

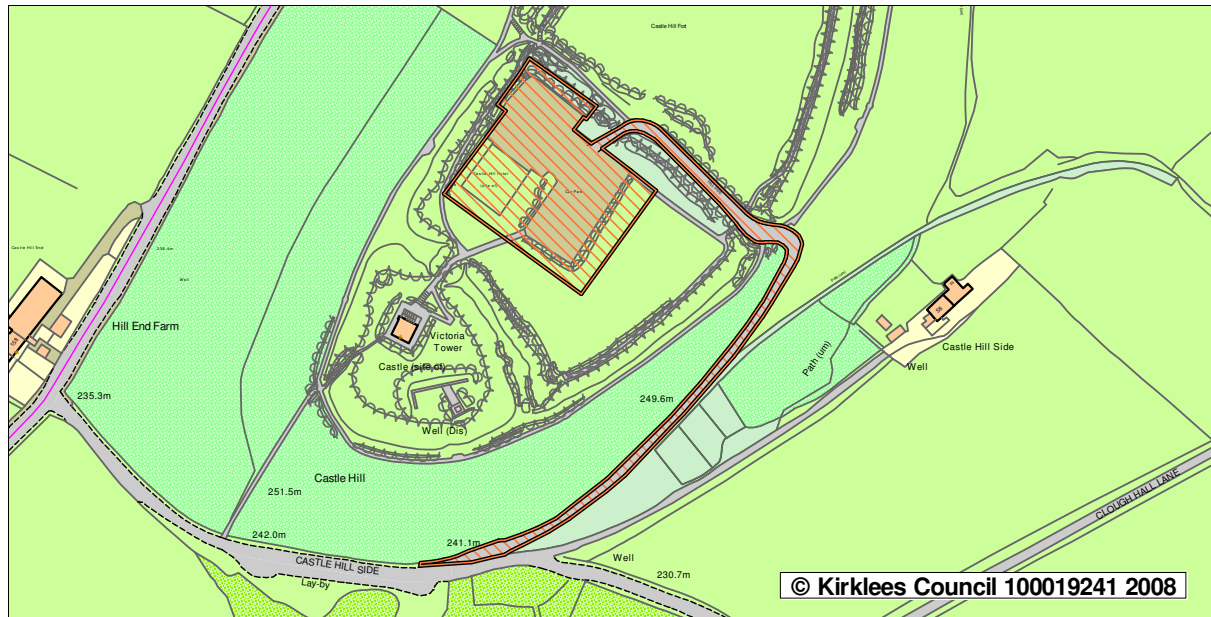
Report of the Head of Strategic Investment

HUDDERSFIELD PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

Date: 31 August 2017

Subject: Pre-Application enquiry for the erection of café/restaurant and associated facilities at Castle Hill Side, Almondbury, Huddersfield, HD4 6TA

LOCATION PLAN



Map not to scale – for identification purposes only

Electoral Wards Affected:

1. Almondbury and Newsome

Yes

Ward members notified

RECOMMENDATION: Members note the contents of this report for information

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

- 1.1 This pre-application enquiry is brought to the Huddersfield Planning sub-committee to inform members of a potential future planning application for a new development on Castle Hill. This would be for the erection of a café/ restaurant with bedrooms and interpretation facilities for visitors and formation of car parking and servicing facilities.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1 Castle Hill is a prominent dome shaped hill situated to the south east of Huddersfield and visible from most of Huddersfield and the surrounding areas. The hill is a Scheduled Ancient Monument of regional significance with evidence that an Iron Age fort once topped the hill. The Jubilee Tower is located on the south west portion of the hill and is a Grade II listed building. There are no other structures on top of the hill but there is a car park area.
- 2.2 The site is green field and contains earth works around the perimeter as well as a number of public footpaths which cross and circumvent the site. There is pedestrian access to the site from both Ashes Lane and Castle Hill Side, the latter via a steep flight of steps. Vehicle access to the site is via the narrow and steep Castle Hill Side, which in turn accesses Ashes Lane.
- 2.3 The site is within the Green Belt, and is also a designated a Local Nature Reserve.

