CastleHill

Project:

Castle Hill Visitors'Centre

Almondbury, Huddersfield HD4 6TA

Document:

Executive Summary

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CASTLE HILL VISITOR CENTRE

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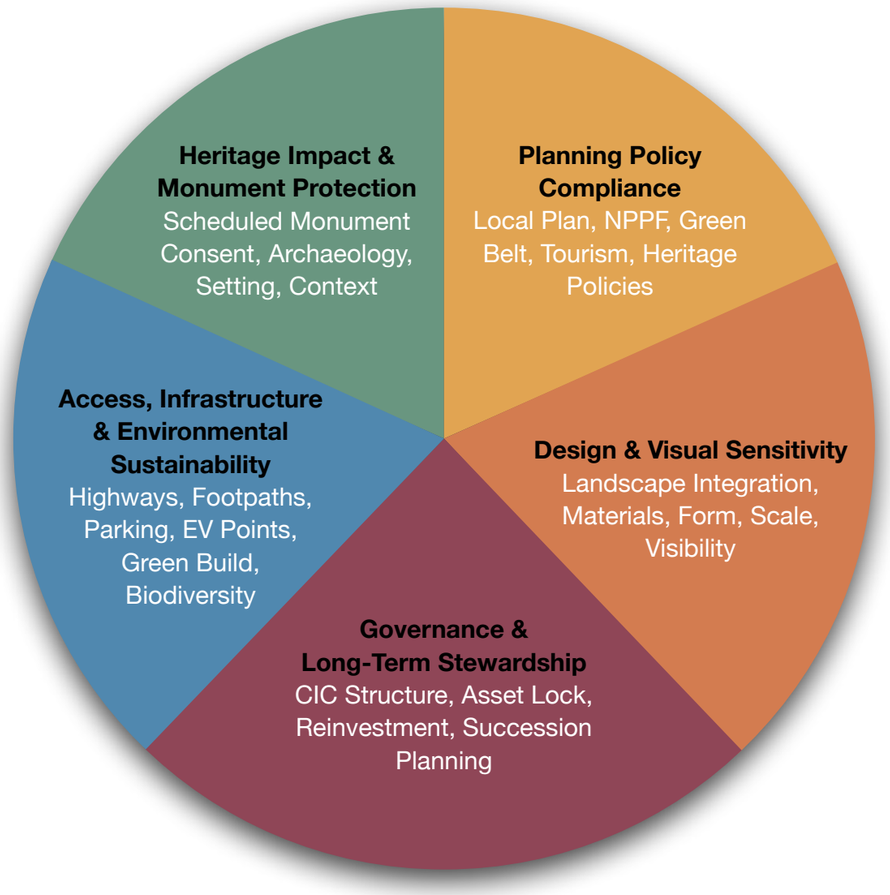
How We Have Listened

What We Have Taken into Consideration



1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Castle Hill Visitor Centre is a self-funded, heritage-led development designed to widen public access to and understanding of, one of Yorkshire's (perhaps England's) most important scheduled ancient monuments. Delivered through a Community Interest Company (CIC), this year-round, all-weather centre provides the facilities rightly expected of a heritage asset of national standing. It plugs a gap in KMC's heritage offering that has been sadly neglected for too long. It acknowledges and responds to the site's huge historical, archaeological, environmental, and community significance.

Castle Hill has witnessed over 4,000 years of human activity, from Bronze Age settlements and Iron Age hillforts to a Norman motte-and-bailey castle, culminating in the iconic Victoria Tower, completed in 1899 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. Now 126 years old, the tower crowns the site as a lasting symbol of civic pride. This legacy underpins Castle Hill's national importance.

Castle Hill is KMC's premier heritage asset, is ranked no.1 for spectacular views in the Huddersfield & Holmfirth area ranked no.4 in Huddersfield top attractions on TripAdvisor.

