

ATKINS

**Castle Hill
Conservation Management Plan
Summary**

March 2006



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INTRODUCTION

Kirklees Metropolitan Council, with financial assistance from English Heritage, commissioned Atkins Heritage to prepare a Conservation Management Plan for Castle Hill. The Plan has been developed to assist the Council with the long-term management and enhancement of the hill.

The Plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Council, English Heritage and West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service (WYAAS). Other groups have been consulted including the Huddersfield and District Archaeology Society; the Huddersfield Geology Group and the Almondbury (Castle Hill) Civic Associates.

The people of Kirklees also made a valuable contribution to the Plan through their participation in a series of consultation events. Over 500 people responded to a questionnaire both online and at the events held in Huddersfield and on Castle Hill and over 300 attended three separate consultation events. These responses have been invaluable in the preparation of the Plan.

What is a Conservation Management Plan

A conservation management plan identifies what is currently understood about a place, what is significant about that place and what the issues facing that place are. From this understanding, a conservation management plan then sets out policies to guide the long-term-management and conservation of the place and proposes actions and management measures to help deliver a sustainable future for the place. This summary provides an overview of all these stages.

Conservation Management Plans have been prepared for a range of sites across the UK and they are now required by many funding bodies. As such, they are recognised as the critical first step in the longer process of managing and conserving sites.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT CASTLE HILL

Castle Hill is an evocative place that plays a special role in the identity of Kirklees. It is a place that is valued and loved by the local population and for many people is an iconic symbol of the area that they live in. Its importance is further recognised by its designation as a Scheduled Monument and Victoria Tower's Listed Building status. The hill is one of the most distinctive and prominent landscape features in the region and is visible from a wide area making it a familiar and valued landmark. It is also an important archaeological site with evidence for occupation and use stretching back around 4,000 years.

Our understanding of the hill is based on a number of archaeological, geological, ecological and landscape surveys. These have generally proven to be adequate for the purposes of the Plan and set a baseline for monitoring future change.

However, current understanding of the archaeological and historical development of the hill is mainly based on the published excavation reports from William Varley's excavations. Whilst these reports, and other surveys, have provided valuable information, the interpretation of Varley's work remains open to debate and we have identified the need for further detailed reassessment of his archives as a key piece of work for the future.

The following presents a brief overview of how the hill is currently used, its archaeological and historical development of the hill, its ecology and its setting. Further detail on all of these can be found in the full Plan.

How Castle Hill is used today

Castle Hill is a highly used and attractive recreational resource and has been such for over 150 years. About 100,000 visits are made to the hill each year and it attracts a wide range of users who come for many different reasons including walking, dog walking, kite flying and to enjoy the views. The questionnaire revealed that many people like to bring visiting friends and family to hill and that there are a large number of regular users often from the local area. However, most people come on a less frequent basis and seem to treat it as a special occasion.

This diverse visitor profile creates both opportunities and challenges for the long-term management of the Site and these are explored in the Issues section of the full Plan.

Archaeological and historical background

It is thought that the hill was settled in the Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Ages, around 3,400 BC to 1,200 BC when a small enclosure was seemingly established at

the western end of the hill, but this has not been verified. The first hillfort was constructed in the Early Iron Age, around 550BC, and this covered the whole hilltop. During the Late Iron Age, around 100 BC, the hillfort was modified with the addition of an extra bank and ditch. However, the banks and ditches that we see today are not those constructed in the Iron Age, rather they belong to a medieval castle which was constructed in the late 11th or early 12th century AD when Almondbury became part of the territory known as the Honour of Pontefract. At this time Castle Hill became an important regional centre of power and it seems that a keep and hall were built at the western end of the Site, with outlying buildings and settlement in the other parts of the hill. The hilltop was seemingly abandoned by the 1340s and remained largely uninhabited, except for a small farm on the southern side, until the 19th century when the Castle Hill Hotel and Victoria Tower were constructed. Since the 19th century the hill has largely been used for recreational purposes.

The above story of the hill's development is based on current knowledge but there are significant gaps in our knowledge e.g. what happened in the Roman and early medieval periods and it is entirely possible that much of what we now understand will change if future research uncovers new remains or documents.

The ecology of the hill

Castle Hill is an important ecological "island" in the middle of managed farmland and urban settlement. It boasts many habitats for breeding birds, as well as large areas of rare unimproved acid grassland and western gorse. Together these provide a diverse mosaic of habitats that contrast, both visually and ecologically, with the improved grasslands that surround it. A wide range of birds have been seen on the Site including yellowhammers and dunnocks perching in scrub on the southern hillside and common garden birds such as wrens and blackbirds in mixed scrub by the car park. Other birds include tawny owls, sparrowhawks, bullfinches and kestrels.

