

Guidance

Flying Flags:

A plain English Guide

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Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

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Introduction

Flags are a very British way of expressing joy and pride – they are emotive symbols which can boost local and national identities, strengthen community cohesion and mark civic pride.

The government wants to see more flags flown, particularly the Union Flag, the flag of the United Kingdom. It is a symbol of national unity and pride. The government has recently issued guidance encouraging the flying of the Union Flag on all UK government buildings throughout the year, alongside other national and local flags.

We are keen for local authorities and other local organisations to follow suit. We have made it easier for the Union Flag to be flown alongside other flags, so organisations can highlight their local identities, as well as their national identities, and celebrate special days or events which champion civic pride.

In England, the flying of flags is treated as advertisements for the purposes of the planning regime to ensure the flags do not impact on safety or amenity. Some flags require formal consent (permission) from the local planning authority, whereas others like the Union Flag do not. The detailed controls over flag flying are set out in detailed regulations (see links below).

This plain English guide provides a brief summary of the regulations so that individuals and organisations can easily understand when they can fly a flag in England without the need for consent. It incorporates the latest changes to the regulations introduced in June 2021. These regulations now allow for the Union flag to be flown with another flag from the same flagpole, provided certain conditions are met.

If you are unclear about whether consent is required for flying a flag, you should contact your local planning authority who can provide detailed advice.

All flag flying is subject to some standard conditions

All flags must be:

- be maintained in a condition that does not impair the overall visual appearance of the site
- be kept in a safe condition
- have the permission of the owner of the site on which they are displayed (this includes the Highway Authority if the sign is to be placed on highway land)
- not obscure, or hinder the interpretation of official road, rail, waterway or aircraft signs, or otherwise make hazardous the use of these types of transport
- be removed carefully where so required by the planning authority

Subject to compliance with the standard conditions, there are 3 categories of flag:

(a) flags which can be flown without consent of the local planning authority

(b) flags which do not need consent provided they comply with further restrictions (referred to as “deemed consent” in the Regulations)

(c) flags which require consent (“express consent”)

(a) Flags which do not need consent

The full list of flags that do not require consent are:

1) Any country’s national flag, civil ensign or civil air ensign

- 2) The flag of the Commonwealth, the United Nations or any other international organisation of which the United Kingdom is a member
- 3) A flag of any island, county, district, borough, burgh, parish, city, town or village within the United Kingdom
- 4) The flag of the Black Country, East Anglia, Wessex, any Part of Lincolnshire, any Riding of Yorkshire or any historic county within the United Kingdom
- 5) The flag of Saint David
- 6) The flag of Saint Patrick
- 7) The flag of any administrative area within any country outside the United Kingdom
- 8) Any flag of Her Majesty's forces
- 9) The Armed Forces Day flag

The above flags or their flagpoles must not display any advertisement or subject matter additional to the design of the flag, but the Regulations now highlight that you can attach a black mourning ribbon to either the flag or flagpole where the flag cannot be flown at half mast, for example, when flying a flag on a flagpole projecting at an angle from the side of a building.

The use of the word "country" in (1) and (7) of the list above, includes any of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and any British Overseas Territory. The flags of St George and St Andrew are recognised as the national flags of England and Scotland, but the flags of St David and St Patrick are listed separately as they do not necessarily fall into the category of a country's national flag.

Two flags can also be flown from the same flagpole without the need for consent if:

- (i) both flags are within the list above; or (ii) one flag is within the list above and the other is within the categories of flag set out under (b) below.

In either case, if one of the flags is the Union Flag, it must be flown in the superior position.

Following the UK's departure from the European Union, the flag of the European Union is no longer included in the list of flags that do not require consent.

(b) Flags which do not require consent provided they comply with certain restrictions

A number of categories of flag may be flown without consent, subject to certain restrictions regarding the size of the flag, the size of characters on the flag, and the number and location of the flags.

Categories of flag that can now be flown:

- house flag – flag is allowed to display the name, emblem, device or trademark of the company (or person) occupying the building, or can refer to a specific event of limited duration that is taking place in the building from which the flag is flown
- any sports club (but cannot include sponsorship logos)
- the Rainbow flag (six horizontal equal stripes of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet).
- specified award schemes – Eco-Schools, Queen's Awards for Enterprise and Investors in People
- the NHS flag.
- certain environmental awards (see below).

