



FAO: Planning Department,
Braintree District Council

Our ref: 17900
Application ref: 26/00731/OUT
Date: 20 May 2026

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVICE

RE: Sturmer Hall Church Walk Sturmer

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..

The proposed development is located within the historic extent of a high status medieval manorial complex. Sturmer Hall is the site of a Scheduled Monument, a moated site and mill complex (ID: 1012094) dating from the tenth century. The application site is also within the setting of the Grade I listed eleventh-century Church of St Mary (List Entry Number: 1122274).

The Scheduled Monument is formed by two separate scheduled areas, the northern area incorporating the moated site and Sturmer Hall, a former listed building with origins in the fifteenth century. The southern area contains a contemporary mill complex, comprising a waterfilled mill pond, a dam and tail race. The moated site is significant due to its association with the extant mill pond and adjacent church, which as a group provide clear evidence of the medieval manorial complex at Sturmer.

The proposed elements of the development are located across the Sturmer Hall estate, with buildings, landscaping and associated infrastructure. The central school building would be located within an existing service yard, with associated buildings accommodated across the rest of the site. Most of the existing buildings within the proposed development would be retained and reused.

A Heritage Statement (John Moore Heritage Services, 2025) has been submitted with the application. The Historic Environment Record has been consulted and an archaeological and historic background provided. The Heritage Statement considers the impact of the proposal on the above and below ground remains within and adjacent to the Scheduled Monument.



The conclusions of the Heritage Statement are that the cumulative effect of the proposed development is likely to result in a certain degree of harm. The level of harm caused to the Scheduled Monument as a result of the proposals is considered to be Less than substantial. This is considered an appropriate assessment of harm to the Scheduled Monument. 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).

The outline application does not provide details on the level of groundworks required for the proposed new builds and access roads. Any groundworks within the areas adjacent to the Scheduled Monument have potential for impact to buried remains contemporary with the scheduled monument. The proposed wellness building will be formed by extending the existing conference building. This is located at the moat edge on the boundary of the Scheduled Monument and it is unknown how the existing building was constructed and any impact it may have had on archaeological remains. The significance of the Scheduled Monument lies not only in its visible earthworks, but also in its buried archaeological remains, which have the potential to provide important evidence of medieval settlement and land use. The listing for the Scheduled Monument notes that the buried remains of the moated enclosure around a building platform, within a largely extant manorial landscape evident in both scheduled areas, is a nationally significant survival.

Some of the proposed lodge buildings are located in an area of former walled garden, the Heritage Statement indicates that part of the wall survives. While not contemporary with the moated site the structure is historic and forms part of the historic development of the site. It is unclear how this structure will be protected within the proposed development.

Braintree Policy LPP 59 states "Where important archaeological remains are thought to be at risk from development, or if the development could impact on a Scheduled Monument or Registered Park and Garden, the developer will be required to arrange for an archaeological evaluation of the site to be undertaken and submitted as part of the planning application.

As the application is an outline proposal then there is potential for methods of construction to change and locations of new build/access roads etc to alter. The Heritage Statement acknowledges that targeted archaeological investigation across the site is likely to result in a greater understanding of the manorial site, and any associated settlement. The results of any such investigation would contribute towards the understanding of the site and potentially help to guide the proposed development.

The application has failed to provide sufficient information or detail to determine the impact of the proposed development on archaeological remains that may have association with the Scheduled Monument.

In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance (NPPF Paragraph 207). The information currently submitted with the application does not fully resolve the significance of potential archaeological remains that may be affected. As such I do not consider the application to be in accordance with Paragraph 207.

In view of this, the following recommendation is made to further understand the significance (and potential significance) of archaeological remains that may be affected by this application.

Evaluation

The applicant should complete an archaeological evaluation to establish the significance, nature and complexity of the surviving archaeological assets. This should be completed prior to determination of this application. This work would permit the necessary consideration to be given to heritage assets affected and could lead to proposals for preservation in situ and/or the need for further investigation.

We recommend this application is not determined until an evaluation is completed and the results submitted in order to provide sufficient information on the nature, extent and significance of any archaeological remains affected by the proposed development.

Should the required information not be forthcoming, we request we are reconsulted prior to the determination of this application to provide appropriate conditions.

Teresa O'Connor MSc MCIfA

Historic Environment Consultant

Place Services

Email: HistoricEnvironment@essex.gov.uk



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.