The setting of the hill

Castle Hill's prominent location means that it can be seen from a wide area and that a wide area can be seen from it. Change in this area has the potential to affect these views and consequently change the setting of the hill. The Site is currently surrounded by mainly rural landscapes and areas of more distant urban development. It overlooks the eastern slopes of the Pennines and the landscape around it is dissected by numerous steep sided valleys.

Within the hilltop itself there are various different character areas, which are defined in main by the earthworks which form the inner, centre and outer baileys. Each of the baileys, whilst uniting to form the overall character of Castle Hill, also have their own unique 'feel' with the outer bailey being the most open and exposed.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

What is a Statement of Significance?

Significance is a way of talking about what is valued about a place and why these things are valued. These values can cover a wider range of aspects including a place's ecology, its value to local communities, its associations with past events or archaeological and remains that survive there.

A statement of significance describes and analyses these values in a way that allows everyone to understand why a place is special and hence what needs to be conserved about a place to keep it special for future generations.

The following is a summary of Castle Hill's Statement of Significance, the full version can be found in the complete Plan.

Summary Statement of Significance

Castle Hill is one of the most distinctive and prominent landscape features in the region and it is widely visible from the Kirklees area. It is an instantly recognisable landmark and an icon for Almondbury, Huddersfield and Kirklees and it forms a visual backdrop for the daily lives of thousands of people. As such it is an important aspect of the wider area's and surrounding communities' identities. Its dramatic topographic form is the direct result of geomorphological processes and it is this topographic form that has led to the Site being a focus of activity for over 4,000 years. This activity, coupled with its prominence in the landscape, has ensured that the Site has become imbued with a wide range of significances – all of which are ultimately reliant on the fact that it is a prominent hill.

These significances are both tangible and expressed physically at the Site itself e.g. its archaeology and ecology; and intangible either relating to the contemporary use of the Site or residing within local communities and memory e.g. iconic status of the Hill.

In terms of the tangible physical significances, the complexity and longevity of the Site's archaeological and historical record makes it a nationally significant monument and one of the most important archaeological sites in West Yorkshire. This value is not due solely to any single period of its development but rather in the fact, that due to its location and prominence, it has seen so many phases of use and re-use over the last 4,000 years. Known evidence includes a Late Neolithic / Bronze Age enclosure, an Iron Age hillfort and a medieval motte and bailey or ringwork castle with an associated settlement. All of these episodes of use related to the fact that it was such a prominent location and one from where people could see and as

importantly be seen. The occupation of such a location could demonstrate power, both real and imagined, over a wide area as well as providing a defensible location in times of strife and conflict. As such the hill has remained constantly attractive to humans.

This attraction has persisted into more recent periods and the modern day. The Victorians chose to firstly situate a hotel on the top of the hill, on the site of an earlier tavern and stables before finally crowning it with the striking commemorative Victoria Tower (Plate 2). A farm was constructed on the side of the hill in the 18th century, to take advantage of the flat open area of the outer bailey demonstrating that it was an attractive place for settlement due to the proximity of suitable agricultural land from this time through to the latter stages of the 20th century. During the Second World War the Site also formed part of the area's network of anti-aircraft defences when it accommodated a Royal Observer Corp observation post. Since the Victorian period the use of the Site as a popular venue for excursions and leisure has developed and it is now highly valued for its community and recreational uses. A large number of people use it for walking, taking in the views and dog walking. Its location close to Huddersfield and surrounding settlements means that it is an ideal location for people who live in an urban environment to experience the relative tranquillity of a rural environment without having to travel too far from home. This recreational use is a critical aspect of the Site's significance.

Other tangible significances include the Site's rich mosaic of ecological habitats and the range of species that these support. Key elements of this mosaic are the extensive areas of lowland dry acid grassland that are of local significance. The Site also supports key bird populations such as linnets and yellowhammers, along with invertebrates all of which are probably absent or present in very low numbers in the surrounding farmland. Other habitat types are important locally as they add structural diversity to the Site. The gorse scrub is of particular value as it provides breeding sites and shelter for linnet and yellowhammer. There are also areas of western gorse which are notable as this species is common on maritime heaths, particularly in south-west England and Wales but it is not common in the north of England.

