



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 September 2025

by H Whitfield BSc (Hons) MSc MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 30 September 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/H1515/W/25/3369011

Stondon Massey House, Ongar Road, Stondon Massey, Essex CM15 0LD

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Mr & Mrs S Wright against the decision of Brentwood Borough Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/00146/FUL.
 - The development proposed is new stables and tack room/hay store for personal use.
-

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal site is situated within close proximity to a listed building. In considering whether to grant planning permission, I have been mindful of my statutory duty under Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 (the Act) which requires special regard to be given to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

Main Issue

3. The main issue is the effect of the proposal on the significance of Stondon Massey House, a grade II listed building, through development within its setting.

Reasons

4. The appeal site relates to part of an open, grassed field to the south-east of Stondon Massey House (the House), a Grade II listed building. The site is relatively flat, enclosed by a mixture of estate fencing between the site and the grounds of the House and trees along the highway boundary. Within the appeal site is a large agricultural barn which is linked to the House and the highway by gravel access tracks. Glimpsed views of this building are achievable from the highway through gaps in the tree cover and unobscured views are achievable from the House and its grounds.
5. Stondon Massey House is an early 19th century former Rectory, now house. The building has a square plan with low pitch gables to each face with deep eaves and well retained Palladian symmetry. The north-western side of the building contains a single storey servants' range and beyond this are service outbuildings. The formal gardens to the property extend to the south-west and include a separate walled garden and areas of formal landscaping. To the south-east, beyond the estate fencing enclosing the House and garden is a large agricultural field laid to grass, which

provides the House with an open countryside setting. There is therefore a distinct separation between the rather grand appearance of the house and its relatively well contained formal gardens; its service buildings which are located away from key views from the property; and the wider, open landscape and fields beyond, views over which are achievable directly from the House.

6. The significance of the House, insofar as it relates to this appeal, is derived from its historic and architectural interest and its setting, which includes the wider landscape and provides a tangible link to agrarian use. Irrespective of whether the appeal site forms part of the curtilage of the listed building or not, given the appeal site has a very close relationship with the House and forms part of the agricultural land immediately around it, it makes a positive contribution to its setting.
7. However, this open setting has been somewhat diminished by the presence of the large agricultural barn within the appeal site, which is understood to have been constructed under agricultural permitted development¹. This barn has a negative effect on the setting of the House by eroding the formerly open aspect views from the building and introducing incidental/service uses in a location that is prominently visible from the House and its gardens.
8. The proposed stable would be positioned adjacent to, and orientated to face, the agricultural barn, creating a courtyard between the buildings. The Council estimates it would be positioned approximately 70m from the House. Due to the proposed positioning, the stables would be intervisible with the House on approach down the access drive and from views from the property over the surrounding land.
9. The stables have been designed and would be constructed in materials to assimilate with the adjacent barn. However, the introduction of additional development in this formerly open land would result in an accumulation of buildings in this location and further erode the open agricultural setting of the listed building. Moreover, as stables are an incidental/service style development that have historically been discretely located to the north-west and away from key views from the building, the introduction of such a development in this highly prominent location would diminish the appreciation of its setting and significance. The fact that the stables would be clustered with the existing barn would only heighten its effect by collectively urbanising the formerly undeveloped land that closely surrounds the listed building.
10. I note that there is extant permission for a stable building² in the wider field that the appeal site is a part of. However, this is discretely located in the western corner, away from views from the listed building and its formal gardens and thus would retain its open landscape setting. As such it is not directly comparable to this appeal scheme.
11. Given the above, I find the proposal would fail to preserve the special interest and significance of Stondon Massey House through development affecting its setting. Given the nature and scale of the development, coupled with its close relationship with the listed building, the harm would be less than substantial, at the middle of the scale. Nevertheless, it would constitute harm, and this attracts considerable weight and importance in my decision.
12. The Framework states that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset, irrespective of the level of harm. Paragraph 215 of the

¹ Under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015. Council Ref. 20/01902/AGR.

² Council Ref. 23/00292/FUL

Framework requires less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The appellant contends that the development would be beneficial because it would provide improved animal security and care compared with the extant positioning of the stables as it would be more visible. However, I have been presented with limited substantive evidence which demonstrates that the site is at particular risk of crime or that visibility of the stables from the house is necessary in the interest of animal welfare. Nevertheless, these would constitute private benefits. The fact that the stables would be constructed in high quality materials to match the adjacent barn does not amount to a public benefit either.

13. The evidence indicates the development could provide a 10% on-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) which would provide environmental benefits. However, the BNG evidence relates to an alternative positioning for the stables and there is limited evidence relating to how this would be achieved. This notwithstanding, given the scale of the development, a 10% on-site BNG would not amount to a public benefit that would be sufficient to outweigh the less than substantial harm identified.
14. Given the above and in the absence of any defined substantiated public benefit, I conclude that, on balance, the development would fail to preserve the special historic interest and significance of Stondon Massey House, a Grade II listed building, through development affecting its setting. This would fail to satisfy the requirements of the Act, the historic environment protection policies of the Framework and conflict with the aims of Policies BE14 and BE16 of the Brentwood Local Plan 2016-2033 which together and amongst other things, require proposals to retain and wherever possible, enhance existing features which make a positive contribution to the significance of heritage assets and that great weight should be given to the preservation of a designated heritage asset and its setting.

Other Matters

15. I note the location of the stables has been amended to take on board concerns raised by interested parties. However, this does not overcome the harm I have identified in respect of the main issue.

Conclusion

16. For the reasons given above, the proposal conflicts with the development plan when read as a whole and the material considerations do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. Therefore, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

H Whitfield

INSPECTOR