

# 9 planning pointers

**If you have a vineyard or viticulture business – or are thinking about establishing one – it's likely you'll come into contact with the planning authorities at some point. It can feel like an intimidating prospect, but keeping a few key considerations in mind will guide you.**

## 1. Planting vines

You don't need planning consent to plant a vineyard, because it's considered to be 'agriculture', just like growing wheat or oilseed rape. However, if the site is 'unimproved' permanent pasture which has been established for 15-plus years, you will need to carry out an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to justify your intention to plough it up. An exception is if you can demonstrate you've undertaken 'chemical cultivations' in the past 15 years (ie put fertiliser and sprays on it), in which case you can avoid the need for an EIA.

## 2. Permitted development rights (PDR)

If a site is five hectares or larger, you can undertake development of up to 1,000 sq m under PDR (also often known as 'prior notification') which is simpler, quicker and cheaper than a full planning application. Remember, this 1,000 sq m applies to the whole development, so includes, for example, hard standing and access routes. The PDR route is potentially open to you if the use of the building is deemed agricultural (ie it will house machinery and equipment associated with grape production) – but not if it's for tourism or retail activities.

## 3. Change of use

With huge projects, where vast sums of money are potentially being invested (if there will, for example, be a restaurant and visitor centre), the proposal might address all the planning issues from the outset. But for small- and medium-sized projects, an oft-taken approach is to get planning consent under PDR then potentially apply for change of use at a later stage, if you're looking to develop it. Planning rules are fairly favourable when it comes to allowing a change of use to retail own-produced products.

## 4. Designations

Are you in a conservation area? An AONB? A National Park? A Green Belt? Such designations can complicate the planning process – especially in a Green Belt, where you have to demonstrate you've taken any potential visual impact into account. But a well thought-out, professionally put-together application will give you the best chance of success.

## 5. Provision of utilities

You'd think getting an electricity or water supply to a site would be really straightforward, but this isn't always the case. A winery might require three-

phase electricity and this can cost many tens of thousands of pounds. Processing grapes uses a lot of water, too, and you can't simply pour the liquid that is produced down the drain so you need to think about how that will be dealt with.

## 6. The national picture

Even if the planning guidance from a national perspective is broadly positive and supportive, policy is interpreted individually by each local authority and their level of enthusiasm for development varies. Access is often a reason for refusing an application, especially if a proposal will bring a large volume of new traffic or large vehicles into the area.

## 7. Talk first?

In some instances, it's worth talking informally to the planning authorities early in the process, but if it's a new building under a PDR, it may be better not to do this as you risk giving the impression there is an issue you're trying to find a way around – when in fact one doesn't exist. Similarly, decide when is best to communicate with neighbours and other local residents. Low-key engagement can often have a positive benefit, because it gives you a chance to address any potential concerns, but the danger is you just worry people unnecessarily and generate opposition when the proposal doesn't warrant it. It partly depends on whether you feel it would be a constructive conversation.

## 8. Think long-term

You'll never regret putting up a new general-purpose building because, if you've chosen the right spot and the access is good, there will always be potential other uses to which it can be put. Meanwhile, if you're investing a lot of money in a building such as a winery or visitor centre, it's always worth considering what might happen if you ever decided to sell it (even if that's not in your current plan). This will help you shape the proposal and decide how you can make it potentially most valuable as a going concern.

Ask yourself: Will there be someone who would want to buy it and will I get my money back? If the answer is 'no' or 'I'm not sure', you might want to question what you're doing...

## 9. Site selection

Navigating the planning system can be complex, costly and slow – and the last thing you want is for your plans to be thwarted after you've invested in land. It's vital, therefore, to identify and acquire the right spot for your viticulture project. This will set you off on the right footing and should make everything that follows simpler, quicker and cheaper.



## VINEYARD CONSULTANTS

- Planning Applications
- Site Finding
- Site Acquisition
- Leases
- Grants



Call Matthew Berryman on **07710 765323**  
or email [matthew@c-l-m.co.uk](mailto:matthew@c-l-m.co.uk)  
[www.c-l-m.co.uk](http://www.c-l-m.co.uk)