About the application

Application number: 2024/93494	
What is the application for?:	Erection of restaurant/café/bar, six guest rooms, exhibition/interpretation room
Address of the site or building:	Victoria Tower, Castle Hill, Lumb Lane, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD4 6TA
Postcode:	

User comments

Type of comment: An objection	
Do you wish your comments to be published on the website anonymously?	Yes

The following comments are objections to the present application due to its statutory status as a scheduled ancient monument within the green belt and which is additionally within the curtilage of a listed building and a site with significant ecological value.

An exceptional case has not been made for this proposal.
The applicant has had years to respond to the concerns of Heritage England and yet there appears not to have been any resolution of the very many issues raised in the earlier applications. I see the present application as yet another attempt by the applicant to push the boundaries of planning law which they have so clearly flouted in earlier years.
In this proposal there appears to be an attempt to push the narrative that this is primarily a visitor centre when that is not the case, this is a commercial restaurant, café, bar primarily and to suggest otherwise is misleading. (see document entitled Project: Castle Hill Visitors'Centre Almondbury, Huddersfield HD4 6TA Document: Background, Vision and Management)

Because of the length of time that this site has been the subject of repeated applications it is very difficult to gain a comparative overview of the successive applications made. The current application appears to be incomplete in several respects, given the time which has passed I would contend that the application should time out and the applicant should be forced to begin the process again if they wish to proceed so that the public can have a clear understand of the proposals and how the many concerns raised are being addressed in a systematic (rather than piecemeal) fashion.

Fundamentally this proposed building is still in the wrong place – it should not be sited in the middle of a sensitive and nationally significant scheduled monument. There is no other comparable site in the country of similar archaeological and ecological importance (Maiden Castle, Dorset; Old Sarum, Wiltshire; Warram Percy North Yorkshire are comparable examples) where a visitor centre would be located in the centre of the monument. It could be argued that the former Castle Hill Hotel was originally in this location but that building no longer exists due entirely to the decision of

originally in this location but that building no longer exists due entirely to the decision of the present owners to demolish it and rebuild out of scale and character in direct contravention of planning law, which resulted in a requirement for them to remove the structure or face prosecution. Is it disingenuous to say (as it does in the Background Vision document) that 'The work on the approved extension was poorly organised and ultimately the entire building was demolished'.

There is a fundamental lack of trust shown here, the applicant cannot be trusted with such a sensitive site as demonstrated by their previous actions. Any agreements to restrict hours of operation etc would I contend not be routinely enforceable. The CIC proposal is not fully worked out and could be costly to the council.

Now that the hotel building it is no longer on the site, the land should be retained as open space / green belt as defined under national planning guidance.

The proposed building, though revised yet again from its previous application, with its service yard it still extends beyond the footprint of the original hotel,
The application gives no indication if outdoor seating etc would extend beyond the footprint of the building or how hotel rooms relate to external spaces / ramparts.
Images give a false impression of the building being self contained and without impact on the immediate environs of the wider hill (I am thinking skips and commercial waste bins for example).

Commercial v Wider Public Benefit
The proposal still does not provide full details of how this facility will be operated and the nature of the business to be conducted there especially in the post covid situation of the decline of pub / bar/ restaurants trade. Does the owner / operator have any prior experience in this sector? – If not the building could become a white elephant which no doubt the owners would then apply to relax agreed restrictions or change the use to something more commercially viable.

The building layout internally with a single restaurant suggest that the likely business model will be for function or volume catering use, not just supporting casual / family visitors to the site. If this is the case, then the operators will be seeking to maximise high volume usage and occupancy for example at weekends or functions in the evenings which will create significant additional pressure points in terms of private clients to the detriment of others. This will have very severe impacts on the quality of access of general visitors to the site (families dressed in boots and cagouls/ with their children / dogs in tow are not likely to mix well with formal functions) who will be visiting at the same time, be sharing the limited toilet facilities and be competing for the reduced parking space available on the hill after this structure is built. Fundamentally therefore there is little evidence of the "substantial public benefits that will accrue" since the primary beneficiaries will be the commercial operator and their private function clients so it seems very unlikely that in NPPF planning terms the harm caused by the development is outweighed by public benefits.

Creating this facility will be turning over a significant portion of the site and at peak times almost all of the available parking, to the exclusive use of clients of the restaurant/bar.

The people of Kirklees should not feel that their key monument is being sold out in this way.