

Balmforth

Estate Agents, Valuers & Letting Agents



USAF Tenants Rental Guide 2024

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Estate Agents, Valuers & Letting Agents



1. Welcome

a) Introduction

This guide is intended to provide as much information as possible for either USAF military members, civilians or contractors wishing to rent a residential family home during their stay in the UK at RAF Mildenhall, RAF Lakenheath & RAF Feltwell. This guide is primarily aimed at USAF military members, which means that a few small sections may not apply to contractors or civilians on the base.

Balmforth are a real estate agent based in the Mildenhall area and are one of the largest agents letting to the USAF rental market.

Within this guide, we include both our activities and as many of the other features associated with renting a property during your stay in this country.

On arrival, your in-process briefings and documentation provided by the various base departments will cover a significant part of the housing process. Within this guide, we have attempted to bring together most of the information you will need, all in one document.

We must stress that this a 'guide' provided by Balmforth and you must refer to the Bases guidelines for all key aspects.

This guide is intended to cover off-Base housing only, as the way in which on-Base housing is operated, is significantly different and is regulated by the Housing Office.

In the event of any uncertainties or queries, your ultimate point of contact will be through the various base organisations, and we include their details in this guide.

This guide also lists a number of third-party services and functions in order to assist the process but we cannot directly make any recommendations.

During your "journey" to find a new home, you can contact the Balmforth office at any point and they will be happy to assist, to make the process as smooth as possible.

Telephone: 01638 711171

Email: mildenhall@balmforth.co.uk



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There are several Letting Agents serving the American market, with most located in the Mildenhall area. They tend to be either a local office for a national company or local independent agents such as Balmforth. Balmforth are the largest Sales & Letting Agent in the area and our Letting services are specifically tailored to suit the USAF market. Balmforth currently arrange around 250 American lettings per annum and have carried out thousands in the 22+ years of our operation.

Balmforth have two offices serving the rental market. The Mildenhall office has a prominent town centre location, and the Eriswell office is adjacent to RAF Lakenheath Gate 2.

(See inside back page of this guide for locator maps to both offices)

We are the only local Agent with offices OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

MONDAY TO FRIDAY

9:00 AM – 6:00 PM

SATURDAY

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

SUNDAY (Mildenhall only)

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM



**12 Shopping Centre, Earls Field,
Eriswell IP27 9RX**



Close to
RAF Lakenheath
Gate 2



**22-26 High Street,
Mildenhall, IP28 7EQ**

Our Rental Team



Chris Mullender
Director of Rentals
(Valuations)



Rebekka Stephenson
Rental Manager
(Repairs)



Sue Smith
Senior Rental Administrator
(Lease Preparation &
Documentation)

Bianca Amoss Cassie Inman
Natalia Wierzynkiewicz
Flip Miller Sarah Akehurst
Tiffany Foley
Rentals Admin



Jordan Faulkner
Rentals Negotiator



Steven Amoss
Rentals Negotiator

Professional

We are members of the following recognised organisations which will give you the reassurance of knowing that you are dealing with an Estate Agent who operates to the very highest standards of integrity and professionalism.



1. Base Services

a) Housing

Your first point of contact before undertaking any investigating into suitable housing is the Housing Office located on RAF Lakenheath in building BLDG429. Contact details are as follows:

- 0800 – 1600: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday
- 0930 – 1600: Thursday
- 0800 – 1530: Friday
- Closed: Saturday & Sunday
- US Holidays (Down/Goal/Family Days): Open
- UK and MOD Holidays: Closed (See section 5b)
- Assistance (TLA/OHA/MFH Wait Lists): 226-2000 E: 48ces.housingassistance@us.af.mil
- Referral (Community Housing): 226-2063 E: 48ces.referral@us.af.mil
- Facilities (MFH Inspections / Maintenance): 226-2064 E: 48ces.mfh@us.af.mil
- Dialing from Off-Base: 01638-52 XXXX

www.housing.af.mil/Units/RAF-Lakenheath

www.facebook.com/RAFLakenheathHousingManagementOffice

The housing office is manned by specialist housing officers who will advise you on your eligibility to Base Housing and also an overview of how the off-Base housing in the private sector/community works. The Housing Office has a wealth of supporting material, to include area maps and guides.

