

MATTER 33 - HUDDERSFIELD SAFEGUARDED LAND

SL2176 – land north of Kaye Lane, Almondbury

Issue - Are the proposed safeguarded land allocations in Huddersfield justified, effective and in line with national policy?

1 Introduction

1.1.1 The identification of Site SL2176 as safeguarded land is not sound as it has not been demonstrated that it is consistent with either the emerging Policies in the Local Plan or with national policy guidance.

1.1.2 Paragraph 126 of the NPPF sets out a requirement for Local Plans to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. When considering the impact of a proposed development upon the significance of a designated heritage asset, Paragraph 132 of the NPPF makes it clear that great weight should be given to the asset's conservation and explains that significance can be harmed by development within its setting. The hillfort at Castle Hill is one of the defining features of the plan area. The *Castle Hill Setting Study* [Doc. LE63] identifies this site as making an important contribution to the setting of that Monument. Development of this site could affect elements which contribute to the significance of this asset. However, there has been no evaluation about what impact the loss of this site and its subsequent development might have upon its significance.

1.1.3 Consequently, the allocation of Site SL2176 as Safeguarded Land would be in conflict with the following aspects of the emerging Local Plan:-

- The Spatial Vision – in that it has not been demonstrated that it conforms with the intention that development will take place in a sustainable way (balancing economic, social and environmental priorities), that the local character and distinctiveness of Kirklees and its places will be retained, or that the natural, built and historic environment will be maintained and enhanced through high quality, inclusive design
- Spatial Objective 8 - that it has not been demonstrated that it will protect or enhance the characteristics of the historic environment

- Policy PLP35 – in that it has not been demonstrated that it will conserve elements which contribute to the significance of a designated heritage asset.

1.1.4 It would also be contrary to national policy guidance as set out in the NPPF in that it has not been demonstrated that it would:-

- Help to deliver a “*positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment*” as is required by NPPF Paragraph 126.
- Contribute to protecting or enhancing the historic environment. Therefore, it has not been shown that it will deliver sustainable development in terms of the conservation of the historic environment [NPPF Paragraph 7].
- Conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. Therefore has not been shown that it conforms with one of the Government’s Core Planning Principles [NPPF Paragraph 17].
- Give great weight to the conservation of the area’s designated heritage assets [NPPF, Paragraph 132]

2 Castle Hill

2.1 As the Local Plan notes [Paragraphs 14.16 and 14.17] Castle Hill is one of the most distinctive and prominent landscape features in the region. It is visible from a wide area and is a familiar and valued landmark. Victoria Tower, which lies on the south-western end of the hill top, accentuates this dramatic location and has become a key feature of the area’s skyline. Castle Hill is a well-used recreational facility that serves Kirklees, in particularly Almondbury and Huddersfield. The visual connections between the site and the rural and urban areas around it are a fundamental aspect of its setting. Castle Hill is designated as a Scheduled Monument, with Victoria Tower designated as a Grade II Listed Building.

2.2 The castle hill Setting Study

2.2.2 In order to better understand the contribution which the area around the monument makes to its setting, the Council commissioned a Study to examine the extent to which the significance of Castle Hill is derived from its setting. The *Castle Hill Setting Study* also examined current features which detract from this setting, outlined particularly sensitive aspects of the asset’s setting and identified future risks and issues related to the impact of further development in

the surrounding area. The study built upon the *Castle Hill Conservation Management Plan* (2006) [Doc. LE64] which identified the need for careful management of the setting of Castle Hill over the coming decades to ensure that the key characteristics and features of this setting are appropriately conserved, and that new developments are appropriate in terms of scale, mass and design. The Submission Plan makes it clear that development proposals will be expected to take into account the *Castle Hill Setting Study* when considering potential impacts on this designated heritage asset.

- 2.2.3 The *Castle Hill Setting Study* makes it clear that the extensive wide-ranging views from the hilltop across the surrounding landscape are a critical component of Castle Hill's setting. It states:-

“Views to and from the hilltop are the most important factor in the setting of the site, and are the most substantial factor in which Castle Hill's significance can be derived from its setting. This aspect of the setting of the hilltop provides visual connections, from across the Kirklees area, to its historical significance as a prominent point of power and territorial control, as well as settlement, use and reuse” [Doc. LE63, Paragraph 4.38]

- 2.2.4 It also considers that the character of the surrounding landscape is an important component of this element of Castle Hill's significance:-

“The character of the immediate surroundings of the landscape plays an important part in the contribution which this aspect of Castle Hill's setting makes to its significance. As emphasised above, the rural ‘band’ of undeveloped farmland on the hillside between Newsome and the hilltop, and in the plateau and valley to the south and east, separate the hilltop from the urban development of Huddersfield”. [Doc. LE63, Paragraph

- 2.2.5 Bearing in mind the extent to which the overall significance of Castle Hill is derived from its setting, the *Castle Hill Setting Study* sets out a strategy for the management of change in that area. In order to assist decision-making, it identifies a number of undeveloped areas around the monument which it considers make an important contribution to its significance [Doc. LE63, Figure 16]. Site SL2176 is identified as being one of those important areas. A development of the scale proposed for this Allocation would be classed as a ‘Medium Sized Development’. The Study states:-

“Development of this size and scale would almost certainly have a notable harmful impact on the setting and significance of Castle Hill if it was situated within the areas of important undeveloped land around the hill Even in locations adjacent to existing development there is a high risk that new medium sized development would intrude on and degrade the setting of the site” [Doc. LE63, Paragraph 6.15]

3 Response to the Inspector’s questions

3.1 Question b) Where relevant, has the impact of potential housing development on heritage assets been adequately assessed and addressed?

3.1.1 By identifying this area as Safeguarded Land, the Council is accepting that the principle of the loss of this currently-open area and its subsequent development is acceptable. However, there has been no meaningful evaluation about whether or not the development of this site would be compatible with the protection of the setting of Castle Hill.

5 Suggested Change

Either:-

(a) Before confirming this site as Safeguarded Land, a Heritage Impact Assessment needs to be undertaken to demonstrate that such an allocation would be compatible with national policy guidance regarding the conservation of the historic environment

Or

(b) Paragraph 6.29 of the justification to Policy PLP6 needs to make it clear that any reassessment of the appropriateness of Safeguarded Land for development as part of a future review of the Local Plan would need to include an evaluation of whether or not the development of those areas would still be likely to deliver sustainable development.