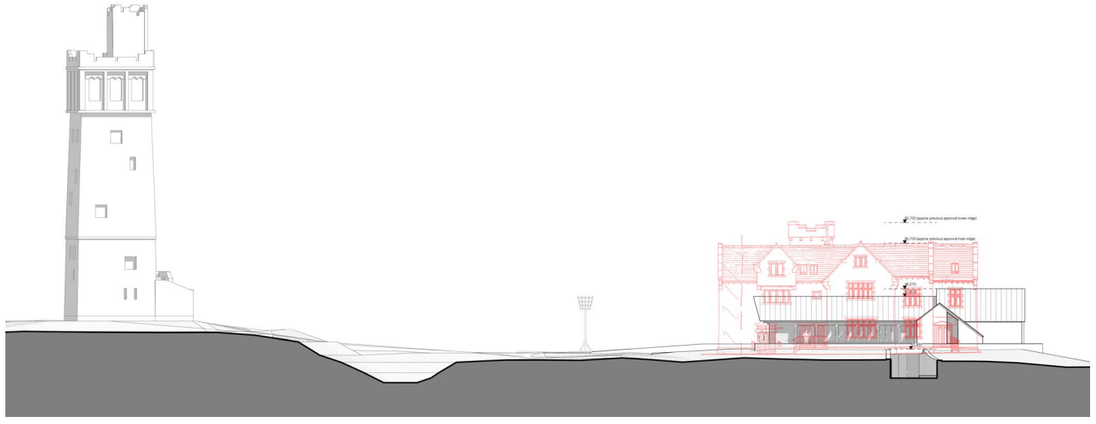
Kirklees has nearly 200 schools, including primary, secondary, independent, and special institutions, highlighting a vast opportunity for our curriculum linked school engagement.

The centre design incorporates:

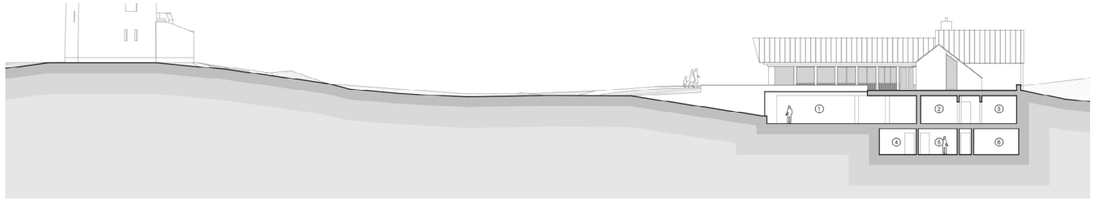
- Extensive, specialist-designed, free-access exhibition and interpretation spaces
- Specialist learning room for children
- FREE accessible Public WCs and baby change facilities
- A café/coffee shop, restaurant and bar
- Outdoor terraces with magnificent views of the surrounding landscape
- Shelter during times of inclement weather
- Gift shop and vending facilities
- Six overnight rooms
- Operated by a CIC, with at least 65% of net profit reinvested into site upkeep and community benefit
- Supports 30–35 local jobs, plus volunteering opportunities
- Employment opportunities during construction
- Offers free admission to all visitors, including school groups
- Opening hours: 9 am – 5 pm daily, restaurant and bar reopen at 6 pm for evening service
- Visitor information desk

2.0 APPROACH TO DESIGN

- Accommodate all core public functions in a single, efficient footprint, within previously developed footprint
- Ensure sufficient accommodation to provide required free-access public benefits
- Provide financial sustainability and a development that is sensitive to planning and heritage requirements
- Prevent future site fragmentation or overdevelopment
- Benchmark appropriately against national heritage visitor centres in both scale and environmental sensitivity
- Overnight rooms provide affordable accommodation for researchers, families, and educational partners
- The partially subterranean design minimises visual impact and continues Castle Hill's historic precedent of visitor accommodation since the 19th century
- The accommodation is fundamental to the project's financial sustainability and has been specifically designed to allow flexible use for educational and community purposes. Its scale reflects the minimum required to generate essential operational income while also providing usable space for academic and public benefit. Any reduction would make the project financially unviable and severely limit its ability to deliver on its core educational and community objectives



