Castle Hill Visitor Centre (CIC)

1. Overview & Purpose

The Castle Hill Visitor Centre is a heritage-led public facility located at Castle Hill, Huddersfield.

Castle Hill represents over 4,000 years of continuous human history, from prehistory through to the present day.

The primary purpose of the Visitor Centre is to protect, interpret, manage and sustain Castle Hill for long-term public benefit.

The Visitor Centre operates as a Community Interest Company (CIC).

Public access to Castle Hill will be permanently retained and free of charge.

The Visitor Centre will provide the infrastructure required to support education, conservation, safety, access, and public enjoyment of the site.

The scheme ensures Castle Hill is will be actively managed, reducing vandalism, drug activity, and other anti-social behaviour associated with unmanaged sites.

2. Planning Status & Context

The Visitor Centre was granted planning permission in 2020.

The current application is not a new proposal; it is the legal mechanism required to activate the existing approval.

The need for resubmission arose solely because the Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC) process, which sits outside the planning system and outside the applicant's control, exceeded the statutory start period.

The principle of development has therefore already been accepted by the planning authority.

There has been no material change to the approved scheme.

The building sits entirely within the footprint of the former structure, utilising the same utility connections.

The building is lower in height than the previous structure.

The site lies within the Green Belt, and the scheme delivers Very Special Circumstances.

Planning consistency applies; refusal in the absence of new material considerations would be unsafe at appeal.

The Secretary of State has confirmed the decision remains with Kirklees Council.

No statutory body currently objects to the proposal.

The current application is a procedural requirement arising solely from the Scheduled Monument Consent timetable, not a change in proposal or intent.

3. Heritage Protection & Archaeology

Castle Hill is a Scheduled Monument, and this status is fully recognised and protected.

No ground intrusion is proposed beyond the approved footprint.

Archaeological trenching has been completed.

A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) has been agreed.

Archaeological excavation and watching briefs are secured by condition.

The scheme is fully aligned with the Castle Hill Conservation Management Plan.

The scheme is fully aligned with the Castle Hill Setting Study.

Historic England supports the scheme.

Historic England has confirmed in writing that the proposal complies with NPPF paragraphs 212, 213 and 215.

Scheduled Monument status does not prohibit development; it requires consent, which this scheme has a clear pathway to achieving.

Long-term heritage protection is embedded into governance and management arrangements.

4. Interpretation, Education & Learning

The interpretation strategy is professionally authored by Dr Bill Bevan (FAHI), inHeritage.

Interpretation covers indoor and outdoor environments, including the wider landscape.

The scheme includes permanent interpretation across the site.

We would like the Interpretation upgrades to extend to the Victoria Tower.

The Visitor Centre includes immersive learning rooms.

Interpretation connects past, present and future.

Learning spaces are designed for schools, families and lifelong learners.

Advanced learning technologies are included:

• immersive projection

• digital environments

• interactive media

• headset-supported learning

Interpretation is accessible and inclusive, supporting different learning needs.

Free access is provided to all interpretation, exhibitions and immersive learning rooms.

Free school visits, including refreshments, are guaranteed for all Kirklees schools.

We confidently anticipate around 100 school visits annually, providing curriculum-aligned educational benefit.

Learning opportunities continue beyond the building through trails and outdoor storytelling.

5. Ground Floor Public Layout & Facilities

Publicly accessible spaces include:

• entrance lobby

• reception and site information hub

• exhibition and interpretation room

• immersive experience room

• interactive learning room

• gallery space

• retail / shop area

• accessible public WCs

• baby changing facilities

The layout supports safe, supervised visitor flow.

Facilities are designed to be welcoming, legible and inclusive.

6. Health, Wellbeing & Community Benefit

The scheme provides calm spaces for reflection and wellbeing.

Mental health and wellbeing programmes will be delivered through:

• nature connection

• culture

• education

• community engagement

Community events and workshops to be hosted on site.

Volunteering and training opportunities to be provided.

A year-round site presence contributes to a safer environment.

The scheme supports public health objectives by encouraging outdoor activity and social connection.

First aid provision on site.

Discrete CCTV monitoring for public safety.

Overnight staff presence for site security.

Designated disabled and parent-and-child parking bays.

On-site catering is affordable and supports accessibility, wellbeing and inclusive public use of the site.