The majority of off-Base house searching will be through the Letting Agents websites or the national websites such as:

www.balmforth.co.uk

www.Rightmove.co.uk

www.OnTheMarket.com

b) Finance Office

The Finance Office will be your point of contact for matters such as submitting your OHA Claim, Utility allowance etc.

RAF Mildenhall Finance Office

Telephone: 011-44-1638-54-8851
314-238-8815

Address: Kansas Road
Unit 4910 Box 365

Building #441
APO, AE, United Kingdom
09459

RAF Lakenheath Finance Office

Telephone: 011-44-1638-52-3517
314-226-3967

Address: Liberty Center
Unit 5185 Box 100

Building #977
APO, AE, United Kingdom
09461

c) Community Bank & Payments

A factor that you will have to live with whilst you are in the UK, is that on-Base transactions are in Dollars(\$) and all off-Base transactions are in Pounds Sterling (£). You will therefore, need to open a Pound Sterling Bank Account, in order to make payments in the local economy such as rent and utilities.

The Community Bank is quite unique in that, it is both an “American Bank” and a “UK/British clearing Bank”.

Whilst it is possible for you to open a bank account at a British high street bank, money-laundering regulations can make this very difficult.

In the short term and particularly on arrival in the UK, you can make payments and purchases using your US cards but the merchants will almost certainly charge fees for this, which are typically 3% (as this is what the card companies charge them).

You can make payments to Letting Agents and retailers in cash but please be aware of the security risk in carrying large sums of cash and many agents will no longer take cash.

On a medium- and longer-term basis, you should set up a Community Bank/UK Bank Account and make rent and utility payments on an automated basis. This is done in two ways.

- Standing Order – When you instruct your bank to make set payments on set dates, **sending** the money to the retailer. (Most letting agents use this method)
- Direct Debit – When you give the retailer the right to take **from** your bank account, money that they believe that you owe them. (Most utility companies use this method)

You can also use the “wise” payment transfer system for payments such as rents.

d) Furniture Management Office (FMO) & Furniture Management Section (FMS)

The Furnishings Management Office is located at RAF Feltwell, in building BLDG73. Scampton Road, RAF Feltwell. Use IP26 4AY for Sat Nav

- Furnishings Management Section RAF Feltwell BLDG 73
- 0800 – 1600: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday
- 0930 – 1600: Thursday
- 0800 – 1530: Friday
- Closed: Saturday & Sunday
- Customer Service: 226-7030 Dialing from Off-Base: 01638-527030 [mailto: 48ces.ceacf@us.af.mil](mailto:48ces.ceacf@us.af.mil)
- Appliance maintenance department: 226-7156 [mailto: appliancerepaircalldesk@us.af.mil](mailto:appliancerepaircalldesk@us.af.mil)

On arrival, it is unlikely that your shipped household goods will be available straight away, so there is a requirement for short-term loaner furniture. In addition, many British houses do not have built in appliances or wardrobes/closets and you may need to loan these types of goods for the full period of your tour. FMO/FMS will be able to assist you in this area and have standard forms to assist with selecting the right appliances/furniture.

In addition, your Letting Agent/Landlord will be able to advise on the size and type of item that you will require. The spaces in UK kitchens for appliances, are generally 60cm wide and a standard height, this is considerably smaller than US standards, so you will often have to loan UK style appliances.

Furnishings Management Section (FMS)

Temporary loaner furniture is available from FMS for off-base and on-base residents for up to 90 days, prior to the delivery of your household goods. A temporary loaner kit consists of beds, dressers, sofas, tables, and chairs. Requests should be delivered within five to seven duty days. Please ensure you process your request at least ten days prior to the effective date of your move, to allow time for delivery.

