Buckinghamshire Council Flag Protocol

March 2026

1. Purpose Statement

This protocol sets out the procedures for flying flags at Buckinghamshire Council buildings. It outlines the occasions when flags should be flown, the types of flags permitted, and the specific processes to be followed. The aim is to ensure a consistent and respectful approach across all council sites.

Buckinghamshire Council seeks to align with **central government guidance** and nationally recognised practices in its flag flying arrangements. Flags are powerful symbols of unity, respect, and commemoration, and it is essential that they are flown correctly and appropriately.

Adherence to this protocol safeguards the council's reputation and reflects its commitment to honouring national and local events. It provides clear guidance for responsible service areas to ensure flags are flown on the correct dates, at the correct times, and in a manner that upholds the dignity and significance of each occasion.

2. Scope

This protocol applies only to Buckinghamshire Council buildings with active flagpoles. Buckinghamshire Council has access to the following flagpoles:

- **The Gateway, Aylesbury** – 3 active flagpoles (2 inactive)
- **High Wycombe, Queen Victoria Road** – 2 active flagpoles
- **Old Crown Court, Market Square, Aylesbury** – 2 active flagpoles (2 inactive on the roof)

At the Gateway, with three active flagpoles, the Union Flag and the Buckinghamshire County Flag will be flown at all times. The third flagpole is reserved for recognised flags on designated dates or occasions outlined in this protocol. If no event is scheduled, the Ukrainian Flag will be flown from the third pole until further notice.

At sites with two active flagpoles, the Union Flag and the Buckinghamshire County Flag should be flown at full mast unless a specific date or occasion requires a change, as set out in this protocol.

All flags flown should, where available, measure 180 cm x 120 cm (6 ft x 4 ft) and be fitted with a headband, rope, and toggle. Where possible, hand-woven flags are preferred over digitally printed ones. Recommended suppliers include:

- **Flagmakers.co.uk**
- **FlyingColours.org**
- **Flags.co.uk**

Unless otherwise stated in this protocol, flags should not be flown from or otherwise affixed to council owned buildings or structures.

3. Flag Protocol

3.1. Designated Flags

3.1.1. The Union Flag

The Union Flag, also known as the Union Jack, is the national flag of the United Kingdom, including the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories. Its design dates back to 1606, originally combining the flags of England and Scotland. The current version was adopted in 1801 following the inclusion of St Patrick's Cross to represent Ireland. Due to its design, the flag can be mistakenly displayed upside down; care must be taken to ensure correct orientation.

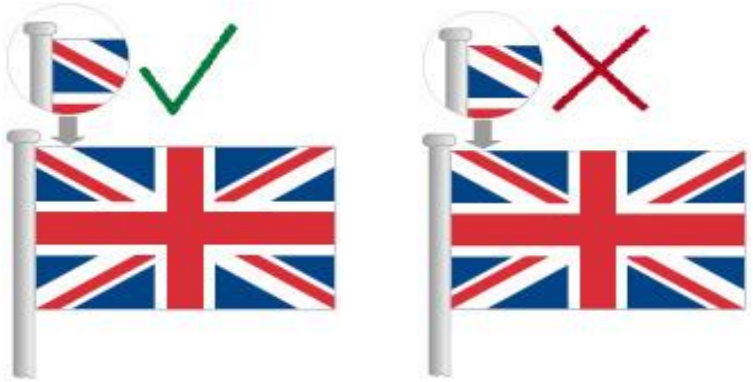
Although there is no formal Flag Act in UK law, the Union Flag is recognised as the national flag by long-established custom and practice.

In March 2021, all councils were requested to fly the Union Flag daily from UK government buildings as a symbol of national identity and unity. Where buildings have multiple flagpoles, the Union Flag must be flown in the superior position, defined as follows:

- The highest flagpole
- The centre flagpole (where there is an odd number of poles of equal height)
- The left-centre flagpole (when viewed from the front of the building, where there is an even number of poles of equal height)

The only exception to this rule is during a Royal visit, when the Royal Standard takes precedence.

