

DCAdmin

From:
Sent: 29 November 2018 11:47
To:
Cc:
Subject: Objection to Application number 2018/62/93591/W - Castle Hill
Attachments: Castle Hill planning objection Nov 2018.docx

Please see attached the objection from _____ to the current proposals for
leisure development on Castle Hill.

To maintain consistency with our objection to the proposals in 2012, this current objection should also be registered
in the name of _____ contact details are:-

For any “technical” questions regarding the content of the objection please contact myself at

has consistently objected to proposals for excessive “leisure” developments on Castle Hill, Huddersfield and our formal objection to the proposals in 2012 is attached as Appendix A. Our current objections are effectively an update on these previous objections and should be read in conjunction with that previously submitted document.

now objects to the grant of Outline Planning Permission for erection of a café/restaurant with bedrooms at Castle Hill, Huddersfield (Planning Application number 2018/62/93591), for the following “planning” reasons:-

1. The proposed development is within the green belt and the applicant has not demonstrated the “very special” circumstances that are required to allow inappropriate development within the green belt, in accordance with Section 13 (clauses 133 to 147) of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (2018)
2. The proposed development would have a massive adverse impact on an iconic heritage asset and scheduled monument (namely Castle Hill itself), in contravention of Section 16 (clauses 184 to 202) of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (2018).
3. The proposed development would have a massive adverse impact on the setting of the Victoria Tower – a grade 2 listed building – which iconically stands alone on the very prominent skyline. By standing alone the tower perfectly complements the elongated, natural profile of the hill.
4. The proposed development would contravene Policy PLP35 (Historic Environment) of the emerging Local Plan and particularly that part of clause (3f) which says that **“proposals which detrimentally impact on the setting of Castle Hill will not be permitted”**. We particularly note that this clause is prescriptive and very clear. It is not something that can be over-ridden or outweighed by other planning or commercial viability considerations. Although the Local Plan has not yet been formally adopted, we argue that it is at a sufficiently advanced stage to attach considerable weight to the Local Plan and to this particular “prohibition”.
5. The proposed development would represent a significant departure from the Council’s Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which shows Castle Hill as both “Green Belt” and an “Archaeological Site”. NB: The UDP is still in force but will shortly be superseded by the new Local Plan. It is therefore appropriate to give significantly greater weight to the emerging Local Plan.
6. The access road to the site is grossly unsafe for ANY increase in visitor numbers (perhaps even unsafe for the smaller number of visitors who currently visit the site by car). The applicant’s proposals for a one-way traffic control system on the access road fail to address the underlying safety problems and are grossly inadequate for a “leisure” development of this scale and nature. NB: We believe that, due to the very steep gradients at 90 degrees to the line of the road, it is impossible to address the underlying safety problems of the current access road, without very significant earthworks, carriageway reconstruction, metal safety barriers and causing grossly unacceptable damage to the Southern flanks of the scheduled monument. The access road, as it stands, was built in the Victorian era and was never designed for motor vehicles, let alone the visitor numbers that would be necessary to economically sustain the proposed development.

In support of our objection we also offer the following additional comments:-

The Castle Hill Setting Study 2016

Kirklees Council commissioned a study by [redacted] in 2016, primarily to support the Local Plan (Document LE63 in the Local Plan Library). It is an excellent document that describes in detail the historic, social & environmental attributes of Castle Hill, and the threats to it. Although it does not go so far as to set out a blueprint for the protection and/or development of the wider site area it does set out some conservation principles that should be followed. We do not feel it is necessary to repeat the contents of this document verbatim in our objection, but emphatically endorse the excellent sections relating to the setting of Castle Hill in the landscape. In our view Castle Hill is a critically important feature in the Easterly views from the Peak District National Park as well as a critically important feature (and viewpoint) in the Westerly views towards the National Park including Home Moss, West Nab and Deer Hill. If Castle Hill is debased the whole area is debased. We would particularly like to point to sections 6.11 and 6.15 of the setting study. They say:-

- *“Small Scale development: 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”.*
- *“Medium Scale development on the slopes or summit of Castle hill would undoubtedly seriously degrade its character and form; adversely affecting its significance. These areas are not suitable for development of this scale”.*

Whether the present proposals are considered to be small or medium scale, the study clearly considers any development on the slopes or summit of Castle Hill to be inappropriate. If they are considered to be large scale, development would appear to be out of the question.

