

OUTDOOR CIVIL MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

(UPDATED MARCH 2022)

FAQS FOR REGISTRATION SERVICES	PAGES 2 - 5
FAQS FOR VENUES	PAGES 6 - 11
FAQS FOR COUPLES	PAGES 12 - 13

OUTDOOR CIVIL MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR REGISTRATION SERVICES
(UPDATED MARCH 2022)

Ceremonies taking place in the linked outdoor areas

Q.1: How will I know where in the linked outdoor areas the ceremony is taking place?

A: The venue must have obtained prior confirmation from the superintendent registrar of the district (or the authority as the case may be) in which the Approved Premises are situated that, in their opinion, the location in the outdoor areas where it is proposed the proceedings will take place is seemly and dignified.

Approved Premises must display a notice stating a description of the location where the outdoor proceedings are taking place. For individual proceedings, these must be clearly signposted at public entrances to the linked outdoor area and the built premises, to ensure guests and registration officials can locate the area. Generalised signage is not sufficient.

Q.2: How will I know whether the ceremony is legally taking place in the linked outdoor areas?

A: Approved Premises **must** have discussed the proposed location with the superintendent registrar and obtained their confirmation that the location is seemly and dignified. Where the land in question is not enclosed by a clearly defined boundary (i.e. a fence or other visible marker) the onus is on the responsible person at the Approved Premises to satisfy the superintendent registrar that the proposed location is within the boundary of the land. Superintendent registrars will be mindful of the need to ensure they do not conduct proceedings in contravention of the regulations. If there is any doubt, evidence should be sought from the responsible person at the Approved Premises prior to agreeing to conduct any ceremony at the proposed location.

Q.3: What should I do if I arrive to conduct a ceremony in the linked outdoor areas of an Approved Premises and the location of the ceremony within the linked outdoor areas is not in my view seemly and dignified?

A: This situation should not arise as Approved Premises are required to obtain the confirmation of the superintendent registrar that the proposed location is seemly and dignified, prior to any ceremony being arranged at the proposed location.

Q.4: What arrangements will venues be asked to make in the event of inclement weather?

A: Venues should have a suitable contingency available. This may be an approved room or a covered structure within the linked outdoor areas. Any contingency must

comply with health and safety requirements including fire risk assessment numbers for the room or covered structure.

Q.5: Can I refuse to officiate at the ceremony if it is in the open and there is inclement weather?

A: This should not be necessary, as Approved Premises should consider contingency arrangements for ceremonies scheduled to take place in the linked outdoor areas. The superintendent registrar will make the final decision as to whether a ceremony must move location.

Q.6: If the marriage/civil partnership notices and schedule refers specifically to the name of an approved room, can the marriage/civil partnership take place in the linked outdoor areas of the Approved Premises?

A: Yes. As currently, notices and the schedule will continue to include the name as shown on the approval but naming a specific room does not prevent the proceedings taking place in the linked outdoor areas.

Whether an application is needed to use any linked outdoor areas and the use of plans

Q.7: When an existing Approved Premises proposes to use their linked outdoor areas, does the venue need to describe the outdoor space and locations within it to be used for ceremonies, alongside the description of the room(s) within the built premises which are already approved?

A: No. There will be no requirement for an existing Approved Premises to submit a revised plan showing the linked outdoor areas of the Approved Premises, nor the locations within the linked outdoor areas at which ceremonies are proposed to take place. However, Approved Premises must obtain prior confirmation from the superintendent registrar of the district in which the Approved Premises are situated, or the authority, as the case may be that, in their opinion the location in the linked outdoor areas where it is proposed that proceedings take place is seemly and dignified.

However, where an existing Approved Premises is renewing its approval, the venue will need to show on the plan both the room(s) within the built premises for which approval is sought and also the linked outdoor areas within which it is proposed to conduct outdoor proceedings (though not the specific locations within these areas where proceedings will be conducted). This is because the amended definition of “premises” means ‘the built premises together with any linked outdoor areas’.

Q.8: Are applicants for new Approved Premises required to provide a plan/drawing of any linked outdoor areas which it is proposed to use, in addition to showing the room(s) to be used within the built premises?