The Union Flag must be displayed correctly, in accordance with guidance from the Flag Institute:



Flying-Flags-in-the-United-Kingdom.pdf (flaginstitute.org)

3.1.2. The Buckinghamshire County Flag

The Buckinghamshire County Flag is the traditional and historic emblem of the county. It features a chained swan set against a red and black bicolour background, derived from the arms of Buckinghamshire (see Appendix B).

The swan symbol dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, when the county was renowned for breeding swans for the King. Today, the swan remains a prominent emblem across Buckinghamshire, appearing in the arms of several historic towns including Aylesbury, Buckingham, Chesham, Marlow, and High Wycombe.

The flag was officially registered with the Flag Institute on 20 May 2011.

3.2. The Royal Standard

The Royal Standard (see Appendix B) should be flown from Council buildings during official visits by members of the Royal Family. It must be raised upon arrival and lowered upon departure and should only be flown for the duration of the visit.

The Civic and Lieutenancy Officer is responsible for liaising with the Household of the visiting Royal Family member to ensure the Royal Standard arrives at least 48 hours prior to the visit.

The Royal Standard takes precedence over all other flags and must be flown in the superior position during the visit.

3.3. Other Flags Flown

Buckinghamshire Council aims to reflect the approach and priorities of central government and the **College of Arms** in its flag flying practices, including the use of nationally recognised flags. Flags must not be used for political purposes or commercial advertising under any circumstances.

Throughout the year, there are recurring occasions and designated days when additional flags may be flown to mark events, groups, or organisations of significance. These occasions are listed in Appendix A. On such days, flags may be flown at sites with more than one active flagpole, in accordance with this protocol.

Appendix A will be updated in line with official guidance from relevant government departments and in response to evolving council priorities. In exceptional circumstances, the council may choose to deviate from the protocol to show support for events of national or local importance. Any proposed changes will be considered on a case-by-case basis and must be approved by the Leader of the Council.

Adherence to this protocol also ensures compliance with the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007, as amended in 2012 and 2021.

Appendix B outlines the flags expected to be flown on specific dates and includes additional flags that may be used under particular circumstances.

3.4. Flying International Flags

Buckinghamshire Council does not routinely fly international flags from its buildings. However, the Council reserves the right to do so in exceptional circumstances, such as to mark significant international events, demonstrate support with global partners, or during official state visits.

The Ukrainian flag is currently flown in recognition of the Council's role in receiving and supporting Ukrainian refugees in Buckinghamshire through the Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme, and also reflects the UK's Government's current position (2025).This reflects the Council's commitment to providing assistance to those affected by conflict, in line with its constitutional responsibilities.

Any decision to fly an international flag outside these circumstances will be considered to be exceptional, will be on a case-by-case basis, and must be approved by the Leader of the Council.

3.5. Flags at Half Mast

When lowering a flag to half-mast, it must first be hoisted to the top of the flagpole, paused briefly, and then lowered to the half-mast position. The recommended position is approximately one-third of the way down from the top of the pole, as this is the most widely recognised placement. Some flagpoles are marked to indicate the correct half-mast position.

If the Union Flag is flown at half-mast, all other flags must also be lowered accordingly, and any event-specific flags should be removed. The only exception is the Royal Standard, which must never be flown at half-mast, as it symbolises the continuity of the Monarchy.

In the event of the death of a Royal Family Member – Operation Bridge will be enacted; in the event of the death of a senior Public or Buckinghamshire figure, or in the case of a major National or Local incident – Operation Oak will be enacted. The Policy Team will then confirm the appropriate flag arrangement in line with the relevant protocol.

The process of lowering flags to half-mast must not occur until Buckinghamshire Council has been formally notified of a death or incident. Facilities teams will be notified by the Policy team of a co-ordinated approach for all Buckinghamshire Council sites.

