

**NORTHUMBERLAND REGISTRATION SERVICE**

**APPROVED PREMISES**  
**For**  
**CIVIL MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP**

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

This Document contains **IMPORTANT** information  
Regarding the Licensing arrangements for Approved  
Premises for Civil Marriage & Civil Partnership  
Please read it carefully.

If you require any assistance or advice please contact:-  
The Proper Officer for Registration  
Northumberland County Council  
County Hall  
Morpeth.  
Northumberland.  
NE61 2EF

**Kathryn Guy** **01670 622542**  
**Superintendent Registrar**

**Lorraine Dewison** **01670 622544**  
**Proper Officer**

**Ceremony Coordination Team** **01665 602870**

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In this Document the term "Approved Premises" will  
mean an "Approved Premises for the celebration of Civil  
Marriage licensed under Section 26(1)(bb) of the  
Marriage Act 1949".

## **Part 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 GENERAL**

Civil Marriage was introduced on 1 July 1837. The Marriage Acts up until 1995 were very restrictive and couples wishing to celebrate their marriage in a civil marriage ceremony had to marry in the register office in the registration district in which one of them had a residential qualification.

The Marriage Act 1994 changed these restrictions by amending the Marriage Act 1949, and allowing couples greater choice and flexibility.

The 1994 Act allows registration authorities, to approve and licence suitable premises, other than existing Register Offices, where civil ceremonies may take place. Northumberland County Council is responsible for licensing venues in Northumberland.

The 2004 Civil Partnership Act also allows registration authorities in England and Wales, to approve and licence suitable premises, other than existing register offices where both civil marriage and civil partnership can take place. A Licence is approved for both civil marriage and civil partnership.

The County Council is pleased to accept applications for an Approved Premises Licence in respect of any premises that meet the criteria set out in these notes.

#### **1.2 THE CONTRACT BETWEEN THE COUPLE AND THE APPROVED PREMISES FOR CIVIL MARRIAGE OR CIVIL PARTNERSHIP**

Couples seeking to be married or enter a civil partnership at Approved Premises are still required to give Notice of Intention to marry or enter a Civil Partnership in person to the Superintendent Registrar of the Registration District(s) in which they live. The ceremony coordination team based at Alnwick are available to advise couples about legal requirements.

If the couple decide to hold their ceremony in an Approved Premises it will be the couples responsibility to approach the venue and arrange the necessary booking of the ceremony room etc. However, no booking for a marriage or civil partnership can be confirmed unless the ceremony coordination team based at Alnwick has been informed and has confirmed that registration staff will be available to conduct the civil ceremony.

All Licence Holders of Approved Premises must ensure that no confirmation of a booking of a civil marriage or a civil partnership can be made, unless the ceremony coordination team has given an assurance that registration staff will be available.

### **1.3 WHO CELEBRATES THE CIVIL MARRIAGE & CIVIL PARTNERSHIP**

The Registration and Marriage Acts require that all civil ceremonies are conducted by a superintendent registrar or deputy and registered by a registrar of marriages. There are slight differences relating to civil partnership these will be explained by the ceremony coordination team.

Registrars are appointed under the Northumberland Registration Scheme by the Proper Officer for the Northumberland Registration Service. The couple will be responsible for paying the fees for the attendance of these registration staff at an Approved Premises. The fees are set periodically by Northumberland County Council.

The Approved Premises will therefore not be responsible for providing anyone to conduct a civil ceremony.

## **Part 2**

### **APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

This application procedure will apply to all applications for a Licence as Approved Premises in the County of Northumberland. It may be amended from time to time by Northumberland County Council.

#### **2.1 WHO MAY APPLY FOR A LICENCE?**

Applications must be by named individuals who are the owner, lessee, trustee or authorised manager of the premises concerned. Where an applicant is not the owner of the premises for which the licence is sought, they must ensure that the owner has no objection to the application. The Applicant must appoint either themselves or another named person as the **"Responsible Person"** who will be the contact person and have the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the terms and conditions applying to the issue of the licence.

#### **2.2 APPLICATION PROCEDURE:-**

Applications will only be considered on the Northumberland County Council's official application form. This is available from the Proper Officer for Registration, Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF or telephone Kathryn Guy on (01670) 622542.