Duration of tour (DOT) items are available for off-base residents. Items include wardrobes, washer/dryer, stove, refrigerator, and transformers WHERE NOT PROVIDED BY THE LANDLORD. A landlord/ tenant statement must be provided to FMS with any application for appliances. Stipulate available space and relevant connections available. It is important that you report any damages to your property on delivery prior to signing for receipt of item on a Form 228. Any damage to the landlord's property will be taken from your security deposit so recording of damages is essential to ensure you can utilize the reimbursement process. Please contact the FMS customer service desk for more detailed information.

3. Temporary Lodgings

Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA)

TLA is a financial entitlement that partially reimburses you for expenses while in temporary lodging (including transient facilities) and cost of meals. TLA is based primarily on permanent change of station (PCS) moves and non-availability of government-controlled quarters (other than transient quarters) or private rental housing. If Government transient facilities are available and not used, TLA lodging reimbursement is limited to the Government-quarters cost. Lodging expenses are not reimbursable when you stay with friends, relatives, co-workers, or associates. In these cases, only meals are reimbursed. You must report to the Housing Office within 2 duty days after the reporting date to the permanent duty station (PDS) to register for permanent housing. The Housing Office will inform you of the availability of government quarters and advise you on how to find private rental housing.

Upon arrival (reporting) at a USAFE PDS, service members will be authorized up to 30 days TLA to facilitate in-processing and determination of housing options. These days could be a combination of on and off base lodging which will be subject to availability. Contact your local TLF (Lodging Office) for confirmation. Under certain circumstances TLA may be extended for more than 30 days after arrival, but such extensions must be approved by the 3rd Air Force Commander. Paragraph 9160-I of the Joint Travel Regulation discusses when an extension might be justified. The Housing Office will provide instructions on how to request an extension beyond 30 days if necessary.

When government-controlled quarters are available in your category and bedroom requirement, you will receive an offer for government-controlled quarters; no area preferences are taken into consideration. If you refuse to occupy available government-controlled quarters, TLA is terminated the first date Furnishings Management Section (FMS) can deliver loaner furnishings based on the date quarters are available.

If government-controlled quarters are not available in your category and bedroom requirement you must aggressively seek private rental housing to maintain your entitlement to TLA. If you elect to process a rental contract on a house or purchase a house which is not ready for occupancy within 60 days your TLA entitlement will end at 60 days unless an extension is approved.

Aggressive search criteria must be documented in 10-day increments. For the first ten days, a minimum of two documented house visits to secure permanent off-base housing is required. Subsequent ten-day increments will require five documented house visits.

Where available, you can elect to initiate a temporary short-term rental contract in order to commence OHA while searching for or awaiting other permanent housing. The Housing Office maintains a list of short-term let options.

Please contact your Housing Office representative for more information on TLA requirements.

TLA Arrival

- 1 copy of orders for each claim
- Fully itemized receipt from lodging for nights claimed
- House Search Form: Must be completed for each claim, until housing is secured
 - 1st Claim – if housing hasn't been secured, you will need to list at least 2 houses you have looked at and reasons you haven't accepted these houses
 - Subsequent Claims - if housing hasn't been secured, you will need to list at least 5 houses you have looked at and reasons you haven't accepted these houses
- Off-base lodging: requires a letter of non-availability from lodging
- Staying with friends: confirmation of lodging letter from friends

(Note: - This is a direct extract from the Housing Office Guide)

<https://www.lakenheath.af.mil>

<https://www.mildenhall.af.mil>

4. Overseas Housing Allowances (OHAs)

OHA is paid at your maximum rental allowance or the maximum rent of the property, whichever is lower. Rental payment over and above the amount of your OHA entitlement is not paid to you. Try and ensure you get value for your money and make allowances for possible future rent increases. It is not always advisable to maximize your OHA. If your situation or circumstances change, it must be reflected in your OHA.

Utility Allowance will be provided to you for the payment of electricity, heating, and water. In almost all cases these payments are your responsibility when renting a home off-base. Legislation exists in the UK to ensure you are provided with the Energy Efficiency of a property before you make a choice to rent it. This is provided to you in the form of an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). Homes are rated from A to G, with A being the most efficient, G being the least. All rental properties must be a minimum of an E.