Importance of the site to local people and the image of Huddersfield

The [redacted] study says that *“Castle Hill is an evocative place that plays a special role in the identity of Kirklees. It is a place that is valued and loved by the local population and for many people is an iconic symbol of the area”*. We fully concur with that statement. However, in our view, the application fails to recognise just how important Castle Hill is and how much damage would be caused to the scheduled monument (the hill itself), the setting of Victoria Tower and the unspoiled green belt landscape surrounding the hill. Also in our view, important as these tangible features are, the iconic symbolism and the way that local people feel about the hill is just as important. Do we really want Huddersfield to become known as the town that had so little regard for its history and natural environment that it allowed a commercial developer to build an out-of-scale “visually contentious shed” on the most prominent and iconic green-belt site in the Borough?

Which is the primary destination – the hill or the hostelry?

Public opinion about the proposed development does fall in to two main camps. There are those who simply want “a pint with a view” and they see a “hostelry” as the primary destination. Others see the natural and historic features of the hill as the primary attraction and any visitor facilities as incidental. firmly takes the latter view, arguing that if people want restaurant meals, alcoholic drinks or a hotel room there are a number of alternative pubs, restaurants, cafes and hotels in the area. That sort of substantial leisure facility does not need to be sited on top of the most prominent hill for miles around, slap bang in the middle of a scheduled monument and unspoiled green belt. On the other hand the hill and its natural / historic attributes cannot be relocated and certainly should not be diminished in any way. It is a question of scale; whatever visitor facilities are provided should be small enough and sensitively sited so as not to obscure or diminish the natural and historic features of the hill (perhaps located at the base of the hill rather than on the summit). We regret to say that the submitted plans would permanently establish obtrusive leisure facilities, which are not small and are certainly not sensitively sited. If built, they would become the destination rather than the hill itself. The plans appear to have been designed as such. They would simply dominate and overwhelm the hill, which would become little more than a theme park. Perhaps the greatest benefit the public get from standing on Castle Hill is the sense of isolation, long-distance open Pennine vistas and close-quarter views over the Huddersfield urban area. All this will be completely and permanently destroyed by the proposed development.

In our view the “hill” must never become subservient to the “hostelry”, as it will do if the current out-of-scale proposals are granted planning permission.

Castle Hill is a very significant Heritage Asset

The Castle Hill Setting Study (2016) capably refers to the significance of Castle Hill as a heritage asset. Excavated artifacts show that the history of human activity on Castle Hill goes back 4,000 years to the late Neolithic era. Today Castle Hill presents itself as a good and well-preserved example of a late bronze-age slight univallate hillfort which later in the iron-age developed into a multivallate hillfort. Not only does it lie outside the main distribution of such forts, it belongs to an extremely small group of northern single-banked hillforts with an internal area of more than 1ha. It is one of the very few multivallate hillforts datable to the period before 400BC and is unique in that, during its multi-banked phase, the bivallate interior was surrounded by two outer earthworks set in places more than 30m apart. Multivallate hill forts provide an important commentary on the nature of settlement and social organisation in the Iron Age and, with only around 100 examples known nationally, they are one of the rarer classes of monument belonging to the period. **All examples with surviving archaeological deposits (including Castle Hill) are considered to be of national importance.** Castle Hill also possesses other rare features, including an outwork, and its earliest ramparts preserve the pre- enclosure ground surface contemporary with earlier Prehistoric use of the site. A substantial part of the monument remains unexcavated, making it of great importance. Equally important are the well-preserved remains of the Norman era motte and bailey castle. Remains of the Norman-era garrison and ancillary buildings survive in the bailey and the well-

preserved earthworks of an associated medieval settlement are immediately adjacent. In our view, the proposed development would have a very significant negative impact on the setting and visual layout of these important heritage assets, irrespective of any artefacts which may or may not lie beneath the actual footprint of the proposed building. The proposals should therefore be refused.

