



Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 April 2026

by Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge BA (Hons) MTP MRTPI IHBC

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 April 2026

Appeal Ref: APP/Z1510/W/26/3377665

St Mary's Church, Church Street, Steeple Bumpstead CB9 7DG

- 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 Mrs Jennifer Cullup against the decision of Braintree District Council.
 - The application Ref is 25/01187/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described on the application form as a temporary storage shed adjacent to the church in the closed churchyard.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The storage shed has already been erected and so this appeal seeks planning permission retrospectively.

Main Issues

The main issues are the effect of the development on (a) the character and appearance of the area, and (b) the significance of Steeple Bumpstead Conservation Area and the listed buildings known as the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin (Grade I), the Lock Up Approximately 30 Metres North West of Parish Church (Grade II) and the Retaining Wall on North Side of Churchyard (Grade II).

Reasons

Character and appearance

3. The appeal site comprises the churchyard surrounding St Mary's Church which is an area of green space on the south side of Church Street. There are many historic buildings and structures along the street which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. There are views of the medieval church across the churchyard from the street, which reinforce the high quality townscape in this location.
4. The storage shed is a box-like structure with a shallow mono-pitch roof and black rainwater goods. Despite the use of timber, its design is highly standardised and of little architectural merit, resembling a typical garden shed. While it is positioned away from the church's main entrance, its location next to the church's north elevation means that it is clearly visible from the street above the churchyard wall. Consequently, the shed's rudimentary design and prominent siting detract from the quality of the local townscape. Painting or staining the shed a different colour would not adequately mitigate the negative effects as it would remain a basic structure in a highly visible and sensitive location.

5. It is possible that moving the shed to a less prominent part of the churchyard could lessen the overall effects. The appellant has proposed an alternative location in the north-west corner underneath an existing tree canopy. However, the appeal process should not be used to evolve a scheme. The amendment would involve a fundamental change due to the use of an entirely different location. This could be unfair on interested parties and consultees who may not be aware of the changes. Therefore, I have not taken the proposed amendments into account.
6. Concluding on the first main issue, the development causes harm to the character and appearance of the area. Therefore, it conflicts with Policies SP7, LPP47 and LPP52 of the Braintree Local Plan 2013-2033 (LP) and Policy SB3 of the Steeple Bumpstead Neighbourhood Plan 2025. Amongst other things, these policies require high standards of design that respond positively to local character and context, especially in historic areas, using appropriate materials and locations. The development also does not accord with Paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which seeks the creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places.

Heritage assets

7. Steeple Bumpstead Conservation Area encompasses the historic core of the village which is predominately focused on North Street, Chapel Street, and Church Street. The first two are main roads through the village with a mix of historic and modern buildings. Church Street is a minor connecting road but with a rich concentration of historic buildings and structures utilising brick, stone and render, some of which is pargetted. Green spaces like the churchyard also add to the quality of the historic environment. Thus, the appeal site makes an important contribution to the conservation area and its significance.
8. St Mary's Church is Grade I listed and dates to the 11th century with flint rubble and red brick walls and a tall west tower. It has considerable architectural and historic interest as a medieval parish church that has undergone many alterations over the centuries. The nave is flanked by two large aisles to the north and south. The north aisle has three large window openings, with the easternmost bricked up and whitewashed due to the siting of an 18th century monument inside the church. However, this does not detract from the prominence and grandeur of the north aisle viewed externally, which makes an important contribution to the listed building and its significance. The churchyard forms a key part of the listed church's immediate surroundings and so the appeal site contributes positively to its setting.
9. The retaining wall on the north side of the churchyard is Grade II listed and dates from the 17th century. It is a mix of stone and brick with several buttresses and has architectural and historic interest as a well-established boundary wall. The lock-up at one end of the wall is also Grade II listed and dates from the late 18th or early 19th century. It is a small red brick structure with slate roof, timber door and iron grill and has architectural and historic interest as a building presumably once intended for detaining people. The churchyard provides an important backdrop to both listed structures and so the appeal site contributes positively to their settings.
10. The effect of the shed on the conservation area is similar to the effect on the character and appearance of the area, with the standardised design and prominent siting detracting from the historic townscape including views across the

churchyard. The shed detracts from the overall setting of the church, retaining wall and lock-up, as it can be seen in views that incorporate these listed structures.

11. There is also a more direct effect on the church due to the proximity of the shed to the north aisle. While the bricked up aisle window provides no light or view into the church, it remains an important part of the church's evolution. The shed obscures the lower half of this large former opening and detracts from the impressive composition of the north aisle elevation. The rudimentary design and materials fail to respect the architectural richness of the church. While not physically attached to the church, the shed is sited so close to the aisle wall that it resembles an incongruous extension to the historic building. The negative effects could not be mitigated through painting or staining for the reasons set out above, while it is not appropriate within the scope of this appeal to relocate the shed elsewhere.
12. Reference is made to the shed as a temporary structure until funds are available to make alternative arrangements. However, there are no details on timeframes or what an alternative might look like (other than a relocated shed). Therefore, this does not reduce the harm I have found.
13. Consequently, the development has a negative effect on the character and appearance of the conservation area and the special interest and setting of the three listed buildings, causing harm to the significance of all four heritage assets. The harm is less than substantial but not insignificant. NPPF paragraph 212 requires great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets irrespective of the level of harm. NPPF paragraph 213 requires clear and convincing justification for any harm or loss, while NPPF paragraph 215 requires less than substantial harm to be weighed against the public benefits of a proposal.
14. It is evident that the church requires additional storage space as there is limited room within the building itself and a need to keep various equipment in a safe and secure place. An external shed avoids harm to the historic fabric of the church building and provide benefits to the congregation in terms of accessibility, site maintenance, and other functions. There is local support for the development too. However, it has not been adequately shown why the shed needs to be sited immediately next to the church when there are potentially less harmful alternative locations within the churchyard. Thus, the public benefits attract only modest weight and do not outweigh the harm identified. There is no clear and convincing justification for the development as a result.
15. Concluding on the second main issue, the development has a harmful effect on the significance of the conservation area and listed buildings with insufficient public benefits. Therefore, it does not accord with LP Policies LPP53 and LPP57 which seek to preserve and enhance heritage assets, having regard to their setting and the effect of development in terms of views, materials and design. It also does not accord with NPPF paragraphs 212, 213 and 215.

Conclusion

16. For the above reasons, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Tom Gilbert-Wooldridge

INSPECTOR