A: Premises applying for the first time to become Approved Premises will need to provide a plan which shows the extent of the full premises, i.e. the built premises and

any linked outdoor areas of which the built premises form part. However, it is not necessary to show specific locations within the linked outdoor areas where ceremonies are proposed to take place. As now, venues must show the room(s) for which they seek approval, they cannot seek approval for their linked outdoor areas only.

Q.9: Given that for existing Approved Premises there is no formal application process, how can the public object to the use of any linked outdoor areas on an Approved Premises on grounds of noise, overcrowding, anti-social behaviour etc?

A: We do not anticipate a significant number of complaints but if a complaint is made, existing planning/nuisance regimes will deal with any issues which may arise.

Health and safety

Q.10: How can I be satisfied all health and safety considerations relevant to the linked outdoor areas, and any fire precautions in respect of structures in them, have been met if they have not previously been seen?

A: Approved Premises will be advised it is their responsibility to ensure that any linked outdoor areas meet with existing health and safety requirements and venues may consult with the local authority for the avoidance of doubt. The local authority may carry out checks to ensure that any linked outdoor areas and/or structures to be used for outdoor proceedings are compliant.

Q.11: What should I do if I arrive to conduct a ceremony at an Approved Premises in the linked outdoor areas and the area or the specific location within it appears to be unsafe?

A: This situation should be mitigated by prior consultation by the Approved Premises with the local authority as to the suitability of the linked outdoor areas in terms of health and safety considerations. The onus is on Approved Premises to ensure that appropriate health and safety measures are in place and are being complied with by staff. Despite this, if you have serious concerns about health and safety you should contact your local authority who will advise you how or whether to proceed. Where health and safety measures appear inadequate the local authority may advise you not to conduct the ceremony.

Q12: As ceremonies can take place in approved rooms and in linked outdoor areas, does it mean that the couple, witnesses and registration officer(s) can be split between the approved room and outdoors for the ceremony?

A: The marriage must be solemnized in the presence of two witnesses, the superintendent registrar and registrar, or two witnesses and civil partnership registrar for a civil partnership formation. For the avoidance of doubt, all parties (registration officer(s), the couple and any witnesses who are signing the schedule) should be in the approved room or wholly outdoors.

The 2022 regulations are available at this link: [The Marriages and Civil Partnerships \(Approved Premises\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Amended RG Guidance for the approval of premises as venues for civil marriages and civil partnerships (the ninth edition) will be available from 6 April 2022 at [The Registrar General's guidance for the approval of premises as venues for civil marriages and civil partnerships - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

For venues which may wish to offer outdoor proceedings and couples who are thinking of having an outdoor ceremony on approved premises, the Ministry of Justice is adding the guidance below at: [Outdoor civil marriage and civil partnership ceremonies - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

OUTDOOR CIVIL MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR VENUES

(UPDATED MARCH 2022)

Definition of “premises” and associated practicalities

Q.1: How are “premises” defined in the Regulations and what does this mean in practice?

A: The definition of “premises” is the “built premises” together with any “linked outdoor areas”. “Built premises” means a permanently immovable structure (for example, a building or other structure) comprising at least a room, or any boat or other vessel which is permanently moored. “Linked outdoor areas” means any areas within the boundary of the land of which the built premises form part, which are not built premises and which may be used in common with the built premises.

Approved Premises can conduct civil marriage and civil partnership proceedings in the room(s) within the built premises which are approved for those proceedings **and** also at locations outdoors within the boundary of the land on which the built premises stand, provided that certain conditions are met. In particular, Approved Premises will need to consult in advance with the superintendent registrar **before** arranging any proceedings in the outdoor area, to obtain prior confirmation that the outdoor location fulfils the requirement to be seemly and dignified.

This amended definition of “premises” captures outdoor locations within the boundary of the same property as the Approved Premises and allows proceedings to be held in semi-permanent structures (such as marquees) within the linked outdoor area, without any requirement that the structure have at least 50% open sides (as was required by the temporary regulations (in force between 1 July 2021 and 5 April 2022)).

It is very important that venues undertake this prior consultation with the superintendent registrar. Failure to obtain prior confirmation that the proposed location of outdoor proceedings is seemly and dignified could result in the ceremony not taking place on the day. Superintendent registrars will not conduct proceedings in contravention of the 2005 Regulations (as amended).

