Historic England

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Our ref: P01587495

8 August 2025

Dear Mr Hirst

T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990

VICTORIA TOWER, CASTLE HILL, LUMB LANE, ALMONDBURY, HUDDERSFIELD, WEST YORKSHIRE HD4 6TA
Application No. 2024/93494

Thank you for your letter of 4th July 2025 regarding the above application for planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the application.

Summary

Historic England has previously provided advice on the original development proposal on 27th November 2018. At that time we objected to the proposal on heritage grounds. In the intervening period we have been consulted on modifications to the scheme and several Discharge of Condition notifications, and most recently a resubmission of the original scheme with additional supporting information on 7th March 2025.

Historic England have maintained a consistent position throughout, stating that this important and sensitive site can benefit from the presence of a well-designed and executed building. We would be supportive of such a proposal if the public benefits are articulated clearly enough for us to be confident that they will outweigh the less than substantial harm to significance.

The updated documentation submitted presents a much clearer vision for the operation of the site and what public benefits will be secured from the development, and crucially, how they will be implemented. On this basis, Historic England does not object to the proposals. However, we strongly advise that your authority commission an independent viability review of the business plan to ensure that the proposed benefits can be realised.

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Historic England Advice
Significance

Castle Hill is an evocative place which plays a special role in the identity of Kirklees. It is a place valued and loved by the local population and for many people it is an iconic symbol of the area.

The closest parallel for its landscape impact and iconic status is Glastonbury Tor, Somerset, with both places sharing a similar, dramatic and recognisable silhouette, composed of very simple, memorable shapes. The continuity of its use as a place for settlement and recreation from potentially as early as the Late Neolithic period through to the present day has given it an almost unique standing not only in Kirklees, but in the whole of the north of England. Its form as a planned medieval hill top settlement places it in a similar category to the 13th and 14th century 'Bastides' of central and southern France, but something that is unique in England.

Castle Hill is a significant place for many different reasons; archaeologically and historically it represents one of only few such sites in the county displaying continuity of human activity for over 4,000 years, ecologically it boasts rare acid grassland and nesting birds, and socially it is a place where people have gathered for enjoyment, protest and celebration. It is an iconic representation of Huddersfield and is loved and valued by the local population. These values are both tangible, expressed physically at the site itself, and intangible, either relating to the contemporary use of the site or residing within local communities and memory as a much loved landmark and place of recreation. Its significance is further acknowledged by its designation as a Scheduled Monument, and Victoria Tower's listed building status. It is a focal point within the Green Belt, south of Huddersfield.

The powerful landscape presence of Castle Hill has attracted people to its summit for millennia and ensured that it has served as a prominent local landmark equally as long. This activity and landscape prominence has ensured that the Site has become imbued with a wide range of values, all of which are ultimately reliant on the fact that it is a prominent hill.

The significance of Castle Hill has been recognised in two key documents produced by Kirklees council in partnership with wider stakeholdders including and endorsed by ourselves:

- Conservation Management Plan (2006)
- the Castle Hill Setting Study (for Kirklees Council, Atkins 2016), which is currently being revised.

Impact on significance:

As with earlier iterations of the scheme, the proposed new building could still result in a degree of less than substantial harm to the significance of both the Scheduled Monument and Victoria Tower, primarily through changes to their setting and the way their cultural and landscape values are experienced.

However, the updated submission now offers much greater clarity on the intended use and management of the site, as well as the anticipated public benefits such as enhanced interpretation, improved visitor facilities, and increased access and educational value. These more coordinated measures represent a positive shift in the applicant's approach and go some way toward addressing our earlier concerns.

That said, we emphasise the importance of ensuring that these benefits are secured and viable in the long term. Independent verification of the business plan by a suitably qualified consultant will be essential to satisfy this requirement.

Policy

Castle Hill is designated as a Scheduled Monument and the Victoria Tower is nationally important listed grade II. The status of the site, its significance and sensitivities require the application to meet a high policy threshold and that any harm needs to be justified and balanced against public benefit in accordance with paragraphs 212, 213 and 215 of the NPPF.

Position of Historic England

Historic England continues to believe that this important and sensitive site could accommodate a well-designed building that delivers real public value provided that such benefits are tangible, clearly defined, and sustainable.

The updated documents represent a more positive and integrated approach to the development and its management, and we acknowledge the applicant's efforts to address previous concerns. In particular, the business plan now outlines how the proposals could be implemented and maintained in a manner consistent with the site's significance, to deliver public benefits.

On this basis, Historic England does not object to the proposals. However, we strongly advise that your authority commission an independent viability review of the business plan to ensure that the proposed benefits set out can be realised. It is essential that your authority commissions a specialist consultant (at the applicant's cost) to audit the Business Plan to confirm that the proposals are viable, that the proposed use (especially the accommodation) is the Optimum Viable Use and as such justifies the

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less than substantial harm to the Scheduled Monument. Historic England will be happy to advise your authority on the preparation of a brief for this work.

Should your authority be minded to approve the proposals, please be reminded that Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) will be required in addition to planning permission. We are happy to work with the applicant to advise them on how to begin the application process.

Recommendation
Historic England has no objection to the application on heritage grounds.
We consider that the application meets the requirements of the NPPF, in particular paragraph numbers 212, 213 and 215.

Your authority should take these representations into account in determining the application. If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us. Please advise us of the decision in due course.

Yours sincerely

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cc:

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