Castle Hill Planning Application 2024/93494

I would be grateful if this further submission I am making both as a resident of Almondbury Ward and as a Ward Councillor on behalf of residents who have contacted me can be considered in addition to my earlier submission.

This current planning application is effectively a renegotiation of the previous plans 2018/93591 approved on the 10th February 2022. Further documents have recently been filed.

I have asked for the current planning application to be listed for Committee on the following grounds:

Highways Safety-
And
Impact on local area

The Business plan and amended plans show that although restaurant covers of 70 were previously approved, and is the number of covers recommended by highways in their recent report, the number of restaurant covers proposed is 100, with open ended closing times in the evening and reduced capacity in the car park from 45 (which was the number originally proposed) spaces to 37 at the top of the Hill. The open-ended closing times combined with increased covers of 100, (if approved) in the restaurant and reduced capacity in the car park implies the development will be busier for longer with fewer carparking spaces but more trips up and down the access road at night due to a combination of the extended opening hours (if approved) and (if approved) additional covers. Not only will these plans place heavier reliance for parking on local surrounding roads, but they encourage an increase in trips up and down the access road at night, when people may have been drinking.

The financial report by Wheawill and Sudworth accepts the financial viability of these proposals, from which can be deduced that there will be public interest in sufficient numbers visiting the restaurant, bar and facilities that support the proposals which means a greater increase in public numbers to the Hill, than there is currently, plus service vehicles.
Even if the carpark capacity was increased to 45 as was previously proposed, there will still be heavy reliance on local roads for parking.
In addition, there has been an increase in road traffic on our roads since the previous application was submitted in 2018.

<u>Interests of the Public</u>

Parking that has been identified by the Applicants only relates to the development itself and no public parking as such has been included to accommodate visitors to the ancient hill site alone. Where should these visitors to the site park? The risk in these plans is the deterrent of the Public genuinely interested in the hill site itself and/or the Victoria Tower. The Hill itself and the Tower are the draw and should only ever be the draw.

The current car park is a Council owned public car park. Will the Applicants be leasing this land from the Council for their own commercial needs for the development therefore?

I do not believe it is in the interests of the Public to not be accomodated in terms of provision for parking in these Plans. Surely then the public benefit of these plans from this perspective alone is very much reduced and does not outweigh the benefits of the proposed commercial attraction?

I have already submitted photos showing Lumb Lane blocked by traffic in the early evening in February 2025, before any commercial attraction is built on the Hill. This photo is at ID 1100765. Congestion on local roads around the Hill site will be inevitable as a result of these plans, as there is insufficient parking provision for the scale of the development, thereby compromising highways safety. I note in the Sandersons Associates report dated November 2019, cited in the Applicants Business Plan 2025 that it categorically states “the development does not cause any negative impacts in terms of road safety or congestion”. This statement is repeated in the Applicants Transport Statement dated Nov 2024. Empirical data has never been filed by the Applicants in support of their plans, so it’s not clear how they can state with such conviction that the development will not lead to congestion? Their statement is misleading.

These plans do not assure us that emergency services would be able to get through and have clear access to local residents living in the area, or to attend an emergency on the Hill?

Of note, no Fire safety assessment has been provided and I would have expected one to be filed, in light of the wildfire on the hill site last Summer. In addition, there is always a risk of fire in the development itself.

In the event of an emergency for example a fire on the hillside how do pedestrians, wheelchair users, people with young children in pushchairs, scooters, cyclists and vehicles egress the site safely

Will there be restrictions as to times when delivery vehicles will be able to deliver to the site, which will be different to times when the development is open to visitors?

Where are the management plans for this?

In the supporting documentation it states the site will serve 270,000 people, this figure only serves to underline my concerns for road safety. In addition, Ashes Lane, is restricted to one lane of traffic in each direction, so if vehicles parked along it, this too could cause traffic related issues and impact road safety. In addition, Lumb Lane is narrow and very steep at points. Clough Hall Lane further down off Lumb Lane is unadopted but needs to be kept clear for residents who live further along it. How will this be managed? How will congestion and parking be managed on local roads?

I note Kirklees highways make reference to the fact that the parking space at the foot of the Hill on Lumb Lane, will need to be relied on as an overspill, but this space is there for the Public and not for the exclusive use of patrons of the restaurant, bar and hotel rooms and is often busy with parked cars both at night and during the day at holiday times and weekends and this is before any attraction is built at the top of the Hill.

As stated, there is insufficient parking provision for the scale of development. I therefore do not believe highways safety will be met and I request the plans are refused.

