

Cheshire West & Chester Council

Outdoor Marriage Ceremonies

A guide for couples



Cheshire West
and Chester

Outdoor wedding ceremonies are increasingly popular and in Cheshire West and Chester we're pleased to offer this as an option for couples. If you have any questions about our outdoor ceremonies please do not hesitate to ask. More information about the registration service, including how you may contact us, can be found on our website at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/registration

Which venues can hold outdoor ceremonies?

Some, but not all, of the venues in Cheshire West and Chester are able to provide outdoor ceremonies. These take place in a designated area of the grounds of the venue. There will also be a room nearby which has been licensed for marriages. In this way we can guarantee that you will always be provided with a room as an alternative should the weather prevent an outdoor ceremony from going ahead.

Details of all of our approved venues (including those with approval for outdoor ceremonies) are provided on the Registration pages at www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

Is an outdoor ceremony different to an indoor ceremony?

In most respects your outdoor ceremony will be no different from one held indoors - with all of the expected elements such as an exchange of vows and rings, readings etc. However, for legal reasons there will be minor changes to the format of an outdoor ceremony.

In England and Wales, for a marriage to be legally recognised, a short but important part of the ceremony – the Declaratory and Contracting words – must be spoken by the couple within a licensed room. (Declaratory words are the declarations you make regarding there being no legal impediment to you marrying. Contracting words are when you agree to take your partner as your husband or wife). To meet this requirement you (and your two chosen witnesses) will be invited by the Registrar to go inside to the licensed room to perform this element of the ceremony. This room may be a gazebo style permanent structure which has already been licensed for ceremonies.

Once you've spoken the Declaratory and Contracting words you are legally married and are then able to sign the marriage register and receive your marriage certificate. This can take place inside the licensed room or outdoors – depending on your preference and the weather. You may also choose to say the Declaratory and Contracting words outside if you wish.

Food and drink

No food or alcoholic drinks may be sold or consumed in the designated area where your ceremony is going to take place for one hour before or during the ceremony. However soft drinks are allowed and if your outdoor ceremony is taking place in the summer you may wish to provide bottled water for your guests.

What happens in bad weather?

As much as we would like to, we can't guarantee good weather, so it's important to have a 'Plan B' for your ceremony. All of our venues which offer outdoor ceremonies are required to have a licensed room available if bad weather prevents an outdoor ceremony from going ahead.

This will be large enough for you and your guests.

On the day the decision whether the ceremony will take place outdoors or in the licensed room will be made by you and a member of staff at the venue (known as the Responsible Person) no later than 30 minutes before the scheduled start time. The Registrars will not be involved in this decision, unless they believe that going ahead with an outdoor ceremony would present a safety risk. Please respect the advice of the Responsible Person and the Registrar; they will do their best to help ensure that your ceremony is safe and enjoyable.

Once your ceremony has begun, any decision to move indoors because of a sudden change in the weather will be made by the Registrar in consultation with you.

Are outdoor ceremonies legal?

In England and Wales, for a civil marriage to be legally recognised a specific part of the ceremony – the Declaratory and Contracting words – must be spoken by the couple within a licensed room. This is why we require you to retire to a room within the venue to perform this part of the ceremony.

Can readings and music be included in a ceremony?

Yes, but as with an indoor ceremony words, readings or music which may have religious connotations cannot be included.

Anything Else?

- Don't forget to let your guests know that the ceremony will be outside so that they can dress appropriately.
- Please arrive in good time for your ceremony, allowing sufficient time for photographs to be taken. An outdoor ceremony can take a little longer than one held indoors, due to the additional time taken to say the legal words in the licensed room. If you are late it may not be possible for the Registrar to conduct your ceremony.
- If you are considering an outdoor ceremony please let us know as soon as possible and no later than 28 days before the ceremony date. This will help us ensure that all of the necessary arrangements are in place for your special day, including that your chosen venue has a suitable designated area for your ceremony.

Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in Audio, Braille, Large Print or other formats. If you would like a copy in a different format, in another language or require a BSL interpreter, please email us at **equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk**

Tel: 0300 123 8 123 **Textphone:** 18001 01606 867 670

email: equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

web: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

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