Red outline showing former scheme compared to current proposal scale



Section illustrating the low impact of the proposed scheme

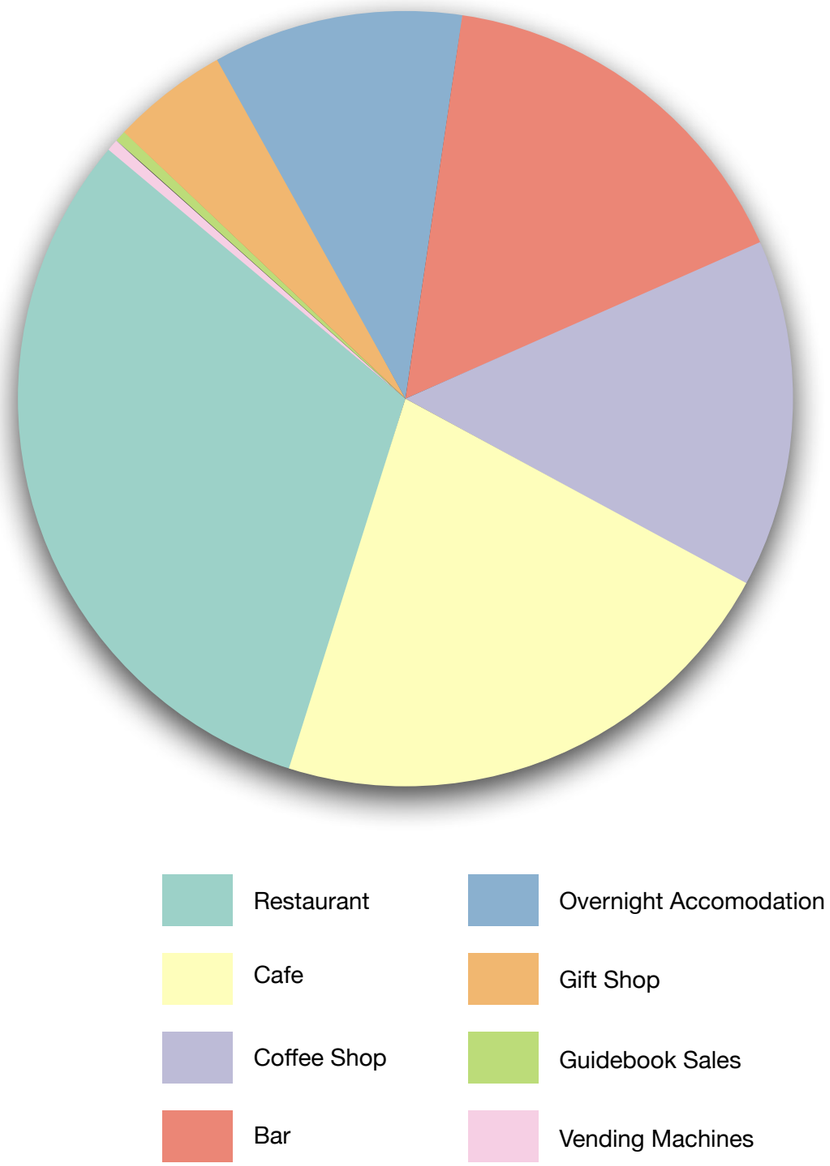
ONE17 DESIGN

- Design and delivery by the professional team will be led by award-winning Huddersfield architects ONE17 Design
- With a heritage stretching back to the 1960s, ONE17 is the premier practice in the area and can boast a catalogue of work covering every building type. It has a long and positive relationship with KMC LPA
- The practice operates from a converted Victorian dyehouse within the green belt and has contributed to domestic, residential, ecclesiastical, commercial and community projects throughout the country, both new-build and conversion/refurbishment

Complementing their acknowledged design skills, the office boasts cutting-edge computer technology, permitting the creation of 3D live videos of projects such as at Castle Hill, allowing viewers to walk around then enter and examine the finished project in every detail.

