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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 9 September 2025

by **R E Jones BSc (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 03 November 2025

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**Appeal Ref: APP/Z1510/W/25/3367373**

**Building North of 12 Grange Hill, Coggeshall, Essex CO6 1RA**

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant approval required under Article 3(1) and Schedule 2, Part 3, Class Q of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended).
  - The appeal is made by Mr John Clarke against the decision of Braintree District Council.
  - The application Ref is 25/00763/COUPA.
  - The development proposed is prior approval for the change of use of agricultural building to a dwellinghouse (Class C3), and for associated operational development - change of use to 1 No. residential dwelling.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Procedural Matter

2. In the absence of a description of development in the application form, the banner heading above has referred to the description in the appeal form. It is upon this that I have assessed the scheme.

### Background and Main Issues

3. Class Q of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (the GPDO) was revised in 2024, with the changes taking effect from 21 May 2024. However, under transitional arrangements applications submitted to the local planning authority prior to 20 May 2025, as in the case of the appeal scheme, can be subject to the earlier provisions of the class. My assessment has been made on that basis.
4. A previous appeal for prior approval at the site was dismissed on the grounds that the proposal was not permitted development<sup>1</sup>.
5. It is now common ground that the appeal scheme meets the requirements of paragraph Q.1 such that it would constitute development permitted under Class Q, subject to the prior approval of certain matters. These prior approval matters include, under Q.2.(1)(e), whether the location or siting of the development make it impractical or undesirable for the use of the building to change to a dwelling; Q.2.(1)(f) consideration of the building's design and external appearance; and Q.2.(1)(g) whether there would be provision of adequate natural light in all habitable rooms of the dwellinghouse.

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<sup>1</sup> Appeal Ref APP/Z1510/W/24/3341656, dismissed 12 December 2024

6. The Notice of Decision states that the proposal does not accord with Q.2.(1) (e), (f) and (g). Therefore, in light of the above, the main issues are:
- whether the location or siting of the building makes it otherwise impractical or undesirable for the building to change from agricultural use to a dwellinghouse, with particular regard to the effect on the provision of adequate natural light in all habitable rooms of the dwellinghouse; and
  - The effect of the design and external appearance of the building, with particular regard to the rural character of the area, the setting of listed buildings nearby and the character and appearance of the adjacent Coggeshall Conservation Area (CA).

## **Reasons**

### *Natural light*

7. The appeal site comprises an agricultural building surrounded, in most part, by tall trees and located close to the built-up edge of Coggeshall. The building, a steel framed structure, has a utilitarian form which is primarily clad in cement render. It was formerly in use as a grain store.
8. The proposal would involve the change of use of the agricultural building to a 6-bedroom dwelling house. Following the Council's previous concerns in relation to an earlier application at the site, regarding the extent of external alterations, the appellant has sought to conceal and recess the majority of window and door openings into three 'insets' cut into the building's south, west and north elevations.
9. The windows serving the bedrooms would face into the covered 'insets', rather than outwards towards the site's boundaries. Although the windows would be wide, enabling angled views outward, the profile of the surrounding inset would have an enclosing effect upon them, that would limit the amount of natural light entering the bedrooms. Moreover, the appellant's intention to retain trees around the appeal building and provide further planting, would significantly diminish natural light from entering the windows. This would be particularly acute where the windows are set into the north and western elevations of the building. During my mid-afternoon site inspection, I observed that the trees close to those elevations were densely planted, tall and largely evergreen to the extent that the appeal building's exposure to natural light was considerably restricted. The proximity of the windows to those trees therefore would severely limit natural light from entering the bedrooms.
10. For similar reasons relating to the presence of trees and the position of windows and doors within the recessed insets, the open plan living and dining room would experience similar conditions in respect of natural light.
11. Taken together, the enclosures around the windows and the proximity to the adjacent trees, would lead to poor levels of natural light entering habitable rooms. Occupiers would experience a poor-quality living environment that would be gloomy and dispiriting, resulting in unsatisfactory living conditions.
12. In conclusion, the location and siting of the appeal building would be impractical and undesirable and the proposed change of use to a dwellinghouse would not provide adequate natural light in all habitable rooms. The proposal therefore fails to meet the tests set out in paragraphs Q.2(1) (e) and (g) of Class Q of the GPDO.