The table below outlines the standard flag-lowering actions following the death of senior members of the Royal Family or significant political figures in line with the Operation Bridge and Oak protocols:

Deceased	Flag to be Lowered	Duration
Refer to Operation Bridge		

Sovereign	Union Flag	Refer to Operation London Bridge and the directions for flag processes within that protocol document
Senior Member of the Royal Family	Union Flag	Refer to Operation Bridge protocol for marking the death of a senior member of the Royal Family
Prime Minister or former Prime Minister	Union Flag	On the day of the funeral only unless otherwise informed by national approach
Refer to Operation Oak		
Serving Local Member of Parliament	Buckinghamshire County Flag	On the day of funeral only
Former MP	Buckinghamshire County Flag	On the day of the funeral only
Serving Leader of the Council	Buckinghamshire County Flag	From the day of death until sunset on the day of the funeral
Serving Chairman of the Council	Buckinghamshire County Flag	From the day of death until sunset on the day of the funeral
Lord-Lieutenant	Buckinghamshire County Flag	From the day of death until sunset on the day of the funeral
High Sheriff/Under Sheriff	Buckinghamshire County Flag	From the day of death until sunset on the day of the funeral
Honorary Alderman	Buckinghamshire County Flag	On the day of the funeral only
Serving Councillor/Member	Buckinghamshire County Flag	On the day of the funeral only

Any additional requests to lower flags to half-mast must be considered and signed off by a member of the council's Corporate Management Team, and for the Leader to be informed.

3.6. Timings

Unless otherwise specified in Appendix A, flags must be raised by 08:00 and lowered at sunset or 18:00, whichever is later. If this is not possible, the flag should be lowered before 08:00 the following morning.

For flags flown over a full calendar month, the following timings apply:

- Raised at 08:00 on the first day of the month.
- Lowered at sunset or 18:00 on the last day of the month.
- If the first day of the month falls on a Saturday or Sunday, the flag should be raised by 18:00 on the preceding Friday evening.

- If the last day of the month falls on a Saturday or Sunday, it is acceptable to lower the flag before 08:00 on the following Monday morning.

For flags flown to mark a week-long event:

- Raised at 08:00 on Monday morning.
- Lowered at sunset or 18:00 on Sunday evening, or before 08:00 on the following Monday morning.

In the event of a death or major incident, such as those covered under Operation Bridge and Operation Oak, flags must only be lowered once a formal announcement has been made, and the Facilities Team has been notified by the Policy Team. All flag changes must be carried out uniformly across council sites, coordinated by the Policy Team and the Head of Facilities Management.

Notifications for exceptional flag changes may be received during weekends or evenings and must be actioned promptly in line with this protocol.

3.7. Roles and responsibilities

Leader of the Council

- Requests to fly any flags outside of this protocol (i.e., outside appendix B) must be agreed by the Leader of the Council.

Council Directors

- Requests to fly flags outside the protocol must first be approved by the Service Director for Policy & Comms, the Assistant Chief Executive, and the Chief Executive – this includes both during office hours and outside office hours, before a decision is sought from the Leader of the Council.
    - Where the Chief Executive is not available, this responsibility falls to the Duty Director; If the Duty Director is not available, then any other member of CMT.

Service Director for Policy and Communications / Policy Team

- **During office hours (Monday–Friday, 9:00–17:00)**; the Policy Team will coordinate flag activity with the Facilities Team.
- The Service Director for Policy and Communications and the Policy Team will receive notifications, via email or formal announcement, regarding any required changes to flag arrangements.
    - **If permission is needed to initiate elements of the flag protocol** (e.g. flying flags at half-mast), the policy team will seek approval from the Service Director for Policy and Communications, Assistant Chief Executive, and Chief Executive (or the Duty Director if out of hours); once granted, the Policy Team will inform the Leader of the Council
    - **Once permission has been granted;** the Policy Team will instruct the **Facilities Team** as per the in-hours telephone tree - to implement the required flag arrangements and if necessary and also inform the **Communications Team**, who will manage internal and external messaging.