Q.2: What is meant by “any area within the boundary of the land of which the built premises form part?” and “... which are not built premises and which may be used in common with the built premises”?

A: The “any area within the boundary of the land of which the built premises form part” will be the land on which the built premises stand. In other words, the Approved Premises will be able to conduct proceedings in outdoor spaces on the same property (including semi-permanent structures, such as marquees). The onus is on the Approved Premises to satisfy the superintendent registrar that the proposed

location for outdoor proceedings is within the boundary of the land of which the built premises forms part.

The land must be land which is available for use by the Approved Premises. The 2005 Regulations (as amended) do not permit other premises which stand on the land, and which are **not** Approved Premises, to conduct proceedings in the linked outdoor area.

Q.3: Will I be able to use other land I own which is nearby or the forest or park adjacent to my land?

A: No. The 2005 Regulations (as amended) only permit proceedings to take place in the linked outdoor areas within the boundary of the land of which the built premises form part.

Q.6: If I erect a semi-permanent structure, such as a marquee, can this be used for ceremonies?

A: Yes. Under the 2005 Regulations (as amended) these structures can be used in the linked outdoor areas and there is no requirement for the structure to have at least 50% open sides as was required by the temporary regulations (in force between 1 July 2021 and 5 April 2022).

Q.7: Can a ceremony take place fully outdoors, with no structure required?

A: Yes. The 2005 Regulations (as amended) permit this, but the proceedings must be within the boundary of the land of which the built premises form part and must take place in a location which the Approved Premises may use. However, you must first consult the superintendent registrar as to the proposed location. They must confirm that in their opinion the proposed location is seemly and dignified. They must also approve the arrangements for and contents of the proceedings. Other conditions must also be met for the proceedings to take place, which include ensuring public access and providing notices and directions for the location of the proceedings.

Q.8: Can I use anywhere within the linked outdoor areas for ceremonies?

A: Yes, in principle, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior confirmation must be secured from the superintendent registrar of the district in which the Approved Premises are situated, or the authority, as the case may be, that in their opinion, having regard to the primary use, situation, construction and state of repair, the proceedings will take place in a seemly and dignified location within the linked outdoor areas.
2. The location within the linked outdoor areas at which the proceedings take place must be identifiable by directions, which are capable of being stated in a notice to enable the public to access the location.
3. No food or drink may be sold to or permitted to be consumed by persons attending the proceedings when gathering for the purposes of the proceedings

or during the proceedings. However non-alcoholic drinks may be permitted to be consumed prior to the proceedings.

Note: This condition applies to the immediate area where the ceremony is taking place, rather than to the venue as a whole at that time, thereby not prohibiting the sale of food and drink to be consumed elsewhere or as part of other events at the same time at the venue.

4. A suitable notice stating—

- (a) that the premises have been approved for the proceedings;
- (b) the description of the location within the linked outdoor areas at which the proceedings are to take place; and
- (c) directions to the location within the linked outdoor areas at which the proceedings are to take place;

must be displayed at each public entrance to the premises and the built premises for one hour prior to and throughout the proceedings.

If you conduct proceedings in the linked outdoor areas, a notice must be displayed at the public entrances to the built premises as well as at public entrances to the linked outdoor areas.

It is important to note from the above that locations must be capable of description so that couples, their guests, registration officers and the public can easily find their way to the location. It is for the responsible person at the Approved Premises to ensure that this, and other conditions, are met.

Q.9: Do I need to apply for planning permission if I want to erect a covered structure in my linked outdoor areas?

A: You should discuss your proposal with your local planning officer. They will be able to advise on whether any new planning permission or revisions to any existing planning permission is required. It is not possible to provide generic guidance on this.

Q.10: Do I need to hold ceremonies in the same place(s) every time or can I change the locations?

A: No. Within any linked outdoor areas, venues have the flexibility to change locations. However, the responsible person at the Approved Premises should discuss any changes in advance with the superintendent registrar. Any location changes should be compliant with the conditions set out at Q.8 above.

Q.11: My Approved Premises has an outdoor space which is a rooftop. Can I use this for ceremonies?

