



FAO: Planning Department,
Braintree District Council

Our ref: 17514
Application ref: 26/00731/OUT
Date: 12 May 2026

HISTORIC BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION ADVICE

RE: Sturmer Hall Church Walk Sturmer Essex CB9 7XD

The application is for Outline application with all matter reserved except access, for the change of use of Sturmer Hall and associated buildings to a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school, erection of new hydrotherapy and wellness centre, 7 no. detached buildings for student accommodation and associated access arrangements.

This application follows on from a previous pre-application consultation (25/60186/PREAPP).

Sturmer Hall is the site of a Scheduled Monument, a moated site and mill complex (List Entry Number: 1012094), with origins as a pre-Conquest manorial complex from the tenth century. The Scheduled Monument is formed by two separate scheduled areas, the northern area incorporating the moated site, earthwork remains and the northern arm and north-west corner of the moat. The southern area contains a mill complex, comprising a waterfilled mill pond, a dam and tail race.

In addition to the scheduled monument, the application site is within the setting of the Grade I listed eleventh-century Church of St Mary (List Entry Number: 1122274). The church was an essential part of the pre-Conquest, manorial complex and has considerable group value with the adjacent scheduled monument.

Due to the potential for archaeological impacts resulting from this proposal, the scheduled monument status of Sturmer Hall and the Grade I listed status of the Church of St Mary, I recommend that Historic England are consulted on their views on the application. In addition, I recommend that my colleague Teresa O'Conner, Historic Environment Officer, is also consulted for her view on archaeological impacts.

The Heritage Statement (John Moore Heritage Services, 2025) accompanying the application finds that though largely twentieth century in date, the existing Sturmer Hall building is a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) due to *"its remaining historic fabric and its historical association with the*



scheduled monument and adjacent church.” I agree with this assessment of Sturmer Hall as an NDHA.

The existing setting of the heritage assets has been impacted by the construction of an existing theatre/conference room building and by the creation of a large storage yard, enclosed by a raised bank, on the west side of the site. Yet, the historic significance of the heritage assets and their group value, within their historic setting is still legible. It is still possible to appreciate the significance of the heritage assets, within their largely surviving, historic manorial landscape setting. There are wide views both to and from the site, from which the scheduled monument and the listed church can be appreciated within their historic, rural setting, despite the modern changes.

Two significant buildings, the Hydrotherapy Facility and the Educational Facility are proposed, in contemporary design. In addition, seven chalet style dwellings would be constructed to the west, northwest and north east of the scheduled monument. Retention and conversion of the Barn, Bungalow and a Site Warden’s office is also proposed. Parking is to be provided with a main car park to the west of the hall, a drop off zone between the Hydrotherapy Facility and the Educational Facility and secondary parking spaces elsewhere around the site.

The proposed single-storey chalets have been designed with weatherboard cladding, timber or aluminium doors and windows and a brick plinth. The roof material is not specified, although natural slate is suggested. While these materials reflect the rustic character of the assets setting and seek to mitigate the harm, in principle, the addition of seven chalet structures in close proximity to the scheduled moat and its immediate setting, would be a negative change. The mitigation through materials would not remove this harmful effect and the chalets will reduce the ability to appreciate the historic significance of the site.

While there is limited intervisibility between the application site and the Grade I listed church, the change to the character and appearance of the listed buildings setting as a result of the development would be negative. The educational building, hydrotherapy building, seven chalets and parking, represent a more intensive use of the site than at present, with an increased negative impact. The result would be a clear weakening in the ability to appreciate the long-standing historic relationship between the scheduled manorial site and the Grade I listed church within their setting.

The NPPF states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably (Paragraph 219). The proposed development would not enhance or better reveal the significance of the heritage assets, nor preserve the positive, rustic and historic character of their setting.

The Heritage Statement concludes a *‘negligible degree of harm to the listed building’*. Negligible does not equate to ‘no harm’ and in my view, and in the language of the NPPF, the proposal would result in a level of less than substantial harm (towards the lower end of the scale) to the Grade I listed Church of St Mary. In addition, the applicant’s Heritage Statement finds that there would be *‘less than*

substantial harm’ to the Scheduled Monument of Sturmer Hall Moated Site and Mill Complex. There would be a harmful impact due to the inappropriate and intrusive nature and intensity of the development within the scheduled monument’s setting and the I agree with their conclusion of less than substantial harm.

Therefore, in compliance with Paragraph 215 of the NPPF, the less than substantial harm to the heritage assets should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. In the assessment of this balance, ‘*great weight*’ is to be given to the assets’ conservation (the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be), irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance (NPPF, Paragraph 212).

David Sorapure BA Hons, MCIfA
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Place Services



Please note:

This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.

We are unable to respond directly to applicants/agents or other interested parties. Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant/agent or other interested parties may have, must be directed to the Planning Officer at the relevant LPA, who will seek further advice from us where appropriate.