



Non-Technical Summary

Proposed Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) School at Sturmer Hall, Sturmer, Haverhill, CB9 7XD.

What is Being Proposed?

This proposal seeks planning permission for the development of a specialist Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) school at Sturmer Hall, providing education for up to 120 young adults aged 16–25. The scheme also includes associated accommodation designed to support students in developing independence and life skills as they transition into adulthood, alongside a hydrotherapy and wellbeing facility. The hydrotherapy provision will primarily support the needs of the students during the day, with limited community access outside of school hours to promote integration and long-term sustainability.

The overall vision is to create a therapeutic and supportive environment, underpinned by a curriculum focused on practical life skills such as cooking, budgeting, and personal care, helping students to build confidence and independence.

Why is it Needed?

There is a well-established and growing need for SEND school places both locally and nationally. Many existing schools, including those within Essex and neighbouring areas, are operating over capacity, resulting in long waiting lists and limited opportunities for placement. In particular, there is a shortage of post-16 SEND provision, meaning that many young adults must travel long distances or are placed outside of their home area.

This proposal directly responds to this identified need by providing additional, high-quality SEND provision within a location that is accessible yet benefits from a calm and rural setting, which is particularly suited to the needs of the intended users.

Pre-Application Engagement and Amendments

The proposals have been informed by pre-application discussions with Braintree District Council. The Council confirmed that the principle of a SEND school on the site is broadly supported and recognised the significant public benefits associated with the provision of specialist education. However, concerns were raised in relation to the impact of the development on the site's heritage assets and the need for further justification of certain elements of the scheme.

In response to this feedback, the proposals have been carefully reviewed and amended. Key changes include a revised car park layout and access arrangement to avoid ground disturbance

within sensitive heritage areas, the introduction of new hedgerow planting to screen parking and enhance the rural character of the site, and a redesigned hydrotherapy building which removes the need for intrusive foundations within the pond area. These changes have reduced the overall impact of the development and improved its relationship with the surrounding landscape and heritage assets.

Heritage Considerations

Sturmer Hall is located within an area of significant historic importance, including a Scheduled Monument and the nearby Grade I listed Church of St Mary. These heritage assets form part of a historic manorial landscape and are an important part of the site's character and identity.

The proposals have been developed with a strong emphasis on respecting this historic context. Consultation has been undertaken with heritage specialists, including Historic England, and their feedback has informed the evolution of the scheme. The revised proposals reduce built form in the most sensitive areas, avoid intrusive construction methods within the Scheduled Monument, and improve the spatial relationship between key heritage features.

As a result, the scheme seeks not only to minimise harm but also to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the historic landscape through a more sensitive and considered design approach.

Flood Risk and Environmental Considerations

A Flood Risk Assessment has been undertaken to assess the suitability of the site for development. The findings confirm that the majority of the site lies within Flood Zone 1, which is considered to be at low risk of flooding. Areas of higher flood risk are limited to the southern edge of the site and have been avoided in the layout of the proposed development.

The main identified risk relates to surface water flooding; however, this is localised and can be effectively managed through appropriate drainage design. Measures such as sustainable drainage systems will be incorporated to ensure that flood risk is not increased and that the development remains safe for its lifetime.

In addition, the scheme has been designed to retain and enhance existing landscape features, protect trees, and integrate new planting to support biodiversity and visual amenity.

Benefits of the Proposal

The proposed development will deliver a range of significant benefits.

Educationally, it will provide much-needed SEND school places within a purpose-built environment tailored to the needs of young adults, helping to address a clear shortfall in provision.

Socially, the scheme will support the development of independence, confidence, and life skills, enabling students to transition more successfully into adulthood.

From a community perspective, the inclusion of shared facilities such as the hydrotherapy centre will provide opportunities for wider community use and interaction, helping to foster inclusion.

Environmentally and in heritage terms, the revised design ensures that the development is sensitively integrated into its surroundings, respecting the historic significance of the site while enhancing its landscape setting.

Conclusion

The proposed SEND School at Sturmer Hall represents a carefully considered and responsive development that addresses a clear and pressing need for specialist educational provision. Through engagement with the Local Planning Authority and heritage consultees, the scheme has evolved to reduce impacts and improve its overall design.

It will deliver substantial educational, social, and community benefits, while respecting the historic and environmental qualities of the site, and is therefore considered to represent a sustainable and appropriate form of development.