The value of and need for Public Facilities on Castle Hill

Much is made in the application of the need to provide visitor facilities and 24 hour security on the Castle Hill site but, as we noted in 2012, the question is “Needed by whom and on what scale?” Insofar as we are aware there is no objective evidence, such as independent market research to justify the applicant’s assertions that visitor facilities are “sorely needed” – certainly not on a scale that would be sufficient to justify desecrating a scheduled monument and the surrounding green belt. It is also difficult to see how a business case can be made for providing public toilets at Castle Hill (in whatever guise), when the Council has been very busy closing down and selling off all the public toilets in town and village centres across Kirklees. As for security, if the Council can lock the gates of Greenhead Park at night, we fail to see why they cannot do the same at Castle Hill. It would be much cheaper and far less damaging to the ancient monument and the environment.

Equally we are not aware of any strategic master plans to develop Castle Hill as a visitor attraction whilst also protecting the environmental and historic attributes of the whole site. It is therefore impossible to judge whether the current proposals are consistent with or contradict longer term public objectives for the site. In our view such a masterplan is an essential requirement, before any consideration can be given to opportunistic planning proposals which would constrain and prejudice the way forward. The applicants argument that the need for visitor facilities and 24 hour security provides the “very special circumstances”, to allow otherwise inappropriate development in the green belt, clearly carries very little weight.

Design of the proposed facilities

Although the new proposals adopt a slightly lower profile than the design refused in 2012 they still rise above the natural hill profile and present an unnatural “hard” edge against the skyline from all sides, but particularly from the north and south elevations. In fact the glass wall cladding, continuous curve of the roof elevation and the very large area of metal (e.g.zinc) roofing material all serve to emphasise how alien the proposed structure is to the hill and the green belt setting. We strongly disagree with the developer that the profile of the structure will be reminiscent of a natural Pennine hill. In our view, the architectural design of the new facilities does not complement the hill or the tower at all and in many ways is more reminiscent of a world war two aircraft hangar. (Others have likened it to a cheap cost-cutting supermarket). It will stick out like a sore thumb from many miles away and there will be very significant harm to the openness of the green belt and the setting of the heritage assets on the hill.

In public perception, Castle Hill and Victoria Tower are inseparable and symbiotically “in balance”. The present proposals destroy that balanced symbiotic relationship because the proposed café / restaurant / bar / bedrooms and associated car parks will become the scale dominant feature on

the hill. Visitors to Castle Hill will struggle to get any view of the tower, which is not dominated by the new facilities, from any part of the whole Castle Hill site. In turn, views over Castle Hill from the top of Victoria Tower will be overwhelmingly dominated by the new facilities, including large expanses of metal roof cladding and surfaced car parks. It will be almost impossible to visualise the full outline of the former motte and bailey castle, or the earlier hillforts, under the modern structures, car parks and roads.

The development would be prejudicial to highway safety

It is quite clear that now, as in 2012, the access road to the top of the hill is completely inadequate for the traffic volumes that would be necessary to economically support the scale of the development. It has very steep gradients, tight (blind) bends and a narrow carriageway with a very limited number of passing places. It also has very steep slopes falling immediately away from the road verges in a Southerly direction with only very limited and totally inadequate wooden safety barriers, mainly at the sharp corner near the top of the road. There are very few roadside safety barriers for the other 95% of the road's length. Motorists and pedestrians share the only hard surfaced route to the top of the hill and there is no separate footpath or lighting whatsoever. Formalised pedestrian crossings near the top of the access road are unsigned, unlit and unsighted. With or without traffic controls the access road is quite simply unsafe for motorists and pedestrians alike, especially at night. We regret to say that the applicant's proposals for a one-way traffic control system will do little to address these fundamental highway use and critical safety issues. The access road is simply not suitable for a leisure development of this scale and nature. It is also difficult to see how it can be improved to a satisfactory standard without very substantial earthworks which would cause irreparable and unacceptable damage to the Southern flank of the hill itself and to the historic earthworks of the scheduled monuments. In our view the only viable permanent solution is to relocate the car park to the base of the hill, to completely relocate the access road to the less steep Eastern side of the hill, or both. The hill needs a new masterplan, perhaps a radical masterplan, if it is to overcome this major obstacle.

