

Becoming an Approved Venue for Marriage and Civil Partnerships.

Becoming an approved venue can be a way of generating income for your business and/or making your venue available to members of your community group for an event which is one the most important in someone's life.

The following information is a summary of the most frequently asked questions regarding how to become an Approved Venue. Should you require any further information, to arrange for us to visit you or have any further queries, please contact:

Anthony Hall, Superintendent Registrar.
Tel: 01325 346 604
Email: Anthony.hall@darlington.gov.uk

Q. Can any building be licensed as an approved venue ?

A. Although most buildings can be licensed, there are some restrictions:

The building must be a permanent building or structure eg, an outbuilding or conservatory attached to a building is fine but a gazebo or summerhouse wouldn't be.

Also a marriage or civil partnership can't take place on the open air eg. a garden.

The building cannot be currently or have previously been used as a place of worship eg. a former church or chapel cannot be licensed.

The building should be a safe and accessible place for both the Register Office staff and the guests.

There are operational conditions of being an approved venue which are attached to our application form. I would recommend that you would be able meet with them before applying.

Q. How much does it cost ?

A. The current fee is £1600 (subject to change on 1st April each year) which is payable at the time of application and provides a 3 year licence for the venue. Most venues recover this cost by recharging a portion of the cost of the licence as a room hire for the ceremony to the couple.

I would recommend that we have an informal visit to the venue before you submit your formal application and fee as fees cannot be refunded or changes made to the application once submitted.

Q. Do I have to make the venue available to anyone ?

A. Once you are granted a licence it will be included in a national list of approved venues and anyone may approach you to hold a ceremony at your venue. However in practice, who you take bookings from is entirely up to you and so in theory you could hold one ceremony during the 3 year period if you wanted to.

A licence can't be granted for a "one off occasion" and also the one licence applies to both Marriage and Civil Partnerships.

Q. How do I obtain a licence ?

The licensing process (for a first licence or a renewal) normally takes 6 months and you should allow this if you have any bookings or enquiries for ceremonies.

Stage 1	Expression of Interest	Visit by Registrar to assess Suitability of venue and designate Ceremony rooms and capacities of Rooms.
Stage 2	Formal Application	Submission of application and fee (non refundable)
Stage 3	Advertising and Visits	Advertising in the local press To allow for any objections by the Public. Visits by Fire, Building Control, Licensing Officer and Register Office to officially tour The venue and raise any concerns or Objections.
Stage 4	Licensing Committee	Consideration for approval of the Application by Licensing Committee
Stage 5	Grant of Licence	By the Superintendent Registrar.

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Q. How do I renew a licence ?

A. A licence is granted for a 3 year period. A first reminder will be sent from the Register Office a year before expiry. The renewal application and fee (again £1600) should be submitted 6 months before its expiry to allow for the above procedure.

If after the initial 3 year term of your first licence you decide not to renew the licence can lapse and be re applied for at anytime. However a Marriage or Civil Partnership cannot take place in an unlicensed venue.

Q. How will I know if it's for me ?

The Register Office team has a wealth of experience to guide venues new and established through becoming and being a successful venue. Although as a public organisation we cannot favour any individual business' we will nevertheless use our experience to help you understand customer's needs and trends and how to make the best use of the business as a ceremony venue.