

About the application

Application number: 2018/93591	
What is the application for?:	Erection of cafe/restaurant with bedrooms, interpretation facilities, car parkin
Address of the site or building:	Victoria Tower, Lumb Lane, Castle Hill, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD4 6TA
Postcode:	

User comments

Type of comment: An objection
<p>Dear Sir/Madam,</p> <p>I am writing to you to object in the strongest possible terms to the proposed development of the site on Castle Hill, Almondbury, and the plans to turn it into a cafe/restaurant and car-parking area, etc. This is the second time that this proposal has been submitted to the Council for their consideration, now that further required archaeological work and assessment has been carried out.</p> <p>One thing must be made absolutely clear. The site is unique in the Huddersfield area, if not within the wider span of the entire eastern Pennines. Hillforts, as this is, dating back some 2000 years from the Iron Age, are rare sites in themselves for this part of the world where the penetration of the Romans was much longer and slower than in the south due to the obvious difficulties of the terrain. Early archaeological work by Varley in the 1920s established the extensive scope and general nature of the site followed by an assessment by Mortimer Wheeler not long afterwards, establishing that Castle Hill was a focus for the northern 'tribe' of the Brigantes, under their queen, Cartimandua, who famously betrayed her husband, Venutius, to the Romans. The Brigantes were about the last tribe to be 'pacified' by the Romans as late as AD 74, some forty years after the invasion. Castle Hill therefore played a pivotal role in the early Roman conquest of the north of England in the first century AD: it was not just any old hillfort.</p> <p>I draw your attention to the following paragraph in the Planning Statement from submitted on behalf of Thandi (October 2018):</p> <p>Para 2.7 "No archaeological remains were found. Accordingly the application proposals are submitted in confidence that they will have no adverse impact on below ground archaeological remains."</p> <p>The earthworks for the hillfort cover the entire summit, with crests originally rising to a height of many metres and as deep again for the intervening ditches. The recent cursory archaeological work could not hope to examine the entire site, still less penetrate to the depths of the original Iron Age earthworks. What fresh evidence there might still be to uncover therefore largely remains on the site. Archaeology is not a</p>

static discipline – knowledge, interpretations, the sort of questions asked and the sort of answers sought, and the investigative techniques all change and advance: we are now able to ask questions and make use of techniques unheard of a generation ago. The ability to investigate Castle Hill in the future will be lost forever if the site is buried under buildings and concrete, to say nothing of the destructiveness of the preparative works, foundations and infrastructure themselves.

To quote from the Planning Statement again:

Para 4.6., quoting from Section 3 of Policy PLP35 of the PDLP35...“Consideration should be given to: f. preserve the setting of Castle Hill where appropriate and proposals which detrimentally impact on the setting of Castle Hill will not be permitted’

This of course raises the entire question of what is considered to be detrimental to the site. Sealing off the possibility of any further archaeological work clearly is not considered to be detrimental!

The Heritage Statement first submitted . on behalf of Thandi in April 2017 argued that “...the scheme now put forward shows that the enhanced visitor experience can be achieved in a way which respects the hill and its historic assets.” (Para.2.7). True more could be done by way of considerably updated and more widespread signage (as is done at many similar heritage sites, e.g. ruined castles and abbeys, as well as hillforts themselves such as Danebury in Hampshire and Old Sarum in Wiltshire) to inform visitors to the site of its history and significance but this can be done quite adequately without the extensive facilities and buildings planned by the applicant. It would not, for example, be deemed at all appropriate for similar facilities be built within the grounds of Old Sarum or Danebury, so why on Castle Hill which, in the early history of the country, and of the Iron Age in particular, matters every bit as much?

With this mind, and appreciating just how precious and vulnerable the site is, the following statement from the same document shows a simply astonishing complacency and a complete ignorance of special place of such sites in the national heritage. I quote:

Para 3.3: “It is considered that any harm to the historic assets is more than outweighed by the substantial public benefits that will accrue.”

This statement amounts to an admission on behalf of the applicant of the potential of the originally proposed development to cause harm – no less than the current submission does! Since when has providing tea, soft drinks and snacks taken precedence over the historical value of a Scheduled Ancient Monument? If “substantial public benefits” accrued from knowingly harming all or part of Fountains Abbey or Stonehenge for example, would it still be considered a reasonable argument for doing it?

