

Preparation PAYS

If you intend to sell your property in France then there are a number of things to think about before it goes on the market, as **Glynis Shaw** explains

Thinking of selling your property in France? It pays to research the process in advance and to make sure that your home looks at its best. Do this before you call in the estate agents or advertise your property for sale and everything could progress faster and more smoothly.

Notaire and technical reports

Having been through the purchase procedure, you will probably know that it is necessary to use a French *notaire* when selling your property. So, early on in the process you should find a recommended local *notaire* who speaks English to the level that you need. The *notaire* acts for the government and is not biased towards seller or buyer.

In France, the seller is responsible for providing various technical reports and certificates (Dossier de Diagnostics Techniques) to the purchaser, according to the requirements of the region. This gives a prospective buyer clear information on the property and can save uncertainty later on. Obtaining the reports will be one of your first jobs and the *mairie* or an estate agent can advise on what you need and which local companies to use.

The technical reports will include the following, as appropriate to local regulations and the age of the property: termites, asbestos, lead, gas and electricity, major natural and man-made risks, energy performance, and sewage disposal arrangements.

Tax and financial obligations

If the property is your main residence then you are exempt from capital gains tax (*plus-value*) on the sale. The simple rule is that you should be resident in the property at the time of sale, which means when the initial contract or *compromis de vente* is signed. If the property is not your main home when you sell it, then a tax in the form of *plus-value* may be payable.

Certain expenditure for work carried out to your property can be claimed against tax when you sell. For this reason, it is always important to keep bills and receipts for work done by craftsmen and building companies.

If you fitted a brand-new kitchen or bathroom yourself, for example, you could claim for the cost of the materials. So now's the time to find all those old receipts. You

may also be able to claim for the cost of reports and any agent's fees paid when you bought the property.

Take receipts to the *notaire* and ask for advice on what you could claim. You should also research how much tax you might have to pay, so that you understand at the outset what is likely to be left from any sale return. This may affect the selling price you set. Tax obligations have regional variations, so first ask the *mairie*, then the *notaire*.

Preparing the house

Ideally, when carrying out any work to a property you should keep in mind that you may want to sell it one day. Therefore it pays to consider whether your plans for improvement would enhance the house's broad appeal to potential buyers.

Look around and see what physical preparation the house might need, such as painting, decorating and mending. It is always worth making the house exterior and interior look fresh and smart with a lick of paint. Also, mend that broken gutter or drain, fix the front door that sticks and get rid of that damp patch.

Potential buyers want to be able to imagine themselves at home in the house, so unless it's an obvious renovation project then aim to make it look ready to move into. Decluttering is vital. Minimise personal ornaments, make sure that the kitchen and bathroom are immaculate and remove furniture that makes rooms look overcrowded.

Keep the house aired if you don't live in it or use it regularly, and avoid making it seem dark, closed or unwelcoming by keeping shutters and curtains open.

Marketing the property

When it comes to advertising your house for sale, you may choose to use one or more local agents, an online portal or both. You may also decide to sell it privately.

If you use a local estate agent, you may need to choose more than one in order to cover areas where potential buyers live or visit – holidaymakers are a market worth tapping into. Remember that the agent's fees are usually paid by the buyer.

If you choose to advertise online, good quality images are essential, especially the main photograph that shows as a thumbnail in

Case study

Selling a much-loved holiday home in Tarn-et-Garonne

Noel and Jennie Bristow bought their French holiday home, close to the small market town of Roquecor, Tarn-et-Garonne, in 2001, and are now ready to sell. The property consists of two separate but adjacent stone cottages in a tiny group of hilltop houses.

Pigeon Cottage and Pheasant Cottage have a large garden with a swimming pool. They have been lovingly restored and together offer five bedrooms. When not in use as a family holiday home, the cottages are let to holidaymakers.

"We have always kept the property up to scratch so there wasn't a lot of work to do before putting it on the market," explains Noel. "Some years ago, we bought a chunk of land from the local farmer to make our own driveway, rather than just having a right of way. This makes the property more attractive to a buyer, I think, and they could buy even more land if they wish."

"We got a recommendation for a *notaire* who speaks good English and, as we are selling the cottages fully furnished, they asked for a valuation of all the items included. To market the property, we realised that you can't know in advance which agent or advertisement will produce the most enquiries, so we decided to try several options and remain non-exclusive."

The Bristows appointed one agent local to the properties, another with high visibility in a nearby market town and a third in another town popular with tourists, especially from the UK. One of these agencies is run by a British woman living in France, so again she has access to the UK market. The Bristows used an agent to advise on organising the necessary certificates and reports ready for a potential buyer.

"We also decided to advertise privately online to reach potential buyers in Britain and other European countries," says Noel.

The Bristows' advertisement explains that local English friends and managers will offer their services for rental change-overs, gardening and pool cleaning, and airport pickups. It also has excellent photos and describes the cottages and the local area in detail.

"Words are important," says Noel. "It's important to describe everything accurately for a potential buyer as well as showing that we care and are conscientious."

The cottages are on the market at €230,000 for the pair. ID 202323 at frenchconnections.co.uk



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search results. This really needs to appeal instantly to a potential buyer. Think of it as telling the story of your property in pictures, so make sure that the photos are clear and pleasing to the eye.

Your advert should also be comprehensive with information and advice about the local area, such as details of the close major towns. Give the potential buyer a feel for what it's like to live or holiday in the house, how to get there and where they can go for daytrips or a weekend away.

Buy to let information

It pays to be prepared in advance with information for two different types of buyer – those who will use the property as a permanent residence or private holiday home, and those who plan to set up holiday lets. For the latter, you will need to put together a purchaser information pack.

If you haven't been offering holiday lets then look at your property in terms of its possible appeal to holidaymakers, and put together as much information as you can

about the potential experience for both the owner and holidaymaker.

If you have already been letting, you should provide details of the costs incurred and income generated from doing so, as well as where you have been advertising and the profile of guests. This would include how many weeks have been let, the length of season, the level of return visits and any advance bookings. You could also provide contact details for any local people offering caretaking and maintenance services.

Some buyers may want to let the property for just a few weeks, while others may want occupation for as much of the year as possible. Give accurate information about your own approach and business results and trust that any buyer looking to let will see the potential for their own plans. ■

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