3.0 PROPOSAL:

- 3.1 The enquiry has tabled no specific drawings for consideration; rather they are seeking an 'in principle' opinion from the Local Planning Authority. The intention is for a building to, as previously stated, include a café/ restaurant with bedrooms and potentially some interpretation facilities for visitors. It could also include the reconfiguration of the car park and servicing. The principle of building outside of the footprint of the former public house is also raised.
- 3.2. The following briefing note has been submitted as part of the enquiry:
1. "This note gives background information on the informal pre-application agenda item regarding proposed visitor facilities at Castle Hill.
 2. A great deal of progress has been made by the key stakeholders in the site: KMC, Historic England and our clients, the Thandi Partnership. However, to move to a full detailed planning application will involve considerable further time, effort and expense on the part of the applicant to prepare the documentation required, as officers will explain.
 3. The purpose of this informal approach is to determine a principle: whether or not there is a wish to see visitor facilities at Castle Hill. If there is, the detailed work for a full application is justified; if not, then there is little point in going further.

4. So, what is our case for a public-private partnership to provide visitor facilities at Castle Hill?
 - a. *Castle Hill is the most visible, most important and most visited heritage asset and tourist attraction within Kirklees. People will always want to visit the site and they will judge Kirklees by their experience.*
 - b. *For over a hundred years before the Jubilee Tower was built there has been a pub, hostel, inn or hotel on the Hill, providing visitor facilities and often acting as the focus for important events. Today visitors find no public conveniences, nowhere to obtain refreshments, nowhere to shelter from the elements and no opportunity to learn more about the important archaeology and history of the site. Despite recent improvements it remains a poor advertisement for our area.*
 - c. *Facilities are desperately needed but the local authority is not in a position to build or manage them. Our proposal is for a public-private initiative that will provide visitor facilities, space for educational and research work and supervision of the site 365 days a year through the inclusion of what must be a viable commercial element to the scheme, designed with respect for and minimal impact on the site. The public benefit must outweigh any perceived harm.*
 - d. *The University and Huddersfield Town AFC (particularly now with its elevation to the Premier League) bring thousands of visitors to Kirklees each year. Many people seeing Castle Hill for the first time (and it is impossible to miss) want to go and visit. At present they are likely to turn round and come down very quickly. We cannot extinguish the wish to visit; we can manage it and make it one of the most attractive, well preserved and visited destinations in Kirklees.*
5. All the work done so far is valueless if there is no desire on the part of Kirklees Council to see something happen at Castle Hill. We are no longer seeking to build a copy of the former hotel that stood on the site, such as was clearly rejected by yourselves in 2013. Instead we propose a modern building far more sensitive to and integrated with its setting. We respectfully request that you indicate to Officers and the main stakeholders your informal support, if this is your wish”.

4.0 HISTORY:

98/90785 - Erection of extensions to the north and south of the hotel – Refused.

2000/91424 - Demolition of flat roofed and green mansard extensions, erection of front and rear extensions to form lobby, stairwell, toilets conservatory and additional kitchen space and internal bin store. This application was approved and work commenced on this scheme. The entire hotel was demolished and replaced with new build which was beyond the terms of the planning permission. Subsequent enforcement action resulted in the new building work being demolished and the site filled with inert material and grassed over.

2004/90033 - Erection of new build public house and hotel - Refused.

2009/93504 - Erection of replacement bar and restaurant including first floor guest accommodation and other works. Permission was refused for the following reasons:

- Contrary to Green Belt Policy;
- Development was on an isolated site not related to any settlement and as such it was contrary to PPS4 Planning for Sustainable Development;
- Adverse effect on the setting of the Grade II listed Victoria Tower;
- Adverse effect on the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument;
- Intensification of a substandard vehicle access.

