



British Sauna Society guidance document.

Operating a sauna in the UK: Securing land & site agreements

This guide forms part of the British Sauna Society's operator guidance series. It is written for people setting up or running saunas in the UK, particularly mobile, pop-up and small site-based operations.

It reflects common practice and shared experience across the UK sauna sector. It does not constitute legal advice. The British Sauna Society accepts no liability for decisions or outcomes arising from its use. Responsibility for compliance and contractual arrangements remains with the operator.



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1. Why land is the real constraint.

For most sauna operators, the sauna itself is not the hardest part. Land is.

Securing the right site affects:

- permissions and licensing
- insurance viability
- water and power access
- amenities available (i.e. showers, toilets)
- customer footfall
- operating costs
- stress levels

Many early problems arise from committing too quickly to a site before understanding demand, costs or regulatory implications.

The aim at the start is flexibility, not permanence.



2. Common types of sites

Operators typically begin on one or more of the following:

- private land (farms, lakes, hospitality venues, private beaches)
- council-owned land
- commercial venues (gyms, hotels, campsites, retreats)
- event-based or seasonal pop-ups

Each comes with different expectations, timelines and levels of formality.



3. Private land: how most operators start

Private land is often the easiest entry point.

Why it works

- fewer layers of approval
- faster decision-making
- more room for informal arrangements

Typical arrangements

Operators commonly agree:

- a percentage of takings (often around 10–15%)
- a flat daily or monthly fee
- a hybrid of minimum fee plus percentage

Percentage-based arrangements are popular early on because they share risk.

Agreements

Early agreements are often:

- short-term
- informal
- based on trust and trial periods

This is normal at the pilot stage.

Watch-outs

- vague expectations about exclusivity
- unclear access to water or parking
- landowners underestimating operational impact



4. Council land: slower but sometimes strategic

Council land usually involves:

- formal applications
- defined operating periods
- stricter documentation

What to expect

- longer timelines
- clearer conditions
- less flexibility once agreed

Council sites can offer visibility and legitimacy, but are rarely ideal for first pilots.



5. Commercial partnerships and hosted sites

Some operators partner with existing venues.

Examples include:

- campsites and glamping sites
- gyms and wellness centres
- hotels and retreats

Benefits

- existing footfall
- shared infrastructure
- clearer operational boundaries

Trade-offs

- reduced autonomy
- revenue sharing expectations
- brand alignment considerations

These sites can work well once operations are stable.



6. What landowners usually care about

Regardless of site type, landowners commonly want reassurance about:

- safety and insurance
- impact on land and neighbours
- reliability and professionalism
- clarity around income

Very few care about sauna culture or ritual at this stage.

Providing:

- insurance certificates
- a simple operating summary
- clear communication

usually matters more than elaborate proposals.



7. Agreements: how formal is formal enough?

At early stages, many operators work without formal leases.

Common early documents include:

- email agreements
- short memoranda of understanding
- simple written terms covering duration, payment and exit

Good practice

Even informally, clarify:

- length of trial period
- notice required by either party
- payment structure
- responsibility for utilities or damage

Avoid long leases before you understand your numbers.



8. Exclusivity, proximity and neighbouring saunas

Operators increasingly encounter other saunas nearby.

Common concerns

- another sauna opening close by
- perceived competition
- customer comparisons

Practical perspective

Evidence from the sector suggests:

- multiple saunas increase overall demand
- clusters normalise sauna use
- community tone matters more than distance

Where possible, open dialogue reduces tension.



9. When sites stop working

Sites fail for many reasons:

- regulatory changes
- weather exposure
- access issues
- instability in leases or rental costs
- relationship breakdowns

This is not failure. It is information. In several cases, operators report that increased footfall or commercial success can itself trigger rent increases or renegotiation, making previously viable sites unstable.

Strong operators:

- design exit routes
- keep equipment mobile
- maintain relationships with multiple sites and potential landowners
- keep conversations open with future hosts even while operating elsewhere
- avoid irreversible commitments



10. When to formalise or seek advice

Formal leases or legal advice may be appropriate when:

- investing significant capital
- installing permanent infrastructure
- committing long-term

At that point, professional advice can protect both parties.



11. Final perspective

Securing land is rarely a single decision. It is an evolving relationship.

Most successful operators:

- start small
- trial multiple sites
- prioritise flexibility
- treat landowners as partners, not obstacles

This guide supports informed judgement, not guarantees.

The British Sauna Society exists to support good practice, knowledge-sharing, and professional standards across the sector. Use of this guide is entirely at the reader's discretion, and the Society accepts no liability for decisions, actions, or outcomes arising from its use.

The UK sauna sector is evolving rapidly, and new regulatory, operational, and practical challenges will continue to emerge. The British Sauna Society will review and update this guidance periodically to reflect sector learning and changing conditions, with the intention of revisiting it on a six-monthly basis.

The British Sauna Society welcomes feedback, shared learning, and sector insight. If you have experience, guidance, or practical considerations that could strengthen this document, please contact us at content@britishsaunasociety.org.uk so they can be considered in future updates.