ONE 17 will manage the entire process — from design and construction to internal fit-out — ensuring consistency and quality at every stage.

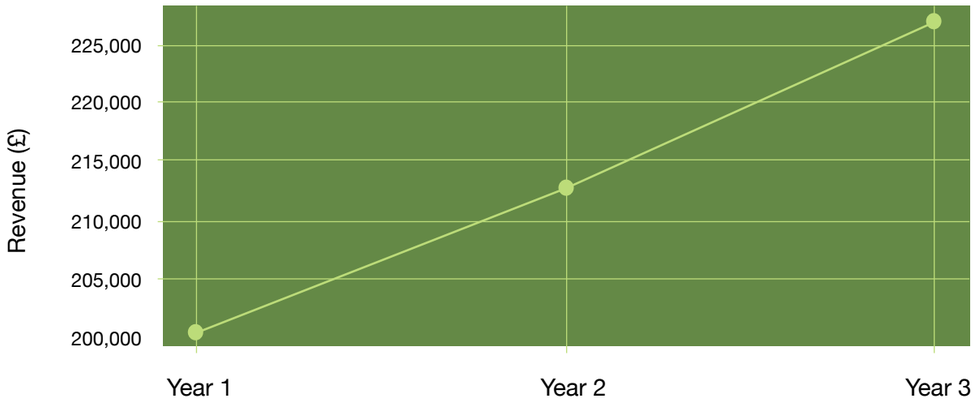
Castle Hill Visitor Centre Income Streams



3.0 CAPITAL FUNDING

- Entirely privately funded with a £3.75 million capital investment — no public funding used for development or construction
- Financial viability and deliverability confirmed by professional cost consultants and chartered accountants
- Revenue streams include gift shop, guidebooks, café, coffee shop, restaurant, bar, vending and accommodation
- Financial risk is mitigated through phased development, long-term forecasting and expert oversight
- Additionally, all external infrastructure enhancements on council owned land including the access road, footpaths, car park and steps, will be fully funded by the private sector
- An asset-locked body is being confirmed to protect long-term community benefit, enshrined in the Articles of Association
- The land at castle Hill is entirely debt-free, with no loans or financial liabilities, a solid financial foundation that underpins the site's long-term sustainability
- The business plan has undergone two forensic-level audits, reinforcing the project's viability, sustainability, credibility, deliverability, and resilience, providing a solid foundation ahead of the LPA required independent audit

Castle Hill Visitor Centre Projected Annual Growth



4.0 THE COMPLETE BUSINESS PLAN

(N.B. Commercially sensitive financial data protected under Environmental Information Regulations 12(5)(e))

The complete business plan includes:

- Demographic and market analysis
- Strategic policy alignment
- Visitor trends and competitor comparison
- Governance models and comparator structures
- Interpretation strategy and engagement approach
- Tourism segmentation: local, day and school visitors
- Post-COVID and cost-of-living response strategies
- Room occupancy and tourism connectivity
- Alignment with Kirklees Council's strategic goals
- Inflation impacts and economic risk analysis
- Resilience and risk management frameworks
- Approaches to affordability, value delivery and economic inclusion
- Forecasts developed through visitor journey mapping and demand modelling
- Tower opening hours and visitor flow planning incorporated
- Archaeological findings (Atkins Report) fully considered
- Sustainability measures aligned with AIM standards
- Capital depreciation, staffing costs and operating expenses forecast
- Revenue streams: retail & catering
- Salary benchmarking and operational team structure
- Comparative governance review: Charity vs Ltd vs CIC

Financial projections:

- Year 1: £200,663
- Year 2: £212,937
- Year 3: £226,848
- April 2025 model update accounts for wage inflation and cost-of-living pressures
- Good ROI, long-term viability and operational independence from public funding

