

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL**NOTES ON THE REQUIREMENTS BEFORE AN APPROVAL CAN BE GRANTED**

The application must be made by the proprietor or trustee of the premises. When made on behalf of a limited company there should be a separate statement of the names and addresses of all the directors.

The premises must:-

1. having regard to their primary use, situation, construction and state of repair, be in the opinion of the authority, a seemly and dignified venue for the solemnization of civil marriages and/or the registration of civil partnerships.;
2. be regularly available to the public for use for the solemnization of marriages and/or the registration of civil partnerships (See note 1 below).;
3. have the benefit of adequate fire precautions which are acceptable to the authority, having consulted with the fire authority, and such other reasonable provision for the health and safety of persons employed in or visiting the premises (with appropriate certificates).The local Office Manager will wish to see your fire safety risk assessment when inspecting the premises prior to approval. See www.communities.gov.uk for more information regarding Fire Safety Risk Assessments.
4. have no recent or continuing connection with any religion, religious practice or religious persuasion which would be incompatible with the use of the premises for the solemnization of marriages in pursuance of Section 26(1)(bb) of the Marriage Act 1949 or the registration of civil partnerships in pursuance of Section 6(3A)(a) of the Civil Partnerships Act 2004.
5. include a room or rooms in which ceremonies of marriage will be solemnized or civil partnership registered if approval is granted which must be identifiable by description as a distinct part of the premises.
6. have appropriate planning permission;
7. include separate room(s) for pre-ceremony questioning by the Registrar;
8. have unfettered access to the public, which should preferably include access for disabled people;
9. have acceptable toilet facilities; and
10. have reasonable provision for car parking.

In considering the suitability of premises as a venue the local authority will have regard to the following Guidance from the Registrar General:

1. As a consequence of the coming into effect of the Civil Partnership Act 2004, applications for premises to be approved as a venue for Marriages now include approval as a venue for the registration of Civil Partnerships. The Government has stated that, "when granted (the Licence) will entitle the holder to use the premises for either the solemnisation of civil marriages or the registration of civil partnerships, or both. However, the requirement is that the premises must be regularly available for one or the other."

2. The law is intended to allow civil marriages and partnership registrations to take place regularly in hotels, stately homes, civic halls and similar premises without compromising the fundamental principles of English marriage and civil partnership law and Parliament's intention to maintain the solemnity of the occasion. The term "premises" is defined in Regulation 2(1) and there are restrictions introduced in Schedule 1. These will mean that certain premises would not be suitable for approval.
3. Marriages and partnership registrations must take place in readily identifiable premises. This will preclude them from taking place in the open air, in a tent, marquee or any other temporary structure and in most forms of transport.
4. Marriages must be solemnized and partnerships registered in premises with open doors, which the Registrar General interprets to mean that the public must have unfettered access to witness the marriage or civil partnership registration and make objections prior to or during the ceremony.
5. A private house is unlikely to be an appropriate venue for civil marriage or partnership registration. It would not be known to the public as such a venue or regularly available for their use.
6. The primary use of a building would also render it unsuitable if that use could demean marriage or partnership registration, or bring it into disrepute.
7. The secular nature of civil marriage and partnership registration precludes the use of any building with a recent or continuing religious connection. This effectively rules out any building or room whose description, purpose or appearance is still considered to be linked to religion. A chapel in a stately home and a building containing furniture or fittings associated with a place of religious worship, or which has stained glass windows depicting a religious image are examples of a continuing religious connection. However, premises in which a religious group meets occasionally may be suitable if the primary use of the premises is secular.
8. Marriages and partnership registrations on approved premises may be followed by a celebration; commemoration or blessing of the couple's choice, providing that it is not a religious ceremony and is separate from the civil ceremony. However if a religious blessing were to regularly follow ceremonies on particular premises, or be considered part of the service being offered on the premises, there may well be a religious connection which would breach the requirements and lead to the local authority having to consider revoking the approval.