A: Usually, yes, and subject to the conditions set out at Q.8 above. This will be for discussion between individual venues and the local authority as it depends on a number of factors, e.g. whether the rooftop forms part of the land of which the built premises form part and is available for use in common with the built premises,

whether the rooftop is shared and, if so, whether its use for proceedings would breach any sharing arrangement in place.

Q.12: I am currently not allowed to provide food or drink before or during a ceremony in the room(s) approved for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at my Approved Premises. Will I be able to do so if a ceremony is held in the linked outdoor areas?

A: This forms part of the conditions set out at Q.8 above. No food or drink may be sold to or permitted to be consumed by persons attending the proceedings when gathering for the purposes of the proceedings or during the proceedings. However non-alcoholic drinks may be permitted to be consumed prior to the proceedings.

Note: This condition applies to the immediate area where the ceremony is taking place, rather than to the venue as a whole at that time, thereby not prohibiting the sale of food and drink to be consumed elsewhere or as part of other events at the same time at the venue.

Q.13: Will there be a maximum number of guests who can attend a ceremony which is fully outdoors or within a structure outdoors?

A: The maximum number of guests will depend on a number of factors including, health and safety and fire precautions (including in relation to any structure within which the outdoor proceedings are to take place), and any planning restrictions which may be in place or which may be imposed by the local authority.

Approved Premises should also consider how the same number of guests might be accommodated in an approved room or covered structure outdoors in the event of inclement weather, whilst also meeting other relevant conditions, e.g. health and safety.

Q.14: Can other activities take place at or near the location of outdoor marriage or civil partnership proceedings in my linked outdoor areas?

A: The 2005 Regulations (as amended) do not impose any restriction on other activities taking place at the location of outdoor proceedings. However, Approved Premises must obtain prior confirmation from the superintendent registrar of the district in which the Approved Premises are situated, or the authority, as the case may be, that, in their opinion the location in the linked outdoor areas where it is proposed that proceedings take place is seemly and dignified. They must also approve the contents of and arrangements for the proceedings.

Approved Premises are strongly advised to ensure that no other activities are planned to take place within the linked outdoor areas at the same time as the proceedings, to ensure that such activities will not affect the prior assessment of the location for the proceedings as being seemly and dignified.

Q.15: I don't want to offer outdoor ceremonies. Does the law require me to make these available?

A: No. The 2005 Regulations (as amended) are permissive. It is for individual Approved Premises, in discussion with their local authority, to decide whether they wish to offer outdoor ceremonies and (if so) on what basis.

Whether an application is needed to use the linked outdoor areas and the use of plans

Q.16: I am the owner of an existing Approved Premises. Will I have to apply to use my linked outdoor areas for ceremonies?

A: No. It will not be necessary to apply to use your linked outdoor areas as the 2005 Regulations (as amended) allow, on a permissive basis, the use of linked outdoor areas of built premises which have already been approved. However, Approved Premises must first discuss with the superintendent registrar the proposed locations in linked outdoor areas at which proceedings are to take place, **prior to arranging those proceedings**, to obtain confirmation that the location fulfils the requirement to be seemly and dignified. Other conditions set out at Q.8 above must also be met.

Q.17: I am the owner of an existing Approved Premises. Will I have to submit a revised plan showing the linked outdoor areas of the premises and the locations within these areas I wish to use before I can use them for ceremonies?

A: No. It will not be necessary to submit revised plans showing the linked outdoor areas it is proposed to use or specific locations within these areas where it is proposed to conduct proceedings. However, venues must first discuss with the superintendent registrar the proposed location for the proceedings prior to making any arrangements and obtain confirmation that the location is assessed to be seemly and dignified.

However, where you are applying to renew your approval, you will need to show on the plan both the room(s) within the built premises for which approval is sought and also the linked outdoor areas within which it is proposed to conduct outdoor proceedings (though not the specific locations within these areas where proceedings will be conducted). This is because the amended definition of “premises” means ‘the built premises together with any linked outdoor areas’.

Q.18: I am the owner of a venue and am applying for it to become Approved Premises for the first time. When I make my application, do I need to show the linked outdoor areas of the premises on the plan, and the locations within these areas I intend to use for ceremonies?