30 Community and Public Benefits

5.0 COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC BENEFITS

Education, Culture & Heritage

1. A comprehensive interpretation strategy ensures inclusive access to Castle Hill's 4,000-year story through immersive education, upgraded on-site and digital interpretation along with external wayfinding.
2. Historical education, interpretation, cultural enrichment and social inclusion are at the heart of the scheme.
3. Free access for all to interpretation areas, exhibitions and core amenities.
4. Free access, curriculum-linked schools visits (with refreshments).
5. Free educational programmes and school visits.
6. Community event and exhibition opportunities.
7. Support for local artists, traders, and producers.
8. A lasting cultural and social asset for Kirklees and the wider region.
9. Legacy and succession planning.

Accessibility & Inclusion

1. Fully accessible design with inclusive signage.
2. The centre is open and beneficial to all income levels, reducing barriers to participation and enriching the wider community.
3. Digital Access and Inclusion.
4. Low-cost, family-friendly catering and retail options.
5. Developed in collaboration with Historic England and Kirklees Council to ensure compliance with applicable legislation.
6. Free parking available on-site to reduce financial barriers for all visitors.

Health, Wellbeing & Community Engagement

1. Mental health and wellbeing programmes.
2. Community engagement via school programmes, events and citizen-led heritage activities.
3. Measures for Enhanced Public Safety.
4. Monitoring and Feedback Mechanisms.

Sustainability & Environmental Impact

1. Eco-conscious construction and sustainability practices.
2. Biodiversity initiatives and improved public access.
3. Sustainable Transport Link.
4. EV (Electric Vehicle) charging points.

Economic & Social Regeneration

1. Local job creation and economic uplift.
2. Serve Kirklees and boost tourism, strengthening Huddersfield's economy.
3. Transparent CIC governance with reinvestment into community outcomes.
4. Huddersfield lack of sufficient and affordable accommodation.

Infrastructure, Safety & Security

1. Significant improvements to on-site infrastructure – including upgrades to the access road, footpaths, car park, steps and public areas – to support accessibility, safety, sustainability and long-term functionality.
2. Incorporation of disabled and parent & child parking in car park redesign.
3. First Aid Provisions.
4. The scheme will enhance site security through the installation of a 24/7 monitored CCTV and the presence of a dedicated night porter. These combined measures will help address a range of current and ongoing issues that have affected the site, including theft, vandalism, anti-social behaviour, drug misuse, littering, fly-tipping, arson, graffiti and indecent behaviour.

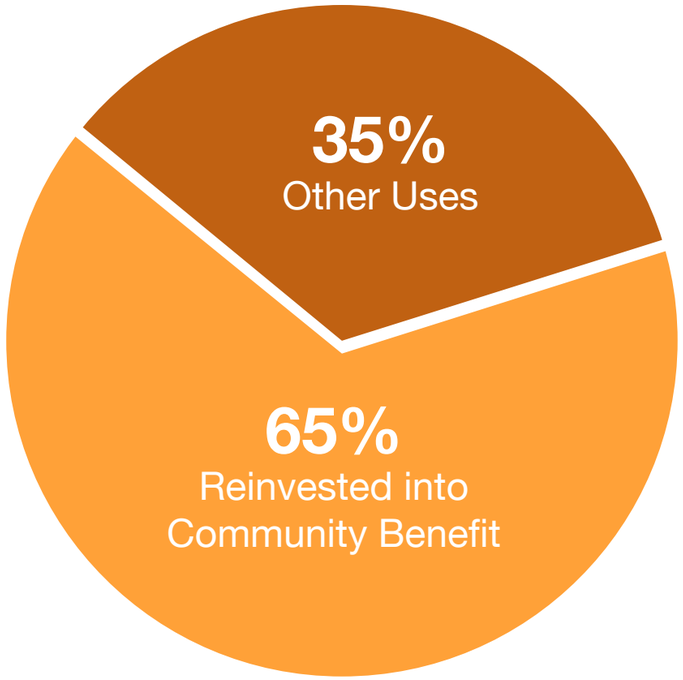
Resilience & Long-Term Governance

1. The project is delivered through a Community Interest Company (CIC) , a regulated business model designed to serve the public good while remaining financially sustainable.