Executive summary document sets out a comprehensive package of public benefits, clearly itemised across multiple sections and exceeding 30 distinct benefits in total.

7. Accessibility & Inclusion

The building is fully wheelchair accessible.

Inclusive signage and wayfinding are provided.

Digital access and inclusion are supported.

Free Wi-Fi will be available to the public.

Facilities are designed to support families, children, and carers.

Free public WCs and baby changing facilities are to be provided.

Free on-site parking is available.

8. Access, Infrastructure & Works on Council Land

Improvements are proposed to:

• the car park

• access road

• steps

• footpaths

These works are located on council-owned land.

All off-site works are fully funded by the applicant.

There is no cost to the Council or the taxpayer.

All improvements remain public assets.

The works enhance safety, accessibility and visitor management.

The scheme is fully supported by Kirklees Council Highways, with no highways objection raised.

9. Transport, Connectivity & Sustainability

A proposed £1 low-carbon electric shuttle, the Huddersfield Explorer, is under discussion.

The route links:

• Huddersfield Town Centre

• Tolson Museum

• Castle Hill

• Holmfirth

Children travel free.

The service is intended to operate April–October, up to four times per day.

The shuttle reduces car dependency and parking pressure, while avoiding additional parking costs for visitors.

It creates a joined-up visitor experience across the district.

Sustainable transport measures include EV charging.

The scheme aligns with low-carbon and climate objectives.

10. Environment & Biodiversity

The scheme delivers approximately 42% Biodiversity Net Gain.

This exceeds national requirements by a significant margin.

Long-term ecological management is secured.

Habitat enhancement is delivered on site.

Sustainable construction methods are used in line with Historic England guidance.

11. Economic Impact & Employment

The development represents £3.75 million of fully private investment.

There is zero public subsidy.

Approximately 30–35 permanent local jobs are created.

Additional construction employment is generated.

Free public access, with no admission charge, contributing to an estimated £5–10 million per annum in wider visitor-economy benefits.

The scheme supports local businesses, hospitality, retail and accommodation.

Rooted in 19th-century use, six modest overnight rooms offer affordable accommodation for walkers, researchers, and heritage visitors, helping underpin the project's financial resilience.

12. Governance & Financial Safeguards

The Visitor Centre operates as a Community Interest Company.

A full asset lock is in place.

A minimum of 65% of surplus is legally reinvested into:

• heritage

• education

• conservation

• community benefit

The remaining surplus is retained as an operational reserve.

There is no future financial liability for the Council.

The English Heritage Foundation is named as fallback owner.

Annual reporting and independent audit are built into governance.

Section 106 obligations have been drafted and agreed in principle.

The Business Plan has been independently reviewed on three occasions, including one review commissioned at Historic England's request, and has been rigorously stress tested as robust and deliverable.

13. Public Engagement, Transparency & Consultation

A dedicated Castle Hill Visitor Centre Instagram account was created to provide transparent public updates.

The account has achieved over 100,000 views.

Public feedback received has been very positive.

The account supports open public engagement and accessibility of information.

Wider communication includes local and regional media.

Almondbury Ward councillors were contacted and offered updates and meetings.

Every statutory consultee that previously objected has withdrawn concerns.

Historic England, Highways, and Conservation officers raise no formal objections, subject to recommended conditions and ongoing management controls.

14. Delivery & Programme

The project is fully funded and delivery-ready.

Previous delays were solely due to statutory consent processes outside planning.

Subject to final consents, the applicant intends to commence development around this time next year.

Long-term management and protection are secured regardless of future conditions.

15. Separation from Historic Schemes

The current scheme is entirely separate from the 2003 development.

Previous developers have no involvement in the CIC, governance, or delivery.

Neither Indy Thandi nor One17 Design were involved in the 2003 scheme.

The current proposal operates under new governance, safeguards and standards.

Statement of Intent

The Castle Hill Visitor Centre is focused on the future of Castle Hill, ensuring long-term protection, education, access and public benefit.

The scheme addresses historic underinvestment and provides a sustainable model for stewardship of Kirklees' most significant heritage asset.

The scheme has evolved through extensive engagement and now reflects a clear, future-focused vision delivering demonstrable public benefit. While a small number of objectors remain focused on the past, the proposals set out a clear and positive future for the site.

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February 2026