A: You will need to provide a plan which shows the extent of the whole premises – so both the room(s) in the built premises for which approval is sought **and** any linked outdoor areas of which the built premises form part. It is not necessary, however, to show specific locations within the linked outdoor areas where proceedings are proposed to take place.

You must also first discuss with the superintendent registrar of the district in which the approved premises are situated, or the authority, as the case may, the proposed location for the proceedings prior to making any arrangements and obtain confirmation that the location is assessed to be seemly and dignified.

You must show the indoor room(s) for which you are applying for approval as you cannot apply to only use your linked outdoor areas.

Q.19: I am the owner of existing Approved Premises. Will I need to pay an additional fee to use my linked outdoor areas?

A: If you are an existing Approved Premises owner, there will be no additional fee for using the linked outdoor areas of which the built premises form part.

Q.20: I am the owner of a venue which is currently not Approved Premises and am applying for approval. Will I need to pay an additional fee to use my linked outdoor areas?

A: You should discuss this with your local authority before submitting your application.

Health and safety

Q.21: Are there any additional health and safety requirements I must meet?

A: You should ensure the location of proceedings in the linked outdoor areas you propose to use meet with existing health and safety requirements, in the same way as if using these spaces for other aspects of the ceremony, e.g. receptions, photographs, etc. It is recommended you consult the local authority in advance to ensure the space is suitable, e.g. access issues for individual registrars (and guests), extreme allergies (e.g. animals, plants). The local authority may wish to carry out checks to ensure that any linked outdoor areas are compliant. If using a partially covered structure you should also consider appropriate fire precautions.

OUTDOOR CIVIL MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FOR COUPLES
(UPDATED MARCH 2022)

Q.1: Can I get married or register a civil partnership outdoors at all types of venue?

No. This applies to civil marriages or civil partnerships which take place on Approved Premises, such as hotels, where they can be held in the outdoor grounds of the premises, providing that the venue agrees to conduct outdoor ceremonies and can comply with various conditions. Religious premises which are already approved for civil partnership registration will be able to hold the civil partnership ceremony within the grounds of the premises if they wish to offer this option. In either case you will need to discuss what is possible with the venue.

Civil marriages which are held at a register office and religious marriages conducted in a place of worship cannot currently be held outdoors.

Q.2: I'm considering having an outdoor ceremony at an Approved Premises venue but I'm not sure which venues offer this option. Is there a register or list which shows which venues in my area will be providing outdoor ceremonies?

No. However, there is a list of [Approved Premises](#) and you can make enquiries of individual venues in the same way you would in order to determine whether other facilities may be available.

Q.3: I have an existing ceremony booked at an Approved Premises. Can I now have that ceremony outdoors?

You should discuss this with the venue as soon as possible. The law allows ceremonies to take place outdoors in the grounds of the venue. However, whether you can change your ceremony from an approved room at the Approved Premises to a location in the grounds depends on whether the venue is offering outdoor ceremonies. The venue must also first obtain prior confirmation from the local authority that the proposed location for your outdoor ceremony is seemly and dignified. It is important that you discuss your wishes with the venue before making any firm plans.

Q.4: Will I need to change my notice of intention to marry or form a civil partnership if I have my ceremony in the grounds of the Approved Premises?

No. This will not be necessary unless you are changing to a different venue (for example, if your current venue has decided not to offer outdoor ceremonies).

Q.5: Will my ceremony be cancelled in the event of inclement weather?

Venues have been advised to consider contingency plans so that a ceremony can still take place on the day. You should discuss and agree this in advance with the Approved Premises. This may be use of an approved room within the premises, or a covered structure in the grounds.

Q.6: Can I have an unlimited number of guests at my ceremony if it is to be held outdoors?

The maximum number of guests who can attend your ceremony will depend on a number of factors, including, health and safety and fire precautions (including in relation to any structure within which the outdoor ceremony will take place), and any planning restrictions which may be in place or which may be imposed by the local authority on the venue.

Approved Premises will also need to consider how the guests can be accommodated in the event of inclement weather, whilst meeting health and safety requirements, which may differ, for example, if the ceremony needs to move to an approved room inside the premises.