Castle Hill is also far more than a physical place. Its prominent form means that it forms a visual backdrop for peoples' daily lives and consequently it has become a key symbol in the identity of Almondbury, Huddersfield and Kirklees. Its distinctive profile now adorns many of the publications produced by bodies such as Kirklees Metropolitan Council and it is used by both Huddersfield Town FC and the Huddersfield Examiner in their logos. This sense of identity extends beyond these official bodies and responses to a recent public consultation event indicate that Castle Hill is a treasured and valued place for members of the local communities who consider it to be part of their and the area's identity.

KEY ISSUES

Every place has issues associated it, whether these be the result of how it is used or how it has been altered or changed in the past or even what is planned for the future; and Castle Hill is no different.

Based on the public consultation, discussions with stakeholders and a number of technical surveys we have identified a range of issues facing the Site and the conservation of its significances (see above). The full Plan discusses and describes these issues in detail. From this, the following have been identified as the key issues facing Castle Hill:

- Pressures caused by the use of the Site, such as erosion; the use of Victoria Tower; the current mix of uses on the hill; littering; a lack of educational and interpretational facilities and problems with antisocial behaviour;
- Issues associated with access to and around the Site, including vehicle access on the access road and the car parking on the hill-top; and the condition of paths leading to and across the hill which can restrict pedestrian access and enjoyment;
- The lack of basic visitor facilities such as toilets, shelter etc;
- An incomplete understanding of the archaeological and historical development of the hill due to a lack of recent research on the Varley archive;
- The need for integrated management of the Site and its environs. This will ensure that the future management current addresses all the significances and issues and provides the most enhancement opportunities; and
- Impacts caused by past developments and interventions including the development of the Castle Hill Hotel, services and overhead lines. Also impacts that may be caused by future developments and intervention e.g. service ducts and car parking arrangements.

Policies and approaches to addressing these issues have been identified in the Plan in the Policies section, Management Framework and Enhancement Proposals. A summary of these sections follows.

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT POLICIES

Statement of Core Values and Key Principles

Castle Hill is an evocative place that plays a special role in the identity of Almondbury, Huddersfield and Kirklees. It is valued and loved by the local population and for many people it is an iconic symbol of the area that they live in. The Hill has many important values associated with it including a rich archaeology legacy reflecting over 4000 years of use, a diverse range of ecological habitats and species, its dramatic role in the wider landscape and its use for a range of recreational activities.

Castle Hill will be managed in a way that respects and recognises all of these values and the interrelationships between them. This will require a careful balance to be struck between the conservation of its physical values e.g. archaeology, ecology, geology and landscape and its use by local communities and visitors. It will be vital however to ensure that Castle Hill remains a treasured and widely used place that is valued by local communities as without this its significance will be severely degraded. This means that the site should not be preserved in the past and that compromises may need to be considered between physical conservation and use.

To help achieve this balance, all decisions regarding the future management and enhancement of the Hill will be based on a clear and robust understanding of the Site and the potential issues and impacts that changes could cause. The level of information required will reflect the magnitude of any proposed change and where there is uncertainty a precautionary approach will be taken. This will allow the partners to develop solutions that maximise benefits whilst minimising any harmful effects. The management of Castle Hill will be delivered through a partnership of organisations and individuals working within an agreed management framework and process. This partnership will be led by Kirklees Metropolitan Council who has the ultimate responsibility for the Site. This framework will allow representatives from the Council, local communities, and other stakeholder groups, (with advice from English Heritage and the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service) to come together to enable the long-term conservation of the Hill within the framework of the agreed Conservation Management Plan

The ultimate aim of the long-term management will be to ensure that Castle Hill remains a special place that is treasured and used by the local community and is welcoming to all visitors; and that the archaeology, ecology, geology and landscape of the Site is conserved and presented for the benefit of current and future generations.

Policies

A number of policies have been proposed to guide the future management and enhancement of Castle Hill. They provide both policy tests for future decisions and detail on actions that require implementation to secure the Site's long-term conservation and use. The policies have been structured to reflect the Statement of Significance and the identified issues.