A Conservation Management Plan was prepared for the Council by _____ in March 2006 but our view is that it was not a strategic masterplan and did not go anywhere near far enough. It was effectively just a stop-gap plan, which only specified minor improvement and "tidying-up" works as a first stage – giving little idea of what the ultimate goal might be, if and when finance became available. Whatever inadequacies it had at the time, as a masterplan, it is now certainly out of date.

NB: The entrance to the Motte and Bailey Castle on Castle Hill would almost certainly have been at the Eastern end of the hill and the current access road, which appears to be Victorian in origin, seems to join the summit at a very unsuitable point, where the Motte meets the Bailey. In our view the ultimate plan should be to reinstate the medieval access to the site (i.e. at the Eastern end of the hill). This would also probably have been the original access route to the long-abandoned settlement just outside the Bailey and to the hill top in the bronze and iron-ages.

29.11.2018

Appendix A – Objection to Proposed Development on Castle Hill - Planning ref. 2012/91867

This re-application should be turned down for the following planning reasons.....

1. The site is in the Green Belt. Any building formally extant is now irrelevant following that building's total demolition a few years ago. Likewise the applicant's continuing references to previous LPA approvals.

Therefore, this proposal is, at this point in time (2012), totally inappropriate and now falls within the scope of the NPPF legislation [NPPF para 87].....

"As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances"]

The applicant rightly points up the general purposes of green belt designation as set out in PPG 2 (and repeated verbatim in the NPPF para 80). However, he fails to appreciate that these are the broader, wider, strategic elements of the law and not its nuts and bolts. A case of; "if the cap fits" perhaps?

The NPPF is very specific about new buildings in Green Belt [para 89].....

"A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in Green Belt" it then cites various putative exceptions outside the scope of this application.

2. Heritage:- Castle Hill is of enormous historical and archaeological interest, not just the past 200 years or so but dating back to Iron Age and Neolithic times. Indeed, as we speak, KMC is facilitating further research into the Hill's pre-history. It is a treasured icon potentially much greater than we currently appreciate....

Section 12 of the NPPF, Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, devotes a number of paragraphs (paras 126 & 133 in particular) to this important aspect and specifically includes a clause that provides for heritage assets of archaeological value which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments (para 139).

3. Amenity value:- the area including and surrounding Castle Hill is one of high landscape value. Its context within the lower Pennines is all and a new building, which can at best be described as pastiche of low order and of whatever scale, will undoubtedly greatly detract from the value of this area of natural beauty and heritage.

The applicant talks of providing much needed facilities. Needed by whom? There are plenty of pubs/cafes in the area; the tower has a number of interesting displays and runs events organised by the local Ranger; there is an improved footpath network with information boards etc; there are plans to improve the facilities in the tower with toilets and rooms for educational purposes. Any additional facility is superfluous.....

4. The Tower:- We can do no better than quote the applicant..."Castle Hill is a prominent site, the most highly used recreational resource in Kirklees (we doubt this!), a Scheduled Ancient Monument, major landscape asset and the location of the Victoria Tower listed building....."

All the more reason, therefore, why this proposal should be refused; its adverse effect on the setting of the Tower would be huge. This is recognised in the NPPF [para 129]....

"Local Planning Authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise....."

5. The building:- The proposed building provides for a pub on the ground floor and 7 letting rooms above. It will require 48 full and part-time staff and provide 24/7 security over the site. Apparently, the current lack of security which, quote "currently discourages visitors to Castle Hill" will be overcome with on-site management.

However,

- there is no provision for accommodation for either domestic or security staff in the plans (24/7?)
- The car park will have a paltry 28 places (less if you exclude handicap provision). Assuming two shifts a day and the fact that most employees will have to travel by car, this leaves precious few places for customers
- There is no sewerage provision
- There is no trade waste provision
- The wholesale use of tarmac is totally out of keeping with the site

6. Nature Reserve:- KMC have recently designated Castle Hill as a Nature Reserve. Any new development would not be compatible with this new status

7. Access:- There are considerable problems with regard to vehicular access to the site, single lane road, blind bends and egress on to Lumb Lane

Finally, is by definition apolitical; however we would urge KMC to stand by its guns and not be influenced by rent-a-mob tactics and bogus approval statistics. Certainly the great majority of our membership feels most strongly that KMC took the right decision last time in rejecting this application. Please do so again!

17.7.2012