- A minimum of 65% of all surplus is reinvested into the site, education programmes, conservation and local community initiatives
- The CIC is structured for long-term public benefit, with clear oversight, transparency, and accountability built into its operations
- This ensures Castle Hill will be maintained and protected well into the future, with profits helping to fund free access, local jobs and cultural programming
- This ensures the centre is financially sustainable, community-focused, and aligned with the goals of Kirklees Council and Historic England
- Only this model makes such long term public benefit possible

This scheme is not just about preserving the past, it's about shaping a vibrant, inclusive future for Kirklees. By embedding educational opportunity, cultural celebration, environmental responsibility, and economic regeneration at its heart, Castle Hill becomes not only a destination, but a beacon of civic pride and public value for generations to come.

CIC Surplus Allocation



What is a CIC?
A Community Interest Company (CIC) is a special type of limited company designed to operate for the benefit of the community rather than private shareholders. The Castle Hill CIC is made up of a broad range of members, including representatives from local community groups, heritage professionals, and council stakeholders. Its primary purpose is to ensure that all decisions and operations serve the wider public interest. The governance structure is collaborative and inclusive, ensuring that no single entity or individual controls the CIC, and that community benefit remains at the heart of everything it does.

6.0 SCHEME READINESS AND POSITIONING

- All capital fully secured, ensuring financial certainty throughout the project
- Entirely privately funded — with no reliance on public funds
- Developed in collaboration with Historic England and Kirklees Council, ensuring all heritage protections are met
- Delivered through a Community Interest Company (CIC) — this is not a commercial development, but a community hub with multiple sustainable revenue streams, reinvested into the site, public facilities and community programming
- Professional delivery team includes Chartered Architects, cost consultants, heritage specialists and accountants
- Positioned as a model for responsible, sustainable heritage development, combining free public access, environmental responsibility and economic resilience
- A case study for how to preserve heritage assets whilst creating comprehensive public benefits and long-term self-sufficiency
- Kirklees Council's Capital Delivery Team to be take responsible for scheme works outside the Visitor Centre boundary (car park, access road, footpaths and steps)
- The CIC and its professional delivery team focus exclusively on the construction, fit-out and long-term operation of the Visitor Centre

Comprehensive Professional Team Supporting the Project:

The successful delivery of this project is underpinned by a multidisciplinary team of industry-recognised professionals and technical specialists. The following consultants have been carefully selected for their expertise in planning, heritage, design, sustainability, education and operational delivery, ensuring that every aspect of the scheme is addressed to the highest standard:

- Access and Inclusion Specialist
- Arboriculture, Ecology, and Environmental Specialist
- Archaeological Consultants / Clerk of Works
- Chartered Accountants
- Chartered Architects
- Community Safety Authority
- Cost Consultants
- Education and Learning Specialists
- Engineering Consultant
- Exhibition Designer
- Geophysical and Archaeological Survey Specialist
- Heritage Specialists
- Historic England
- Immersive Experience Designers / Themed Environment Specialists
- Interpretation Specialist
- Landscape Consultants
- Local Authority Technical Services
- Local Planning Authority
- Planning Consultants
- Precision CNC Machining and Subcontract Engineering Specialist
- Quantity Surveyors
- Security Consultants
- Specialist Lawyers
- Sustainability and Environmental Consultant
- Transport Consultants
- Viability Assessment Specialists
- Visitor Operations Advisor
- Water and Wastewater Authority

7.0 DELIVERY

- We acknowledge certain concerns arising from the handling of the 2003 Castle Hill project. While neither the present applicant, nor any member of the professional team had any involvement in that former scheme, we understand why confidence must be rebuilt