Fundamental to this are a series of overarching policies that form the basis for the ongoing management, conservation and enhancement of the Site:

Key Policy 1: Future decisions relating to management, conservation and enhancement of Castle Hill should respect and sustain all of its significances

Key Policy 2: A management framework should be adopted, implemented and subject to regular review

Key Policy 3: An appropriate level of capital and revenue funding and resources should be maintained for the management of Castle Hill

Key Policy 4: The Site will be maintained as a premier recreational destination in Kirklees

Key Policy 5: The significances, story and sensitivities of Castle Hill should be communicated to as wide an audience as possible

These broad and overarching key policies are supported by more detailed policies for a number of specific areas including:

- Guidance on any proposals for future development on or around the hill. Policies FD1, FD2 and FD3 in Section 5 of Volume 1 set out these proposals in greater detail;
- The current use of Castle Hill;
- Proposals for the improvement and maintenance of access to and across the hill, and for the development of strategies to improve intellectual access;
- Proposals on how to ensure the preservation and communicate effectively the archaeological and historical significance of the hill; and
- Proposals to ensure the preservation and communicate effectively the landscape, geological and ecological significances of the hill.

Details on all these policies can be found in the full Plan.

MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Key to the long-term conservation of the Site and its continued use as a major recreational area is the implementation of a formalised management framework. As outlined above and in the Issues section, the implementation of such a framework is considered to be a priority for action.

The need for this framework arises from a combination of factors including the complexity of the Site's physical and intangible significances and the wide range of stakeholders involved, on both a statutory and non-statutory basis, with the day-to-day management of the Site. This complexity requires clear and agreed approaches to the management of the Site.

The management framework is presented in the full Plan. In summary, it has been developed to enable the long-term effective management of the Site and it consists of three interrelated elements:

Management Structure: This defines responsibilities and roles for the key stakeholders and partners involved in the management of the Site

Management Process: This outlines an approach to programming and agreeing management and enhancement works on a cyclical basis with the involvement of all key stakeholders. It also includes measures to address unforeseen events on an ad-hoc basis should they occur

Management Guidance: A series of guidelines that will assist in the preparation and implementation of management and maintenance works on the Site and ensure that the significances of the Site are not harmed by future action.

It is proposed that this framework will be developed and implemented by the Council over the coming months in partnership with the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service, English Heritage and other stakeholders.

ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

It is widely recognised that enhancement of Castle Hill is required to better serve the communities that use it and help to secure its long-term conservation.

The proposed first phase enhancement measures focus on addressing critical issues facing the Site. The proposed first phase of works have been designed to deliver enhancements in the short term, whilst not compromising the ability of the Council and stakeholders to further enhance the Site in the future should the opportunity and funding become available.

Any possible second phase of enhancement proposals will be reliant on the resolution of the situation with regard to the site of the former public house.

Proposed First Phase Enhancement Works

The first phase of proposed enhancements have been developed to address key issues facing the Site including the condition of footpaths; access across the hill; erosion; scrub encroachment; interpretation and information; car parking; and night time anti-social behaviour.

Subject to the formal approval of the agreed Council capital funding, it is currently anticipated that the first phase of works will be taken through the detailed design process in the new financial year (2006-2007) with work commencing on-site before the end of that financial year.

These works consist of a number of components that would be implemented across the Site; these are presented on the masterplan (see overleaf) and outlined below.

- Resurfacing and landscaping part of the current car parks
- New off-site lay-by parking
- Upgrading the path network
- Footbridge over access road to facilitate the circuit of the ramparts (this will need to be carefully considered as it received mixed views during public consultation)
- Repairing erosion and restoring damaged areas
- New Amenity Area by the well
- Providing new signs at gateways onto the Site
- Barrier at base of access road to prevent night-time vehicle access (this will need to be subject to a Traffic Regulation Order)
- Interpretation materials

- Site furniture such as seats and litter bins
- Improved booth and interior decor for Victoria Tower
- Scrub management

Outline Costs

The proposed works are likely to cost in the region of £200,000 to £220,000 although further detailed design work and studies to investigate ground conditions may result in a decrease or a possible increase in overall costs. These costs do not include a number of other elements such as the design of interpretation material and signage or for any ground investigation works.

NEXT STEPS

The following outlines the principal next steps that will be undertaken to ensure the successful implementation of the policies and recommendations set out in the Conservation Management Plan:

- Establish the Management Group - 2006
- Prepare the first 5 yearly Management and Maintenance Plan – 2006
- Design and commence implementation of Enhancement Proposals – 2006 to 2008
- Consider the preparation of an application for Environmental Stewardship – 2006 to 2007
- Consider the preparation of an application for Local Nature Reserve and Country Park with Green Flag status – 2007 to 2008
- Review the existing footpath connections to and from the hill – 2006 to 2008
- Develop partnerships with relevant bodies to deliver an archaeological research agenda for the hill – 2006 to 2008

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Further information about Castle Hill and the
Conservation Management Plan can be found
on the Council's Website www.kirklees.gov.uk