- **Outside office hours;** responsibility for notifications will fall to designated individuals as outlined in the out-of-hours telephone tree.
- Any non-standard flag activity will require approval from the following if not already covered by Operation Oak or Operation Bridge:
    - Service Director for Policy and Communications
    - Assistant Chief Executive
    - Duty Corporate Director (if ACE and SD Policy & Comms unavailable); or an
    - Appropriate member of the Corporate Management Team (CMT)

- **Flag Replacement;** The Policy Team are responsible for the replacement (payment only) of all recognised flags (appendix B). Jointly with Facilities, they will observe the quality of flags and request replacement when required.

Facilities Management

- The Facilities Team will ensure that all flag changes are carried out uniformly and in compliance across council sites.
    - They will confirm planned changes to flag status with the Policy Team and Service Director for Policy & Comms or the Duty Director if the Service Director for Policy & Comms is not available.
    - They will also be responsible for the storage, maintenance, replacement (ordering), and dignified disposal of flags.
    - Flags will be kept in good condition, free from tears or blemishes, through periodic checks by designated flag keepers.
    - Repairs will be arranged through preferred suppliers.

- They will monitor the condition of the flags when they are raised and lowered and proactively contact The Policy team to secure permission (funding) to replace flags when they need replacing.
- Disposal of flags will follow guidance from the Flag Institute, with acceptable methods including burning, tearing, or cutting into unrecognisable strips.
- They will conduct a flag inventory once a year to assess the condition and numbers of flags at different locations and report their findings to the Policy team.

Communications Team

- The Communications Team will prepare and issue relevant external communications.
- They will also manage any necessary internal messaging.

APPENDIX A: Calendar of Recognised dates

Date	Event	Flag	Site/location	Notes
Second Monday in March	Commonwealth Day	Commonwealth Day Flag	• The Gateway • High Wycombe • Old Crown Court	In place of the Buckinghamshire County flag at High Wycombe and the Old Crown Court. At the Gateway it should be flown of the third flagpole.
Second Monday in March	Commonwealth Day	Union Flag	All	Full height
9 April	His Majesty's Wedding Day	Union Flag	All	Full height

23 April	St George's Day	National Flag of England	• The Gateway • High Wycombe • Old Crown Court	In place of the Buckinghamshire County flag on the 2nd flagpole in High Wycombe and the Old Crown Court. At the Gateway it should be flown on the third flagpole.
6 May	Coronation Day	Union Flag	All	Full height
First, second or third Saturday in June	Official Birthday of His Majesty the King	Union Flag	All	Full height
Late June	Armed Forces Week	Armed Forces Day Flag	• The Gateway • High Wycombe • Old Crown Court	AFD occurs on the last Saturday of June, and the flag is flown from the previous Monday until the following Monday morning. The flag should be flown in place of the Buckinghamshire County flag in High Wycombe and the Old Crown Court. At the Gateway it should be flown on the third flagpole.
June	LGBT+ Pride Month	Pride Flag – six colours	• The Gateway	Recommended to fly for the week following Armed Forces Week but reference should be taken each year based on the College of Arms recommendations.

				Should be flown on the third flagpole at the Gateway.
21 June	Birthday of the Prince of Wales	Union Flag	All	Full height
17 July	Birthday of Her Majesty the Queen Consort	Union Flag	All	Full height
8 September	His Majesty's accession	Union Flag	All	Full height
11 November and the closest Sunday to 11 November	Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday	Royal British Legion Flag	• The Gateway • High Wycombe • Old Crown Court	The flag should be flown in place of the Buckinghamshire County flag in High Wycombe and the Old Crown Court. At the Gateway it should be flown on the third flagpole. It will be flown continually between Remembrance Day to Remembrance Sunday, whichever falls first. Where the 11 November falls on a weekend, the flag should be flown from the Friday before until the Monday following.
14 November	Birthday of His Majesty the King	Union Flag	All	Full height

Appendix B: Images of flags recognised by Buckinghamshire Council

Flag Image	Flag Name
	**Union Jack**
	**Buckinghamshire County Flag**
	**Royal Standard**
	**Commonwealth**
	**St. George's Flag**
	**Armed Forces Day Flag**

	**Pride (6 stripe)**
	**Royal British Legion (old logo)** **– Pause to Remember Flag**
	**Royal British Legion (new logo)** **– Pause to Remember Flag**