

# CAMPSITES & YURTS



## Planning Considerations



# Overview of Planning Issues

In France, control over the planning process is, in principle, devolved to a local level, with even the smallest of communes having the right to decide what will or won't be permitted within its borders (with certain limitations such as those located within a national park).

In the absence of a local regulatory framework, a national framework exists. An outline of these follows, and we need to be aware of these in relation to their effect on the possibility of gaining planning permission for leisure businesses such as camp sites, glamping, yurts, pods, mobile homes, or fishing lakes. Suffice to say that planning is required where any land is to be used for such activities, and contrary to popular belief, the process is not straight-forward, and a successful outcome is certainly not guaranteed.

Planning permits for the use of land for camping is different to that for fishing lakes, and we'll explore the requirements individually in this article. Firstly, let's look at the difference between local and national planning frameworks.

# Local & National Regulations



## Local Regulations:

There are a number of different “models” in use for local regulations, with each version existing to control planning matters within the commune. The more usual ones are the “PLU” (Plan local d’urbanisme), “POS” (Plan d’occupation des sols) and the “CC” (Carte Communale). The first of these is the most detailed version and will place every plot of land in a commune into one or more planning zones, ranging from agricultural to industrial, and from parkland to residential.

Each zone will have its own set of rules defining what can or can’t be achieved, taking account of an overall plan set by the commune for development of the area. The other two tend to be simpler (older) versions of the PLU, but have the same overall aims. In many cases, local plans specifically exclude the use of land for camping or leisure use, so it is imperative that regulations are checked to ensure the project is feasible, especially if you are buying a property with land or lakes in order to set up a business of this type.

## National regulations:

These apply anywhere not covered by a local regulatory framework. Known as “RNU” in France (Règlement National d’Urbanisme), they are used to control what can or can’t be built in any given area or commune. Planning decisions resulting from applications where RNU applies will be based on issues such as existing land use in the immediate vicinity, size of development, noise, public health & safety, architectural style, etc., but most important is the proximity of the land to the built-up area of the town or village. The further from the centre, the less likely it is that the land will be “constructible”, and the harder it will be to obtain permissions for any form of development..

# Campsites (including yurts etc.)

If you're thinking of buying a property with land in order to set up a campsite, there are some simple planning-related matters to consider, rules to follow and questions to ask yourself before you proceed with the purchase:

Would I buy the property if permission for a campsite is not possible?

If it would be a “deal-breaker” to not have planning permission, then it is imperative to include a condition in the purchase contract that you will only proceed if permission is granted prior to completion. This can be either outline permission, or full permission, depending on your requirements, but it also depends on what the vendor is prepared to accept! Most vendors are happy with a condition for outline permission, but not all will take the same view for full permission. We'll look at the differences later in this article.

How many pitches do you want/need to make the project viable financially. Many buyers would be happy to have a small site, for which planning regulations are generally more favourable than for a larger site, but if you're looking to set up a site with more than 6 pitches, many things change, and the regulations are more complex.

What drainage facilities exist – mains, or will the project need a septic tank system of some kind? Planning applications require proof that an adequate waste-treatment system will be installed, and the cost of the system needs to form part of your financial considerations.

What facilities will you offer – eg shower & wc block (whether using an existing building or creating a new block). Will you supply electricity points to the pitches? If so, it is important to be sure an adequate supply exists, not only for the campsite, but for any owners accommodation or other requirements. Where an inadequate supply exists, planners may refuse the application, or demand the applicant pays for any extension to the property.

# Campsites (including yurts etc.)

Camping 'à la ferme':

This is a generic term where land is to be used for no more than 6 pitches, and a maximum number of 20 visitors at any one time. Anything more requires a different application, and the process is subject to more regulation. An important thing to note is that recent changes to regulations make the planning application in many cases subject to an impact study (or an attestation from the relevant authority that one is not required).

Access: it is imperative that adequate vehicular access is available, together with sufficient turning space to enter and leave the site.

“ERP” (établissements recevant du public) regulations:

Where a building (eg wc/shower block, games room, TV room, etc) is available to visitors, it must adhere to fire and disabled access regulations. A separate dossier is required as part of the planning application for the campsite, and these add time and cost to the process.

Buying an existing site: where this is the case, it is important to check all permissions are in place, including ERP approvals. Where you intend to increase the number of pitches, you may need to undertake an impact study as part of the planning application – this may not have been necessary previously when the site was originally opened.

Swimming pools:

Above-ground “temporary” type pools do not as a rule require a permit, but in-ground pools by comparison, certainly do. There are also strict rules about filtration and emptying processes which need to be detailed as part of the application process. All pools must adhere to safety regulations.



# Outline Permission versus Detailed Planning Consent

In France, outline permission is called a “CU” (certificat d’urbanisme). Anyone can apply whether they own the property or land in question or not.

This type of application allows you to outline the project in reasonable detail, but requires only limited plans/drawings/documents – typically a site plan, service connections, existing and proposed building positions and uses, project description, etc. If approved, the CU is valid for 18 months, during which time a detailed application can be submitted. A CU does not allow any work to be undertaken – it is just outline approval.

Detailed planning consent for campsite and fishing lakes usually takes the form of a “PA” (permis d’aménager), but can sometimes be either a “DP” (déclaration préalable), or a “PC” (permis de construire), depending on the size and complexity of the proposal. All of these give full permission for the project, but the dossier is far more involved and full plans and drawings are required, along with the ERP dossier outlined previously. Each of these is valid for a period of 3 years.

It is important to note that a CU approval doesn’t always indicate all the elements which will subsequently be necessary for detailed approval. For example, it may conclude that in principle the land can be used for the purpose in question, but the detailed application may fail if, for example, the impact study reveals reasons why it isn’t possible, so please proceed with caution and understand that a CU is only a general outline approval, and you may need to make your purchase subject to full permission in some cases.

# Registering a business

If you intend to run any business in France, you must register with the appropriate authority. Whilst it is possible to do this direct, it is often much better to discuss it with an accountant and ask them to deal with it for you – this ensures everything is done correctly, and quickly. There are many English-speaking accountants in France who can assist where language would otherwise be a barrier. Bureaucracy is a French word don't forget, and the red tape in France can be a little daunting for the unprepared!

Typically, your options would be to register with the local chambre de commerce, either as a self-employed person under the micro-entreprise régime, or there are various options for limited liability companies. Depending on the size of the business, and the number of people involved as owners or directors, your accountant will advise the best registration for you.

Typically, the cost for an accountant to set you up as self-employed is around 500.00 €, and for a company, around 3000.00 €. TVA registration (French VAT) applies where the turnover exceeds around 33,000.00 € per year. Once registered, you are entitled to French healthcare and receive your carte de vitale, proving your eligibility.

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