

Outdoor civil weddings and civil partnerships made permanent

Press release

Outdoor weddings at licenced venues in England and Wales will be legalised permanently after the change received overwhelming support from the public, faith groups and the wedding industry.



Photo: Brad Wakefield Photography

- Temporary measures introduced during the pandemic will continue indefinitely.
- Move will provide greater flexibility and choice to couples and the wedding sector.
- Over 90% of people back permanent legalisation of outdoor weddings.

It will mean that marrying couples will continue to have greater choice in how they celebrate their big day. Temporary legislation allowing outdoor civil weddings and partnerships for the first time has been in place since last summer.

A government consultation found that 96% of respondents backed making this change permanent, while 93% supported extending it to religious weddings. Ministers will lay legislation today to legalise outdoor civil weddings and partnerships indefinitely. Reforms to religious ceremonies will be made in due course after the consultation found every major faith group supported the move.

Prior to last summer, civil ceremonies at a licensed wedding venue had to take place indoors or within a permanent outdoor structure, such as a bandstand.

Couples can now have the whole ceremony outside in the venue's grounds – providing them with greater flexibility and choice, as well as boosting the recovery of the wedding sector which saw many ceremonies postponed during the pandemic.

The move gives the wedding industry the certainty needed to invest in their services and locations for ceremonies before the end of the temporary legislation in April.

Justice Minister Tom Pursglove MP said:

A wedding is one of the most important days in a person's life and it is right that couples should have greater choice in how they celebrate their special occasion.

These reforms will allow couples to hold more personalised ceremonies and provide a welcome boost for the wedding sector.

An ongoing Law Commission report into marriage laws is due to be published in July and the government will carefully consider the recommendations once received. This report is exploring how to modernise and improve marriage law into a simple, fair and consistent legal structure. This includes widening the locations that people can get married at and whether more types of weddings should be legalised.

The government will set out its plans to legalise outdoor religious weddings in due course as this will require changes to primary legislation.

- These changes are being introduced on the 15th March via the laying of a Statutory Instrument (SI) which amends the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 to allow legal outdoor civil weddings and civil partnership registrations to take place within the grounds of Approved Premises.
- 93% of respondents to the consultation also supported the proposal to permit outdoor religious ceremonies in the grounds of places of worship, as long as this is permitted by the respective religious bodies. Religious groups who responded to the consultation noted that while there was no theological obligation to conduct a wedding within the curtilage of a church, these changes must be permissive in nature, and that existing protections to safeguard religious freedoms need to remain. All representatives of religious groups who responded to the consultation were in support of this proposal. These changes would require amendments to primary legislation and the associated procedural requirements are such that it is not possible to legislate within the same timeframe as this SI. This would allow marriages to take place in the grounds of religious buildings, such as outside of churches.
- The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) (Amendment) Regulations 2022 will come into force on the 6th April 2022.
- The regulations apply only to Approved Premises – the changes cannot

enable outdoor weddings to take place on religious premises or in outdoor areas that are not part of the grounds of Approved Premises.

- In order to hold legal outdoor weddings and civil partnership registrations, a venue must be an Approved Premises or must become an Approved Premises under the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005, as amended.
- Before the temporary changes were introduced last summer, premises could only be approved if they were a permanently immovable structure (or any boat or other permanently moored vessel) comprising at least one room which is to be approved for civil weddings and civil partnership registration.
- Existing Approved Premises will be permitted to use any outdoor areas in the venue for civil wedding and civil partnership registrations without having to re-apply for approval, subject to certain conditions.
- Ceremonies will now be able to take place fully outdoors or under a partially covered structure. The location for the ceremony within the outdoor areas must be assessed to be seemly and dignified. Other requirements for public access and signage must also be met.
- With the exception of Jewish and Quaker weddings, which for historical reasons can already take place outdoors, legal religious weddings will continue to take place in certified places of worship which are also registered for marriage, or churches and chapels of the Church of England or Church in Wales. The government will however work to take forward the proposals to extend provision to outdoor religious ceremonies. In due course, the government will put forward a Legislative Review Order to allow for outdoor religious weddings; this is since such a change would require an amendment to primary legislation.

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