2012/91867- Erection of public house/ hotel with associated parking. Permission was refused for the following reasons;

- Contrary to Green Belt policy;
- Substantial harm to the setting of the Victoria Tower(a Grade 2 listed building);
- Substantial harm to the setting of the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument;
- Intensification of the use of existing access, inadequate levels of parking;
- Detrimental effect on Bio diversity of the site which is a designate Local Nature Reserve

5.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES:

5.1 As part of the pre-application enquiry process a number of key consultees within the Council have been contacted to seek their advice on the potential implications of such development in this location and the measures required to mitigate the associated impacts. These consultees are identified and their views are summarised as follows:

5.2 KC Policy

5.2.1 The site is within the Statutory Green Belt, and the development, is by definition inappropriate development. Any application would need to make a case for “very special circumstances” which outweighed the harm caused to the Green Belt by inappropriate development.

5.2.2. In addition within the Emerging Local Plan a Castle Hill Settings Study has been produced, as part of the Local Plan process, and following on from the Castle Hill Conservation Management Plan that was produced in 2006.

5.3 KC Highways

5.3.1. Any detailed application coming forward for this site would need to be supported by a Transport Statement that not only deals with the application site, but also specifically deals with demonstrating that surrounding routes to the site would be suitable for accommodating the levels and types of traffic expecting to visit the development.

5.3.2. It is noted that routes leading to the site for vehicular traffic are sub-standard, but are out of the control of the applicant. It may well be that a financial contribution will need to be secured with regards to off-site highway mitigation and improvement works and that an appropriate scheme needs to be designed. This would be identified within the required Transport Assessment. The applicant is strongly recommended to engage with Highways Development Management regarding the scope of assessment required and also to discuss potential measures.

5.3.3. The submitted information is insufficient to make any meaningful comment other than to state that the development will need to provide sufficient levels of parking in line with adopted standards and will need to demonstrate safe and efficient access to the site for vehicular traffic. The site will also need to be demonstrated as being suitable to be serviced in a safe and efficient manner.

5.4 KC Ecology

5.4.1 The site is designated a Local Nature Reserve. Any new development on the hill would have an impact on the existing biodiversity. A Full Ecological Report identifying the impact that a new development would have on biodiversity, would be required, together with suggestions to mitigate the impacts.

5.5 KC Business and Economy/Regeneration.

5.5.1 The Business Team supports the application and recognises the investment the applicant is making in this area to create jobs. It would be beneficial to understand not only the nature and number of direct jobs created by the site itself but for further information in identifying supply chain benefits for local businesses as well as local construction jobs and materials supplied etc. in the build. From a Tourism point of view this is a unique location and the applicants are sensible to target both day and overnight visitors.

5.5.2 Anything that adds value to accommodation provision is a benefit – visitors are looking for ‘experiences’ when on holiday, so the interpretation and unique site would add to the saleability of the accommodation.

5.5.3 It is recommended the applicants:

- Investigate current room and occupancy rates, and other proposed hotel developments in Huddersfield, to ensure its a viable business proposition,
- Consider catering for people with a disability
- Are clear about jobs creation

5.6 KC Conservation and Design

5.6.1 Castle Hill is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and contains the Victoria Tower (a Grade 2 listed building). As such any application needs to be accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment, to inform any claim of the development being in the public interest to outweigh any harmful impact. This assessment should extend to the setting of the Scheduled Ancient Monument. As the enquiry indicates that the option of building beyond the footprint of the former pub, a full Archaeological Survey would be required.

5.6.2 NOTE: Given that the proposed development affects the Scheduled Ancient Monument in addition to any planning application, which would be determined by the Local Planning Authority, a Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent would be required, and this would be determined by Historic England. For any development to be capable of being implemented both Planning Approval and Scheduled Monument Approval would be required.

