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Kirklees Council Planning Department
Via Email

4 February 2025

Dear Sir/Madame

RE: 2024/93494 | Victoria Tower/Castle Hill, Almondbury, Huddersfield, East Yorkshire, HD4 6TA. (Grade II and Ancient Scheduled Monument, Neolithic to C20th, construction of a new visitor centre).

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society on this case; we considered the application very carefully and took it to the Victorian Society's Building Committee (a group of architects, historians and heritage professionals). The Society accepts the principle of creating a free and accessible visitor centre at Victoria Tower but wishes to **object** to these proposals in their current form.

Built in 1897-99 and designed by *Isaac Jones,* Victoria Tower is a neo-Gothic icon of East Yorkshire. Visible from miles around, it stands as a testament to not only the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, but also to Victorian engineering and the perceived dominance of man over the natural world. It stands on a much older site: an Iron Age hillfort which itself shows signs of Neolithic occupation. The proposal seeks to build a visitor centre on the site which would include: free, accessible toilet facilities; six bedrooms; a community/classroom space; a shop; exhibition/display space; a kitchen; office and staff room. It seeks to utilise the area once taken up by the Castle Hill Hotel (c1810) and reuses the current carpark.

The Design

The Society accepts the principle of facilities but questions the scale of the works. Being in such a prominent location, the centre would be seen by many people all over the local area. As such, the centre must strike a balance between the historic nature of the site and the dominance of the tower, but also not be apologetic for its own existence.

The materials proposed for the design are ill fitting for their surroundings as they would clash with the materials of the Tower. The Society would accept the use of more sympathetic

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materials, such as a brick that matched the tower, or organic materials that were not obtrusive to the view and country setting.

The building's viewing gallery is long and thin, taking up both more of the view and building material. The Society would recommend a simpler, more elegant plan form, with a café space that is more of a square. This would allow the view both to and out of the café to be unimpeded, while maintaining the capacity of the space. The impact the building would have on the tower, now having stood on its own for over 20 years, would be considerable. A structure, set further back form the tower in order to preserve its solitude would be much more acceptable.

The Bedrooms

The Society feels the proposed bedrooms are unnecessary and unjustified. By removing the bedrooms from the scheme and moving the kitchen and office spaces into the ground and lower ground storeys, the scheme would no longer require the below-ground level.

Access and Conservation

The Society is concerned about access to the site. The number of cars the centre could attract would impede the flow of foot and vehicular traffic up what is a narrow and steep track. While accessibility of wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility is important, emphasis should be placed on encouraging visitors to walk to the centre, reserving vehicular access for those who it was necessary.

Secondly, the amount of foot and vehicle traffic the centre could bring may have adverse effects on the conservation of the site, regarding both ecology and historic material. Aside from being unsafe to pedestrians, a large amount of traffic would erode both Iron-Age and prehistoric material, but may also begin to affect the Victorian Tower. Ecologically, the rural character of the space may be affected as the course of erosion took hold. Provisions must be made to ensure the Scheduled Monument and Grade II tower are not affected by any increase in car traffic.

In conclusion, the Society objects to these proposals due to the design of the centre, the damage increased traffic may do to the site and the unnecessary impact the below-ground level would have on the monument. The Society recommends moving the centre further away from the tower in order not to intrude on its solitude. The Society accepts the principle of a centre of this purpose, but not in this manner – The National Planning Policy Framework advises in the need to carefully protect heritage locations (2024, para. 202). We object to the proposal as presented and strongly urge your authority to require more information – if this is

not provided then we recommend refusal. I would be grateful if you could inform the Victorian Society of your decision in due course.

Yours faithfully
Thomas Ollivier
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