#### **2.3 THE COMPLETED APPLICATION FORM SHOULD BE RETURNED WITH:-**

- (i) Plan of the premises clearly identifying the room(s) to be licensed (if not previously submitted).
- (ii) A cheque to cover the Inspection and Licence Fee.

The premises will be inspected on behalf of Northumberland County Council to ensure compliance with the Licence Requirements and Conditions.

#### **2.4 ADVERTISEMENT AND CONSULTATION:-**

Northumberland County Council will publicise the Licence Application either in a local newspaper or on the public notices section of the Council website. This process is to ensure that members of the public have the opportunity to object to the approval, if they so wish during a statutory period of 21 days. The Council will also consult other interested authorities.

#### **2.5 APPROVAL:-**

Subject to the result of the inspection, and either non-receipt or non-acceptance of any objections the grant of the Licence is likely to be approved. If the grant of a Licence is approved the Licence Applicant will be informed within 5 working days of the decision. The Approval of a grant of a Licence may include specified conditions.

## **2.6 IF THE LICENCE IS NOT APPROVED:-**

If the Licence is **NOT** approved, the Licence Applicant may appeal within one month to the Policy Board Member for Customer and Cultural Services. A Licence Applicant may also appeal to the Policy Board Member against any additional and/or special conditions applied to the Licence by Northumberland County Council. The decision of the Policy Board Member is final. Any review by the Policy Board Member will be subject to a separate Review Fee.

## **2.7 LENGTH OF LICENCE:-**

A Licence will normally run for 5 years from the date of issue. Licence holders may apply for a renewal of a Licence beyond its expiry date not less than 6 MONTHS and not more than 12 MONTHS before that date. All renewals will be subject to this standard application procedure and fees.

## **2.8 AREAS WITHIN THE BUILDING THAT ARE APPROVED**

The Licence will apply to a named and identifiable building (the Approved Premises). The Licence is not transferable between premises or buildings.

Within the Approved Building an individual and identifiable room or rooms will be specified as the Ceremony Room(s) where civil marriage and civil partnership may be solemnised. There is no limit on the number of specified Ceremony Rooms in Approved Premises. Ceremonies must only take place in the room or rooms specified within the Licence.

In addition, although not covered by the Licence, the following requirements will also be applied by Northumberland County Council to each grant of a Licence. That the following rooms or areas are made available:-

- (i) A confidential Interview Room where necessary.
- (ii) A separate waiting room or area for the guests etc.

## **2.9 CHANGES TO THE LICENCE:-**

The Licence holder and/or the Responsible Person will be responsible for informing Northumberland County Council of any changes which will affect the Licence. These include:-

- (i) change of use of Approved Premises
- (ii) change of Licence Holder
- (iii) change of Responsible Person
- (iv) change in the qualification of the Responsible Person
- (v) any material change to the Licensed rooms or environment

Any change affecting the Licence may, at the discretion of Northumberland County Council, be treated as a re-application or a new application.

## **2.10 THE ROLE OF THE RESPONSIBLE PERSON**

Where the Responsible Person is not the Licence Holder he/she must have sufficient authority, as the representative of the Licence Holder, to enforce the conditions of the Licence or the reasonable requirements of the registration team. A deputy may be appointed to act in any absence of the Responsible Person.

The Responsible Person will liaise with the ceremony coordination manager over any matters affecting the ceremony. In addition he/she must be present before and during the civil ceremony to ensure compliance with all the Conditions attached to the grant of the Licence.

## **2.11 COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE:-**

A complaints procedure will be operated by Northumberland County Council details of this can be found on the Northumberland County Council website [www.northumberland.gov.uk](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk), alternatively, please contact the Proper Officer (contact details above).

## **2.12 REVOKING A LICENCE:-**

Northumberland County Council may revoke a Licence if:-

- (i) Any conditions attached to the grant of the Licence have been broken.
- (ii) The use of the premises has changed so that Northumberland County Council no longer considers the premises as a suitable venue for the solemnisation of Civil Marriage and Civil Partnership.

Normally three months' notice of the intention to revoke a Licence will be given, but this may be waived or reduced at the discretion of Northumberland County Council.

In addition Northumberland County Council will revoke a Licence immediately if so directed by the Registrar General.

## **2.13 TERMINATION OF A LICENCE:-**

Unless it is renewed, a Licence will be terminated at the end of its 5 year life. A Licence Holder may terminate a Licence by giving Northumberland County Council not less than 3 months' notice in writing. No refund of fees will be made in the event of termination of a Licence, whether voluntarily, or by revocation.

