The Victorian Society

Kirklees Council Planning Department
Via email

22 May 2025

DC.Admin@kirklees.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: 2024/62/93494/W | Victoria Tower, Castle Hill, Lumb lane, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD4 6TA (Scheduled Ancient Monument, Grade II, *Isaac Jones,* Neolithic – C20). Application for the construction of a new visitor centre in a highly prominent location.

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society on this application. Our Buildings Committee (a group of architects, historians and heritage professionals), considered the proposal carefully at their meeting on the 12th May 2025. We **maintain our objection** to these plans. Our previous objection was dated 4th February 2025, and this letter follows the upload of amended plans to the Kirklees Council Planning Portal.

Built in 1897-99 and designed by *Isaac Jones,* Victoria Tower is a neo-Gothic icon of West 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 is a Grade II-listed building, meaning it is recognised for its national significance and special interest.

Victoria Tower enjoys a certain poetic solitude, due to its isolation and exposure to the elements. It stands on a much older site: an Iron Age hillfort which itself shows signs of Neolithic occupation. This aspect clearly lies outside of the remit for the Victorian Society, and consultations will have to be undertaken with the Council for British Archaeology and Historic England regarding the impact of the proposals on the Iron Age Fort.

This amended proposal appears to be substantially unchanged to the previous scheme with no obvious revisions being made, despite our advice and recommendations to reduce the impact on the setting of the listed building. The Society wish to make the following comments:

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Design, Location and Setting

As the Society stated in its previous objection, the building's viewing gallery is too long, representing an unacceptable scale of development. The Society recommend a simpler, more compact plan form with a café space that is square, allowing both the view of and out of the café to be unimpeded while maintaining the proposed capacity of the space. This would also reduce the mass and scale of the building, allowing the Tower more room. This isolated setting is important, as Victoria Tower has become synonymous with its solitude and dominance over the surrounding area. Now having stood on its own for over twenty years, this is a change that has arguably improved the setting and romanticism of the site.

Victoria Tower is privileged for being in such a prominent location, being visible from many points in the local area. As such, any change here will have to be carefully considered and clearly and convincingly justified according to the NPPF (2024, paras. 212-215). The impact the proposed building would have on the tower is harmful as it disrupts and erodes the setting of the listed building. A smaller proposal, set much further back form the tower in order to preserve its solitude, would be much more acceptable.

The design of the centre inappropriate for the characterful setting. It reflects neither the setting of the fort nor the character of the Tower. Any proposal for this site would require a carefully designed centre with the character of the area at its heart. The current design does not fulfil this brief and would result in harm for the setting of a listed building and Ancient Schedules Monument.

Currently this proposal seriously impacts the setting of a nationally significant and important listed building. Any proposed building for this site cannot expand greater than the footprint of the c.1810 hotel, previous plans to rebuild on this site have been rejected for this reason.

The materials proposed for the design are inappropriate for their surroundings as they would be discordant with the materials of the Tower. The Society would accept the use of more sympathetic materials, such as a brick and masonry that matched the tower, or organic materials that were not obtrusive to the view and wider, rural setting.

The Society still question the need for accommodation of any kind on the site. There has not been accommodation on the site for over twenty years, and this should be understood as an end to any historical precedence in this instance. The needs of the site, and of the local area, have developed and accommodation is no longer an appropriate use for the site.

The Wider Site
Further to this aspect, the Society is further concerned with the related paraphernalia a site like this would attract. The expansion of litter bin provision and their regular emptying, the accumulation and disposal of commercial waste, regular delivery of stock would all serve to further urbanise the secluded and rural setting of the listed building.

This proposal would also require the provision of plumbing and electricity. While electricity cables were moved underground in 2006, there seems to have been little consideration regarding the impact plumbing for the proposed facility will have.

The proposed public benefits of this scheme do not outweigh the harm resulting from the associated paraphernalia that would accompany the site by predicate.

Public Benefit
The Society highlight that an attraction being free, while a welcome aspect, isn't a public benefit. Equally, free mental health support initiatives are also not a public benefit of this building, as they could be provided in any suitable space or site, not requiring development within the setting of a listed building.

The provision of accessible public WC facilities and educational spaces are a public benefit of this scheme. However, they do not outweigh the harm caused to the setting of the listed building.

Ancient Monument
The potential for considerable impact on any below-ground archaeology would need to be carefully consulted with Historic England and the Council for British Archaeology. The needs and planning policy of Scheduled Ancient Monuments outweigh that of Listed Buildings, but both need to be carefully considered in this case.

In conclusion, the Victorian Society maintains its objection to the scheme for the above reasons. The proposed building is too big, too close to the Tower and unsympathetic to its surroundings. The design is generic, with its materiality not preserving the character of the area and disrupting the setting of a nationally important listed building. The need for accommodation on the site is questioned, with the character of the site having altered considerably, and beneficially, since the loss of the public house. Finally, the stated public benefits of the proposed scheme do not outweigh the harm presented to the Listed Building and Ancient Scheduled Monument.

The Society defers to the more relevant bodies of Historic England and the Council for British Archaeology to consult on the risk of harm to the Iron-Age Fort outside of what the Society can identify.

Thank you again for consulting the Victorian Society and we hope this feedback will be useful in finding a considered and positive future for Victoria Tower and Castle Hill.

Yours Faithfully

Thomas Ollivier
Northern Conservation Adviser