The restrictions on flying this second category of flag relate to where the flagpole is located on a building or within the grounds of a building.

Flying a flag on a vertical flagpole from the roof of a building

Two flags on the same vertical flagpole on the roof of a building are permitted provided one of the flags is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent such as a national flag) and that flag is flown in the superior position.

Otherwise only one flag on a vertical flagpole on the roof of a building is permitted.

There are no restrictions on the size of flag.

No restrictions on the size of any character or symbol displayed on the flag, except where a flag is flown within an area of outstanding natural beauty, area of special control, the Broads, conservation area or a National Park (referred to elsewhere as “controlled areas”) where the characters may be no more than 0.75 metre in height (0.3 metre in height in an area of special control).

It is permitted to fly one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) on a vertical flagpole on the roof of a building and one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) on a flagpole within the grounds of the building without consent (subject to restrictions below). However, it is not permitted to fly a flag on a projecting flagpole and on a vertical roof top flagpole without consent.

Flying a flag on a flagpole projecting from any part of a building other than the roof (eg projecting from the side of the building)

Two flags on the same flagpole projecting from any part of a building are permitted provided one of the flags is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) such as a national flag and that flag is flown in the superior position.

Otherwise, only one flag on a projecting flagpole on a building is permitted.

The flag may not exceed 2 square metres in size.

No restrictions on the size of characters.

Consent is required if the flagpole is in a controlled area.

It is permitted to fly one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) on a vertical flagpole on the roof of a building and one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) on a flagpole within the grounds of the building without consent (subject to restrictions below). However, it is not permitted to fly a flag on a vertical flagpole on the roof and a projecting flagpole without consent.

Flying one or two flags within the grounds of a building

You can fly two flags on the same flagpole within the grounds of a building (the regulations refer to 'curtilage') provided one of the flags is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) and that flag is flown in the superior position.

You can fly flags on two separate flagpoles within the grounds (the regulations refer to "curtilage") of a building at the same time subject to the conditions listed below:

- there are no restrictions on the size of the flag, but any flagpole may not exceed 4.6 metres above ground level.
- consent is required if the flag is to be flown in a controlled area.
- only one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) can be flown on a flagpole within the grounds of a building if one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent) is either being flown from the roof, or is projecting from the building.

The table below summarises the various options for flying flags from, or within the grounds, of buildings.

Summary of location options

If I fly one flag (or two if one is from category (a) Flags which do not need consent)

What other flags do not require consent

On a vertical flagpole on the roof

One additional flagpole in the grounds of the building displaying one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent))

On a projecting flagpole from the building

One additional flagpole in the grounds of the building displaying one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent))

On a flagpole in the grounds of a building

One additional flagpole – either a vertical flagpole on the roof of a building or a projecting flagpole attached to the building or a flagpole in the grounds of a building displaying one flag (or two if one is from category (a) (flags which do not need consent))

Green and blue environmental award scheme flags

The regulations allow a flag of the Blue Flag Award scheme to be flown from a flagpole on part of a beach or marina and a flag of the Green Flag Award scheme or Green Flag Community Award scheme to be flown on part of a park, garden or other green space, without the need for consent.

(c) Flags which require consent

Any flag not identified above requires express consent from the local planning authority before it can be flown.

Further information

The regulations governing the flying of flags in England are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) regulations 2007 (as amended in 2012 and in 2021).

These regulations, including relevant amendments to flying of flags, can be viewed respectively on the government legislation website at:

[Town and Country Planning \(Control of Advertisements\) \(England\) Regulations 2007](#)

[The Town and Country Planning \(Control of Advertisements\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2012](#)

[The Town and Country Planning \(Control of Advertisements\) \(England\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#)

Planning practice guidance for local planning authorities by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the control of advertisements can be viewed at [Advertisements](#)

Further information on flags can be found on the [Flag Institute's website](#).

Union Flag flying guidance for UK government buildings can be found on [Designated days for Union flag flying](#)