## **2.14 FEES PAYABLE:-**

The non-returnable fee payable for Licences approved is £2,000

Cheques should be made payable to:-  
NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

## **2.15 ADVERTISING**

The Licence Holder or any person or persons employed or acting on his/her behalf may not imply in any advertisement or statement that Northumberland County Council or the Northumberland Registration Service recommends the Approved Premises as a venue for civil marriage or civil partnership ceremonies.

The Licence Holder may use the following words to describe the grant of Licence as Approved Premises:-

"Licensed by Northumberland County Council (or NCC) for the solemnisation of civil marriage and civil partnership".



## **Part 3**

### **LICENCE REQUIREMENTS**

The following Licence requirements introduced by The Marriages (Approved Premises) Regulations 1995, and the Civil Partnership Act 2004 will apply to all Licences issued for Approved Premises in the County of Northumberland. They may be amended from time to time on instructions from the Registrar General.

#### **3.1 THE ACCOMMODATION MUST:-**

- (i) Having regard to its primary use, situation, construction and state of repair, provide a seemly and dignified location for the regular solemnisation of civil marriage and civil partnership.
- (ii) Be secular in nature and have no recent or continuing connection with any religion, religious practice or persuasion which would be incompatible with the use of the premises as a venue for the civil marriages and civil partnership.
- (iii) Be of a permanent immovable construction with a postal address.
- (iv) Have the benefit of adequate fire precautions and other appropriate provision for the health and safety of persons employed in and visiting the premises.
- (v) Include a room or rooms in which it is intended that civil ceremonies should be performed which are identifiable by description as a distinct part of the premises.

#### **ADDITIONAL LICENCE REQUIREMENTS**

The following Additional Licence Requirements which have been agreed by Northumberland County Council will apply to all Licences issued for Approved Premises in the County of Northumberland. They may be amended from time to time by Northumberland County Council.

#### **3.2 THE LICENCE HOLDER MUST:-**

- (i) Ensure that the premises are covered by an appropriate insurance policy and that this indemnifies Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland registration employees against any claims resulting from deficiencies in either the premises or facilities, or non-compliance by the Licence Holder with Northumberland County Council's Requirements and Conditions for the Issue of a Licence as an Approved Premises for Civil Marriage and Civil Partnership.
- (ii) Provide a confidential interview room where the Bride and Groom may be interviewed prior to the ceremony.
- (iii) Provide a separate room or area where guests for the marriage may wait prior to the ceremony.

## **Part 4**

### **LICENCE CONDITIONS**

The following Licence Conditions introduced by The Marriages (Approved Premises) Regulations 1995 and the Civil Partnership Act 2004 will apply to all Licences issued for Approved Premises in the County of Northumberland. They may be amended from time to time on the instruction of the Registrar General.

#### **4.1 THE HOLDER OF THE LICENCE MUST ENSURE:-**

- (i) That there is at all times an individual with responsibility for ensuring compliance with these conditions (the Responsible Person).
- (ii) That the Northumberland County Council is notified as soon as possible of any change or alteration to:-
  - (a) the plan submitted with the application for approval or in the use of the premises,
  - (b) the name or full postal address of the approved premises,
  - (c) the description of the room or rooms in which civil marriages or civil partnerships are to be solemnised,
  - (d) the name and address of the holder of the Licence, and
  - (e) the name, address or qualification of the Responsible Person.
- (iii) That the approved premises are made available for inspection by Northumberland County Council on its giving reasonable notice to the Licence Holder and/or the Responsible Person.
- (iv) That a suitable notice stating that the premises have been approved for the solemnisation of civil marriages under the Marriage Act 1994 and identifying and giving directions to the room in which the ceremony is to take place must be displayed at the main entrance to the premises for one hour prior to and during the ceremony.
- (v) That no food or drink is sold or consumed in the room where the ceremony is to take place, one hour prior to, or during the ceremony.
- (vi) That the ceremony takes place in the room(s) which has been identified as Licensed to be used for the solemnisation of civil marriages and civil partnership on the plan submitted with the application for approval.
- (vii) That the room in which a civil marriage is solemnised is separate from any other activity on the premises at the time of the ceremony.

