

GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE

28 NOVEMBER 2023

APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF LICENCE FOR PREMISES TO BE APPROVED AS A VENUE FOR MARRIAGES AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

THE DOLPHIN CENTRE, HORSEMARKET, DARLINGTON

Purpose of Report

1. To consider an application for the grant of a licence to be an approved venue for civil marriage and civil partnerships in accordance with the provisions of:
 - (a) The Marriage Act 1949 (as amended by the Marriage Act 1994);
 - (b) The Civil Partnership Act (2004);
 - (c) The Marriage and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 and 2021; and
 - (d) The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act (2013).

Summary

2. Since 1994 local authorities have been able to approve venues where civil marriages and civil partnerships can take place as an alternative venue to a Register Office with most approved venues being hotels.
3. The Dolphin Centre was licensed as an approved venue from 2008 to 2016 when the Register Office was located at the Dolphin Centre. In 2016 the Register Office relocated to the Town Hall and the Dolphin Centre licence for civil marriages and civil partnerships expired.
4. To meet its business continuity arrangements, the Register Office has identified a need to have a premise licensed for civil marriage and civil partnerships for use in the event of an urgent situation e.g. of damage to the Town Hall or a security incident which would prevent a marriage or civil partnership taking place.
5. The need to host a marriage or civil partnership at an alternative location in an urgent situation could be required for a single wedding or for a longer period depending upon the need for the relocation.
6. The Dolphin Centre have agreed to act as an alternative Register Office venue should an emergency situation arise. Furthermore, the Dolphin Centre are seeking to offer weddings at the Dolphin Centre as a commercial venue offering similar facilities to a hotel licensed for marriages or civil partnerships and could host either the ceremony only or a wedding package of the ceremony and a wedding function.

Information

7. The former Register Office ceremony accommodation at the Dolphin Centre (The Pease Suite, Stephenson Suite and ceremony entrance in Bull Wynd) is still in situ and is ready for use as a ceremony facility. The Dolphin Centre are experienced at hosting wedding celebration functions and during the time of the Register Office being located at the Dolphin Centre, a number of couples chose to be married there and then stay to have their wedding celebrations at the Dolphin Centre.
8. The Dolphin Centre has the required risk assessments for fire evacuation and accessibility. There are no issues which adversely affect an evacuation or prevent access to the areas proposed to be approved for marriage and civil partnerships.
9. Access to the proposed ceremony and function facilities would be by Bull Wynd where there is an entrance either by lift or stairs. In the event that the lift in the Bull Wynd entrance wasn't working there is alternative means of access by lift via the Dolphin Centre main entrance and through the bistro area.
10. Any guests attending a wedding at the Dolphin Centre would need to park at the nearby pay and display car parks. Bull Wynd is a narrow but busy road. Whilst the Register Office was located at the Dolphin Centre, a wedding car would alight a bride at Bull Wynd, park at the side of the Dolphin Centre in Houndgate and drive back along Bull Wynd and collect the couple at the end of the wedding.
11. As the permanent accommodation for the Register Office is now at the Town Hall, the Dolphin Centre would be an approved venue for marriage and civil partnerships rather than part of the Register Office facilities. As with the licence conditions for all approved venues such as hotels, a member of the Dolphin Centre Staff would be required to manage the event including the public attending the wedding and any post ceremony function, the wedding car, any evacuation and first aid required and also to ensure that maximum capacities in designated rooms are observed.
12. The proposed locations and capacities for civil marriages and civil partnerships at the Dolphin Centre are:

Location	Maximum Capacity
Pease Suite	60 people
Central Hall	200 people
Stephenson Suite	30 people
Seminar Room	40 people
The Studio	60 people
Sports Hall	200 people

Notes to maximum capacities:

- (a) Maximum capacities do not include the couple being married, registrars, photographers/videographers and venue staff.
- (b) In the event of a business continuity emergency where a wedding would be relocated urgently from the Town Hall to the Dolphin Centre, a room for the ceremony from one of the designated rooms would be allocated dependent upon bookings taking place at the time of the emergency.
- (c) Should the Register Office be relocated to the Dolphin Centre for a sustained period of time due to lack of access to the Town Hall i.e.. a business continuity emergency, then the Pease Suite would become the temporary ceremony room of the Register Office.
- (d) Where a marriage or civil partnership is to be held for a commercial purpose then the ceremony would be held in the Pease Suite and the wedding celebration function would be held in Central Hall.

Financial Implications.

- 13. Where a marriage or civil partnership was held at the Dolphin Centre for commercial purposes for the Dolphin Centre, the fees for the Register Office to attend a marriage or civil partnership ceremony at the Dolphin Centre would align with the fees approved by Council each year. A fee is levied for the Register Office to attend a marriage or civil partnership at any council owned venue (currently the Town Hall, Hippodrome and Head of Steam) and the same fee (currently £382.00) would apply to the Dolphin Centre as a council owned venue. The current fee for the Register Office to attend a marriage or civil partnership at a non-council owned approved venues (hotels) is currently charged currently £652.00..

Legal Implications.

- 14. The grant of a licence to be an approved venue for civil marriages and civil partnerships is required to facilitate Register Office Business Continuity plans and also to meet commercial aspirations of the Dolphin Centre.
- 15. The Dolphin is seeking a standard three year licence from 28th November 2023 to 27th November 2026. The licensing committee can issue a licence on a shorter timescale and also make any specific conditions on where ceremonies can take place and be managed.

Conclusions.

- 16. Members are asked to grant the licence for the Dolphin Centre to be an approved venue for civil marriages and civil partnership for a three year period with effect from 28th November 2023 to 27th November 2026.

Recommendation

17. It is recommended that the licence for The Dolphin Centre as an approved venue for civil marriage and civil partnerships be granted for three years from 28th November 2023 and that the places designated where civil marriage and civil partnerships can take place at the premises and the maximum number of persons who can attend those marriage and civil partnerships can be:

Location	Maximum Capacity
Pease Suite	60 people
Central Hall	200 people
Stephenson Suite	30 people
Seminar Room	40 people
The Studio	60 people
Sports Hall	200 people

Reason

18. To facilitate civil marriages and civil partnerships at the Dolphin Centre.

**Luke Swinhoe, Assistant Director, Law and Governance and
Proper Officer for Darlington Registration District**

Anthony Hall, Superintendent Registrar, Ext 6400

Background Papers.

There were no background papers in the production of this report.