6.6.3 As part of the planning application process Historic England would be consulted, and much of the information they would require to validate any application is the same as identified above.

6.0 Ward Members

Cllr Julie Stewart Turner:

“Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I hear lots of mixed views from people, and it’s hard to get a clear understanding of what the majority would like to see on Castle Hill. My personal view is that there needs to be some facilities on site. I’d like to take my grand-daughters there to fly their kits, but then I’ll need somewhere to wash them, as they are good at attracting dirt, and I’d need toilet facilities for them. I’d like to get a cup of tea or coffee on a cool day, or an ice cream for us all on a hot day. I take visitors to Castle Hill to show off the views, and it would be lovely to get a cup of tea with them, and learn a little about the history, or even buy a postcard of the amazing views. I think a small tourist facility would add value to the site, especially one that has minimal carbon footprint. However, I also realise that the traffic needs to be carefully managed, so that it doesn’t spoil the site, possibly some park and ride, or park and walk for those who can.

I personally would not want to see a large restaurant and hotel on site.”

7.0 MAIN ISSUES

7.1 It is considered that the main, but not exclusive, issues which would need to be fully addressed by the applicant in any subsequent planning application can be summarised as:

- Policy:
- Heritage Issues:
- Bio Diversity
- Highways

Policy Matters

7.2 The site is within Green Belt, and as such the proposed erection of a new building is by definition “inappropriate development and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.. Very special circumstances will not exist, unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of its inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. The site does not fall into the category of any exceptions as defined in paragraph 89 of the National Planning Policy Framework “Protecting Green Belt Land”.

7.3 The proposal is for a café/ restaurant facility which is a town centre use as defined in part 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework, and is in a remote location, with difficult access.

7.4 The NPPF presumes in favour of sustainable development, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Such considerations can include where there are specific policies within the NPPF indicating development be restricted. This includes where land is designated as Green Belt.

7.5 As such any planning submission, would need to provide a case demonstrating ‘very special circumstances’ in terms of development in the Green Belt and demonstrate the sustainability of locating a town centre use, in a remote isolated location.

Heritage Matters

7.6 The site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, and the Jubilee Tower, is a Grade 2 listed building. There would be a requirement to submit appropriate information in support of the application that would include:

- Heritage Impact Assessment;
- Archaeological Survey;
- Visual Impact Assessment- (relating to the Castle Hill Setting Study).

Until these surveys are carried out, and the results available for consideration, the extent of any harm to the significance of Heritage Assets cannot be identified. This means that until such time the level of mitigation or “ the public interest argument “ cannot be made, to make an on balanced judgement that any harm to the significance of the heritage assets is outweighed by the public benefits.

- 7.7 Given that the proposal is to extend beyond the footprint of the former public house, until an Archaeological Survey is submitted and it is confirmed that Scheduled Ancient Monument Consent for this is secured (by Historic England) justification for extending the footprint cannot be considered.

Biodiversity

- 7.8 The site is within an area that has been designated as a Local Nature Reserve. (this is a Local Designation not a statutory designation such as an Site of Special Scientific Interest). A Full Ecological Survey would be required with an application which also sets out any proposed mitigation.
- 7.9 Part 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework “Conserving and enhancing the natural environment” is a material consideration.

Highways

- 7.10 A Transport Statement would be required with any submission, given the nature of the development described and because this would result in an intensification of the access road. The access road is narrow and steep, and there is little scope to improve this by way of provision of passing places etc.
- 7.11 There are existing car parking areas on the hill, but any new proposal would need to demonstrate that the proposed parking provision satisfies the Council’s parking standards given the site’s location. In addition any development should encourage the use of low emission vehicles and alternative means of transport.
- 7.12 The potential for an access management arrangement to the site has been mooted by the potential applicants in the past. In considering the implications of access and transport to future development it would be worth exploring this option further.

8.0 Recommendation

- 8.1 That members note the contents of this report for information.