- (iv) That the arrangements and content for each civil marriage or civil partnership ceremony meet with the prior approval of the ceremony coordination team manager.
- (v) That any reading, music, words or performance which forms part of a civil ceremony celebrated on the premises is secular in nature. For this purpose any reading or music played by way of introduction to, in any interval between parts of or by way of conclusion shall be treated as forming part of the ceremony.
- (vi) That public access to any civil ceremony solemnised in approved premises is permitted without charge.

#### **ADDITIONAL LICENCE CONDITIONS**

The following Additional Licence Conditions which have been agreed by Northumberland County Council will apply to all Licences issued for Approved Premises in the County of Northumberland. They may be amended from time to time by Northumberland County Council.

#### **4.2 THE HOLDER OF THE LICENCE MUST ENSURE:-**

- (i) BEFORE confirmation of a booking for a civil marriage or civil partnership ensure that the ceremony coordination team has been informed and have confirmed registration staff are available.
- (ii) That the Licence issued by Northumberland County Council is displayed in a prominent position within the main entrance to the building.
- (iii) That the name and address of the Superintendent Registrar for Northumberland, is prominently displayed.
- (iv) That the person(s) booking the accommodation for a marriage or civil partnership ceremony is aware of any limitations imposed on the size of the ceremony party by the size of the room numbers granted within the Licence.
- (v) That the following will have free and unfettered access to the Approved Premises when required:-
  - (a) Representatives of Northumberland County Council carrying out Inspections in respect of the Licence as set out in this Document.
  - (b) Registration Staff officiating at a civil marriage or civil partnerships at the Approved Premises.
- (vi) That Registration Staff officiating at a civil marriage or civil partnership have access to the ceremony room, at least 30 minutes before the ceremony is due to begin.

- (vii) that where possible, access is available for disabled persons, and where this is not possible the person(s) booking the accommodation is so informed at the time of making the booking.

### **SPECIAL LICENCE CONDITIONS**

Northumberland County Council reserves the right to apply Special Licence Conditions, other than those set out in these notes, to any grant of Licence as it considers necessary.

## **Part 5**

### **CODE OF GUIDANCE**

This provides a helpful list of the type of accommodation, facilities and best practice that may be available at Approved Premises and within a Marriage Room:-

#### **PUBLIC AVAILABILITY**

A Civil Marriage may take place on any day of the week, including bank holidays, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. However, there is a local arrangement in Northumberland that no civil marriages will take place on Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day and Good Friday.

#### **LOCATION OF MARRIAGE ROOM**

Where possible, the Marriage Room should be close to, or easily approached from, the main entrance to the building. Signs directing the public to the Marriage Room should be available and displayed on days when Civil Marriages are taking place.

#### **ROOM SIZE**

No minimum room size is set down by the County Council. In general, ceremony rooms usually accommodate between 25-40 people, but larger and smaller Marriage Rooms are acceptable.

Licence Applicants should carefully consider the type of civil marriages they are hoping to attract and therefore the likely size of the wedding party. They may wish to provide a range of room size options.

#### **ACCESS**

Wedding Party, Guests etc. will require access to the waiting area or room at least 20 minutes before the ceremony is due to begin. This may be subject to discussions between the Licence Holder and the Marriage Party. Any admission charge must be waived.

*A Civil Marriage is a public ceremony and any member of the public who wishes to attend must be able to do so without charge.*

#### **FURNITURE**

One table plus 4 chairs should be provided in the Ceremony Room.

Chairs for guests etc. may be provided, the number and position of the chairs to be dictated by the size of the room and with the agreement of the registration staff. There should at all times be free access and movement within the Marriage Room during the marriage ceremony.

## **LIGHTING**

Lighting levels must be satisfactory having regard to the size and location of the ceremony room. Lighting should not be altered during the course of the ceremony.

## **HEATING**

All rooms to be licensed must have suitable heating available.

## **VENTILATION**

All rooms to be licensed should have suitable ventilation to fresh/outside air either by opening windows or air conditioning systems.

## **TOILETS**

Toilet facilities should be available, and should be clean and easily accessible. A condition may be included in the Licence requiring such provision to be made available for guests and registration staff.

## **CLEANLINESS OF ROOMS**

The ceremony room(s), other room(s) included on the Licence, and any other rooms to be used should be adequately cleaned prior to the civil ceremony.

## **CAR PARKING**

Access/car parking for the bridal car and for guests, etc. may be the subject of Licence conditions.

