and no views from the bedrooms. Fire-escape would appear to be inadequate. Ramps and external yards would form secluded areas outside the building where security and safety concerns have not been addressed or designed out.

Policies require good design to function well and add to the overall quality of the area. It should be sympathetic to local character, history and landscape and reinforce a sense of place (NPPF sectn 12). Unfortunately this development imposes itself onto and into the hill. The top floor is highly exposed and of domestic character. External seating and umbrellas would reinforce this character. The configuration offers no safe sheltered outside space. The dialogue window between the education space and the Tower is one bonus.

No proposals have been put forward to improve existing poor quality hard-surfacing or to diminish the effect of the extended car parking area. Overall the design is a poor response to this extra-ordinary landscape. **Proposals demonstrate yet again that it is not possible to introduce this amount of commercial development on Castle Hill without significant harm to the special character of the place.**

## Inadequate Information

The amount of detail provided should be sufficient to assess the impact of proposals on the site and its surroundings. Levels should be shown on the vertical section and plans of the building so that impacts on both physical fabric and views of surrounding assets can be assessed. The block plan should show the whole site and indicate where previous recent development has been.

Servicing requirements can be substantial and obtrusive. There is no indication of ventilation intake and outflow, especially to below ground areas; kitchen filters and extract flues have not been shown; laundry extract is not shown; there is no indication of the extent and type of external lighting whether for

amenity or security, safety and security barriers have not been indicated; also no CCTV or signage has been shown. There are no details of external landscape materials for new and reordered pedestrian areas including paths and ramps. The location and extent of delivery area and recycling provision has not been indicated.

This level of commercial development would increase vehicular movements and would exacerbate pedestrian and cycle conflicts. It would introduce more pollution, light and noise into a non-urban environment which is widely appreciated for the experience of “being able to get away from it all” (CMP 2006).

### Validation Criteria

The Position Statement prepared for the Strategic Planning Committee meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2019 included a list of documents required for validation of the similar applications. Reports were required to enable any harmful impacts to be identified and assessed. The list is at 5.2 of the above Position Statement. In addition the paragraph reiterated the requirement for scheduled monument consent to be obtained in addition to any planning permission. We note that this second application has been validated in spite of a number of required documents being omitted. Also there is no reference within the documents to a parallel application for scheduled monument consent.

### Public Engagement

There appears to have been no public consultation during the development of these proposals. This is surprising given the high level of interest generated by the previous application. The National Planning Policy Framework stresses the importance of effective engagement between applicants, local communities and other interested parties.

The CMP and Setting documents were commissioned to explore and impart an understanding of the place in order to inform management proposals and guide future enhancement of Castle Hill. The CMP was subject to several rounds of public consultation, its recommendations have been carried into local policies and as such it carries weight in decision making and should form a starting point for any new proposals.

## Sustainable Development

Proposals fail to meet the objectives of sustainable development in that the economic drivers of the scheme cannot be achieved without causing substantial harm to social and environmental objectives. The health, social and cultural benefits derived from conserving Castle Hill as a place of recreation and events for community building far outweigh the benefits of the commercial enterprise. Also by protecting the special natural, built and historic environment of Castle Hill, and rejecting its commercialization, the environmental objectives of sustainable development would be met.

## Summary

The current application proposals would harm the greenbelt. Building anything other than the “barest minimum” of support facilities would be regarded as taking something away from the intrinsic power of the place.

Proposals do not respond to inherent characteristics of the site nor do they strengthen the sense of place; instead proposals would harm the evidential, aesthetic and historic significances of the site; and they would erode the open setting of the tower as a historic landmark of communal significance in the district.

The application does not meet the environmental objectives of sustainable development as set out in the NPPF as the proposals fail to contribute towards protecting or enhancing the natural, built and historic environment. The development would have a harmful impact on the natural, built and historic environment and therefore would not meet both statutory and policy requirements. Please recommend refusal of the application.

Yours faithfully,

\*Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

\*Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Copies sent to Case Officer Victor Grayson and by e-mail to [dc.admin@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:dc.admin@kirklees.gov.uk)