### *Design and external appearance*

13. The appeal building sits at the edge of Coggeshall, where the pattern of development becomes more sporadic and low density. Buildings are separated from one another by green spaces and mature vegetation, while the proximity to nearby fields and the surrounding countryside becomes more apparent. This semi-rural character makes a positive contribution to the appeal building's context and reinforces its bone fide agricultural appearance.
14. The tall stand of trees lining the appeal site's northern boundary separates it from the grounds of The Grange Barn, a Grade I listed building. According to the official list entry<sup>2</sup>, this substantial former monastic barn dates from around the 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> century, while later rebuilding, alteration and repair took place in the 14<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and last centuries. Currently in the care of the National Trust, the building's historic use would have been to store and process agricultural produce.
15. Featuring a timber framed construction, the barn's internal nave and aisles are supported by massive timber posts and beams. The considerable roof structure that extends, in parts, almost to the ground level is finished in handmade red plain tiles. Other finishes include timber weatherboarding stained black and a brick soldier course at the building's base.
16. The significance and special interest of the building is largely derived from its architectural and historic interest and evidential value. Important contributors in these regards are its surviving historic fabric, its architectural form and scale, and its rarity as an enduring example of a monastic era agricultural building.
17. The building's significance and special interest also stem from its setting which includes extensive green spaces framed by mature trees to the south and west. Although part of that area, comprises a staff and visitor car park, these largely undeveloped spaces and the associated trees that partly surround the barn, together with the adjacent countryside to the west, provide a tranquil setting from which the scale and historic significance of the building can be understood and appreciated.
18. In the context of the appeal site, the tall stand of trees running along the site's northern boundary and close to the appeal building make a positive contribution to the above-mentioned setting of the Grange Barn. The screening effect of those trees considerably limits inter-visibility between the appeal building and the listed barn such that it has a neutral effect on its significance and special interest.
19. A short distance from the appeal building and separated by an access track/public right of way (PRoW) and boundary wall is The Grange, a Grade II listed farmhouse dating from around 1600. This large 3 storey building is timber framed and plastered. The main roof is hipped and finished in red plain tiles. Notable features include the large axial brick stacks emanating from the roof and several sash windows. The farmhouse overlooks The Grange Barn and given their mutual proximity, would likely have been historically associated with one another at an earlier point in time, as part of a larger farmstead.
20. The significance and special interest of The Grange is derived largely from its historic and architectural interest. Important contributors in these regards are its

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<sup>2</sup> List Entry Number:1123112

surviving historic fabric; imposing architectural style; and traditional construction and materials. The building's special interest and significance also stem, in part, from its setting, which includes its proximity to agricultural fields, green spaces and the likely historic, functional and visual links with the Grange Barn. The adjacent PRow that divides the two listed buildings also provides an important vantage point from where the building's significance and special interest can be experienced and valued.

21. In this context the appeal building is angled away from The Grange and clear visual perspectives of both buildings are partially screened by the tall trees that surround the appeal building. Therefore, other than being an agricultural building in proximity, to the former farmhouse, the contribution the appeal building makes to the significance of The Grange, insofar as it relates to its setting, is negligible.
22. The appeal site is adjacent, but outside the CA. The CA covers an expansive area primarily within the historic core of Coggeshall. The designation's special interest largely stems from the concentration of vernacular buildings, their architectural coherence, and the historic street layout of the settlement. Insofar as it relates to this appeal, the setting of the CA encompasses visual perspectives of the outlying countryside and the relationship of the village to its rural hinterland. The trees surrounding the appeal site, positively add to this character, however the contribution made to the CA as a whole is relatively minor.
23. The proposed alterations involve the insertion of two full height windows to the building's south elevation and a single window with a wide profile in the east elevation. The three large 'insets' would be located in the south, west and north elevations and would contain new timber cladding and several windows and doors within the recessed areas. Subject to maintenance the existing fibre cement walls and roof covering would remain.
24. Although the proposed 'insets' would create three large openings in the building, such features would not be untypical of modern agricultural buildings which often contain tall and wide openings or doors to facilitate access for larger machinery and loads. It is acknowledged that in this case the recessed areas would contain timber cladding, windows and doors, yet those would be set into the envelope of the building and have a discreet presence when viewed from nearby vantage points and adjoining land.
25. The other alterations to the building (i.e. 3 new windows) would be relatively minor interventions and taken in isolation would not detract from the design and appearance of the building.
26. The proposed change of use would likely involve the creation of a private amenity space and the presence of parked vehicles at the front of the building. Domestic paraphernalia and parked vehicles would, nevertheless, be partially screened from the adjacent PRow and other vantage points by the existing vegetation surrounding the site. Further landscaping, as proposed by the appellant, would likely enhance that screening effect further, such that those domestic features would not detract from the appeal building and the rural character of the surroundings.
27. On this basis the proposed changes would not significantly alter the form and utilitarian appearance of the appeal building. While attendant parking and the domestication of the land around the building would be adequately screened.