- This new project adopts a fundamentally different approach, with new leadership, new consultants, strengthened governance, and a commitment to transparency and quality throughout that Castle Hill merits

- For clarity, the parties involved in the 2003 design and construction of the previous building have no involvement whatsoever in this project. This is an entirely new scheme, developed from the ground up, with a new team, robust professional oversight and a forward-looking approach

- Design and delivery by the professional team will be led by local architects One17 Design, who were NOT involved in the 2003 scheme. They will manage the entire process from design and construction to internal fit-out, ensuring consistency and quality at every stage

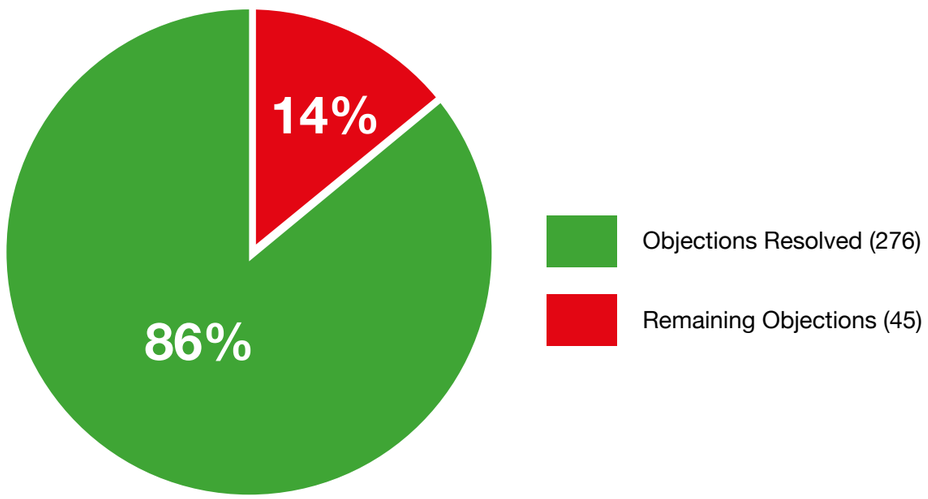
8.0 STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Castle Hill Visitor Centre project has received broad and sustained support from a diverse range of stakeholders across the public, professional and community sectors.

A key indicator of this growing support is the sharp decline in public objections from 321 to just 45 in February 2025, an 86% reduction. This significant shift reflects increasing community alignment with the project and growing confidence in its benefits, safeguards and delivery model.

Castle Hill is set to serve over 270,000 residents in the Greater Huddersfield area and more than 443,000 borough-wide. Huddersfield, the largest town in Kirklees and its principal administrative centre, plays a pivotal role in connecting communities to the region's heritage. The centre's commitment to free access, inclusive educational programming, and sustainable operations has strongly resonated with local priorities. As a result, the project is widely recognised as a valuable long-term asset for the community.

Public Objections to Castle Hill Visitor Centre Project



9.0 FINAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

- Castle Hill has existed for millennia as a focal point of local history that is today a nationally significant Scheduled Ancient Monument. But at present, visitors to the site are poorly served, in several ways

The project has strong backing from the local community, elected representatives and stakeholders, who understand it will deliver clear public benefits including free entry for all visitors and school groups, high-quality educational experiences, improved accessibility, sustainable development, local job creation and long term community involvement through a Community Interest Company, ensuring Castle Hill remains an inclusive, valued and educational asset. We have also formally confirmed to the Local planning authority and Historic England that all required funds are fully secured and available.

- The Castle Hill Visitor Centre will deliver a legacy of wider public access, education and interpretation, conservation, and community benefit, all within a self-funded, policy-compliant and financially viable framework

- It represents a rare and timely opportunity to deliver a nationally significant, locally led and publicly enriching heritage destination that serves the people of Kirklees and visitors from across the UK, for generations to come

Castle Hill has waited long enough, this is the moment to do it right and for the right reasons.

CASTLE HILL
VISITOR CENTRE

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