## **MUSIC**

Where it is intended that music should be incorporated within the ceremony, this will be permitted at the discretion of the ceremony coordination team. Any music played must be secular. The Licence Holder will be responsible for ensuring compliance with Performing Rights, Phonographic Performance and any other requirements.

## **GENERAL**

Ideally a box of tissues, carafe of water and 4 glasses should be provided.

## **ARRIVAL**

On arrival at Approved Premises registration staff will make their presence known to the Licence Holder and/or the Responsible Person.

## **COMPLIANCE**

Registration staff will abide by any rules and regulations affecting the Approved Premises, provided that they do not conflict with:-

- (i) Northumberland County Council's requirements and Conditions for Approved Premises for Civil Marriage and Civil Partnership.
- (ii) Regulations and/or Code of Practice issued by the Registrar General.
- (iii) Any Marriage or Civil Partnership Acts etc.
- (iv) Their statutory responsibilities relating to the solemnisation of marriage and civil partnership.

## **COMPLAINTS**

A complaints procedure for use by (1) the general public using the Approved Premises and (2) Registration Staff officiating at a Civil Marriage or Civil Partnership will be in operation. All complaints will be referred to the Proper Officer and investigated by Northumberland County Council. The County Council may revoke any Licence where the Licence Holder neglects, ignores or abuses the conditions applying to the approval of the Licence as set out in the Requirements and Conditions for Approved Premises for Civil Marriages.

## **Part 6**

### **Ceremony Coordination Team**

27 Fenkle Street, Alnwick,  
Northumberland, NE66 1HP  
Telephone: (01665) 602870  
E-mail: [alnwickreg@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:alnwickreg@northumberland.gov.uk)

All ceremony bookings and arrangements for Northumberland are handled by the ceremony coordination team

### **NORTHUMBERLAND REGISTER OFFICES:-**

#### **Alnwick**

27 Fenkle Street, Alnwick,  
Northumberland, NE66 1HP  
Telephone: (01665) 602870  
E-mail: [alnwickreg@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:alnwickreg@northumberland.gov.uk)

#### **Berwick**

Council Offices, Wallace Green,  
Berwick-upon-Tweed, TD15 1ED  
Telephone: 0845 600 6400  
E-mail: [berwickreg@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:berwickreg@northumberland.gov.uk)

#### **Hexham**

Hadrian House, Market Street,  
Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3NH  
Telephone: 0845 600 6400  
E-mail: [hexhamreg@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:hexhamreg@northumberland.gov.uk)

#### **Morpeth**

The Town Hall, Market Place, Morpeth,  
Northumberland, NE61 1LZ  
Telephone: 0845 600 6400  
E-mail: [morpethreg@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:morpethreg@northumberland.gov.uk)



## **Part 7**

### **GUIDANCE FOR THOSE MARRYING AT APPROVED PREMISES**

1. As soon as a couple have made provisional arrangements for the date and time on which they wish to be married or enter a civil partnership at Approved Premises they should be advised to contact the ceremony coordination team on 01665 602870.
2. Without the presence of both the Superintendent Registrar or deputy and a Registrar of Marriages there can be no legal ceremony. It is, therefore, essential that the couple make an advance booking with the ceremony co-ordination team to ensure that registrars are available and the booking can be accepted and confirmed. A fee for the attendance of registration staff will be payable 8 weeks prior to the ceremony.
2. The couple will also have to give Notice of Marriage or Notice of intention to Enter into a Civil Partnership to the Superintendent Registrar(s) of the district(s) in which they live. This Notice must be given in person by both parties. The ceremony coordination will be able give advice regarding legal requirements that must be completed prior to the ceremony taking place.
4. The couple should be warned that any arrangements made for a marriage/civil partnership to take place at an Approved Premises are dependent on:-
  - (a) the attendance of the Superintendent Registrar/deputy and a Registrar of Marriages for the District in which the Approved Premises is situated, and,
  - (b) the issue of the Authorities for the Marriage/Civil Partnership by the Superintendent Registrar(s) to whom the legal notices has been given.
5. The couple should be advised that only a civil, non-religious ceremony can be permitted. Any music, reading, words or performance which forms part of the ceremony must be secular. The content of the ceremony must be agreed in advance with the ceremony coordination team.
6. Any issues relating to performing rights, copyright or similar requirements for music, readings, etc. permitted at the ceremony are matters for the couple and the holder of the Licence.