28. In terms of the effect on the surrounding designated heritage assets, views of the proposed insets and the associated timber cladding and windows, would not be readily apparent from within the grounds of The Grange Barn due to the thick line of predominantly evergreen trees along the appeal site's northern boundary. The vegetation along the southern boundary where the appeal building faces the PRow is more sporadic and the alterations to the building would be viewed through limited gaps between the boundary trees. Therefore, visual perspectives of both The Grange and the appeal building would be glimpsed, but not obvious. Those views would be further obscured by the angled relationship between the buildings, their separation distance from one another and the presence of a small building close to the appeal site's boundary with the PRow. The trees to be retained alongside the additional planting proposed around the boundaries of the site would help maintain the setting of the surrounding designated heritage assets. On this basis their retention could be secured through appropriate planning conditions, were I to allow this appeal.
29. Accordingly, the significance that those listed buildings draw from their setting would be preserved. It also follows that there would not be harm to, the significance of the adjacent CA through development affecting its setting.
30. Taking the above reasons into account, I conclude that the proposal would not have a harmful effect on the design and external appearance of the building, with particular regard to the rural character of the surrounding area, its effect on the setting of adjacent listed buildings and the character and appearance of the adjacent CA.

### **Other Matters**

31. The Council's evidence includes the official list entry for 15 Grange Hill, a Grade II\* listed building. This domestic property dating from the late 14<sup>th</sup> century has a timber frame construction, plastered walls and handmade red plain tiles. Its age and proximity to The Grange Barn and the former Abbey to the east, are indicative of the building having monastic origins.
32. The building's significance and special interest stem mainly from its architectural and historic interest. Its form, scale, surviving historic fabric and evidential links to the monastic period are all important in these respects.
33. The appeal building is located a significant distance from the listed building and screened by intervening buildings and vegetation. On this basis I am satisfied that its special interest and significance would be preserved.
34. The appellant indicates that the use of the building as a grain store has ceased and the proposal would put the building back into use. I acknowledge that this would prevent further decline and deterioration of the building, yet the scheme is not acceptable in other respects, and the benefits of reuse would not outweigh the harm to future occupiers, described above.
35. The proposal, according to the appellant would likely be Building Regulations compliant. Whilst that might be the case this alone does not overcome my concerns regarding natural light to habitable rooms. Similarly, the proposed residential use being consistent with the use of surrounding buildings, does not override my concerns.

36. Interested parties have made representations regarding the proposal's effect on highway safety, local wildlife, the condition of the access road and neighbouring living conditions. It has not been necessary for me to consider those matters further as I am dismissing the scheme for other reasons.

### **Conclusion**

37. Even though I have found that the appeal proposal would be acceptable insofar as it relates to its design and external appearance, it would nevertheless be in an impractical and undesirable location that would, in combination with the position of windows and adjacent vegetation, severely limit the amount of natural light to the proposed habitable rooms. These effects would subsequently be harmful to future occupiers.
38. The proposal therefore fails to satisfy the conditions of prior approval under Class Q of the GPDO and for this reason the appeal is dismissed.

*RE Jones*

INSPECTOR