Impact on Local Area.

I referred earlier to the open-ended closing times of the bar and restaurant, reduced capacity of the car park and projected increase in public visitors to the restaurant, bar and facilities above. In addition, due to all the publicity over the years and the fact that the Applicants have stated this venue will serve at least 270,000 residents, I have grave concerns for its impact on the local area and for the lives of the residents who live there. Any increase in traffic generation to the vicinity will lead to an increase in air pollution, congestion on local roads, noise and disturbance where people walk back to their cars from the restaurant and bar late at night and vehicles manoeuvring, all this in a quiet rural area. Often when people have had a drink they become louder due to the alcohol consumed. The development could also give rise to an increase in anti- social behaviour, an increase in litter and Flytipping.

Access Road-

Visibility at the junction between Castle Hill side/ Lumb Lane and Ashes Lane is poor and an increased use of these junctions could result in vehicle accidents.

The Kirklees Highways update is not a comprehensive assessment of site safety and the report is focussed on the proposed passing places of the access road in the main. What happens during inclement weather? In addition, where are the safety measures on the access road for pedestrians, people in wheelchairs, children, pushchairs, prams, cyclists etc and riders with horses?

While Highways state there have been no material changes since prior approval in 2018, there has been a big increase in traffic volumes on our local roads which I understand is set to increase in the future.

Byway 171 has a width of 3.7m and is maintained at public expense by PROW to be used by pedestrians, cyclists, equestrians, and occasional motor vehicles. The proposal will result in intensification of the byway by vehicular traffic so improvements will be needed. I believe that byway 171 is unsuitable for the scale of development proposed and the increase in trips up and down the hill both from the Public and service vehicles. Presumably the Applicants will fund any improvements and not the Public?

The Independent Audit Report on the access road seems to be aimed at mitigation of risk.

(2.2) We are not provided with details of the PSV value for surface core aggregate so how do we know whatever material is selected will be suitable to prevent skidding and loss of control and (2.6) how will the issue of loose soil and debris be resolved? And (2.4) The implementation of tapers seems to be concerned with mitigation of risk of vehicle collisions. Will it suffice and stop collisions?

In addition, the report recommends stripping away vegetation (2.3) to 0.45m at the verge between passing places and retaining walls, but does not provide details of how this will be done or managed or who will do it. The natural beauty of the hillside and its wildlife will be stripped away.
Similarly at (2.5) The Report recommends to cut back vegetation to a depth of 3metres, along the carriageway at North West side of Castle Hill up the access road. Is this the entire length of the carriageway? No management plan is provided. This area was damaged by fire and is in the Local Nature Reserve and Wildlife site. Will regrowth be encouraged? In addition, I understand there are some endangered birds that frequent this area and habitat, (endangered birds not referred to in the ecology report), which includes gorse which is crucial for providing shelter for nesting birds and provides nectar for moths and butterflies so it's not clear what protection they will be given by these plans and how this will be managed. The stripping away of vegetation on the hill side will result in a barren area that will be detrimental to the hillside and its wildlife and vegetation and should not be approved.

The recent Highways report

Overall, I do not believe safety on the access road can be met with the scale of development proposed, the narrowness of the Byway access road itself, a lack of walkway for pedestrians, mobility scooters, young children in pushchairs and young pedestrians etc as outlined earlier, difficulty in manoeuvring, cars at the passing places, the increase in trips up and down the hill if closing times are extended and covers are increased, plus the introduction of service vehicles with an increased risk particularly at night from visitor vehicles and pedestrians after people have been drinking.
The report also refers to a small basement storage area, but this is contrary to what the plans intend as there will be deep excavation for a broad range of facilities in the basement.
The Highways officers report also refers to traffic generation, but the words/comments are not those of the officer but have been copied verbatim from the Applicants own transport statement dated November 2024. Furthermore, this transport statement on traffic generation is copied from the Applicants own Transport Statement/Assessment compiled by their agents, Sandersons dated November 2019, so is out of date. No empirical data has ever been submitted to support the assertions made, so it's difficult to understand how the report can be accepted. I also believe this to be misleading.

This application should therefore be refused.

The application does not include information that is needed for decisions for planning approval, such as an environmental impact assessment, or a fire safety assessment, or a highways safety assessment.

Finally it is difficult to understand fully why HE withdrew their objections, or why the current application seems to fail to acknowledge/downplay the high number of previous objections which are relevant to the current amended application.

I request this application be refused.