Moving In Housing Allowance (MIHA) is a one-time payment to assist you with additional costs you may incur on your move into off-base housing. Your OHA will start and your TLA will stop on the effective date of your lease agreement. Ensure the time between when you sign your lease and the effective start date is sufficient to process your OHA allowance paperwork, and the funds you need will be on hand to pay to your landlord. You can apply for Advance Overseas Housing Allowance (AOHA) which is a loan up to three times your rent amount or maximum rent allowance. You will need to produce a signed lease in order to apply for AOHA and have signed approval from your commander. (Repayment is made over 12 months by automatic pay deduction). Alternatively, you can defer repayment of your deposit advance until year 2 or the end of your tour).

The housing office will be able to provide allowances for the various ranks not included in the table below and are also subject to change on an occasional basis. If you have any doubt about your allowance, you must check with the Housing Office. There are also different allowances for Mil-to-Mil tenancies, again, please check with the Housing Office.

Processing Advance Overseas Housing Allowance (AOHA) requires additional time, the entire process takes approximately one week. You will be required to complete the paperwork and attain Commander/1st Sergeant approval/signature.

Advance OHA

- 1 copy of signed lease (housing unable to make copies)
- 1 copy of orders (only needed for deferring repayments)

OHA Start

- 1 copy of orders
- 1 copy of signed lease (housing unable to make copies)

a) OHA Table

Rental Allowances from 16th January 2024

Rank	Rank code	Without dependents	With dependents
Airman	E1/2	£1125	£1250
Airman First Class	E3	£1125	£1250
Senior Airman	E4	£1125	£1250
Staff Sergeant	E5	£1200	£1330
Tech Sergeant	E6	£1440	£1600
Master Sergeant	E7	£1440	£1600
Senior Master Sergeant	E8	£1440	£1600
Chief Master Sergeant	E9	£2115	£2350
Second Lieutenant	O1E	£1440	£1600
First Lieutenant	O2E	£1440	£1600
Captain	O3E	£2115	£2350
Second Lieutenant	O1	£1200	£1330
First Lieutenant	O2	£1200	£1330
Captain	O3	£1440	£1600
Major	O4	£2115	£2350
Lieutenant Colonel +	O5-O10	£2250	£2500

5. English or American

a) The Language: Alternative wording

<u>English</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>American</u>
Estate Agent	Real Estate Agent	Splashback	Backsplash
Solicitor	Attorney/Lawyer	Tap	Faucet
Show Home	Model Home	Toilet	Restroom
Ground Floor	First Floor	Wardrobe/Cupboard	Closet
First Floor	Second Floor	Curtains	Drapes
Flat	Apartment	Net Curtains	Under Drapes
Housing Estate	Housing Development	Bin	Trash Can
Bungalow	House/Ranch House	Rubbish	Trash/Garbage
Terrace	Town House	Cooker	Stove
Semi Detached	Duplex	Sitting Room	Living Room
Block of flats	Apartment Building	Cloakroom	Half Bath
Garden	Yard	Lift	Elevator
Postcode	Zip Code	Chemist	Drugstore
Car park	Parking Lot	Petrol	Gas
Fitted Carpet	Wall to wall Carpeting	Bonnet	Hood (of a car)
Pavement	Sidewalk	Trolley	Cart
Mobile phone	Cell phone	Boot	Trunk
Pedestrian/ Zebra Crossing	Crosswalk	Torch	Flashlight
Letterbox	Mailbox	Lorry	Truck
Ring Road	Beltway	Holiday	Vacation
Motorway	Highway	Working day	Duty Day
Flyover	Overpass	Work colleague	Co-worker
Sat Nav	GPS	Anti-clockwise	Counter-Clockwise
		Opposite	Across from

b) Acronyms

USAF

FMO	Furnishing Management Office
FMS	Furnishing Management Section
TDY	Temporary Duty Assignment
DOT	Duration of Tour
DEROS	Date Estimated Return from Overseas
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
PDS	Permanent Duty Station
TLA	Temporary Living Accommodation
TLF	Temporary Lodging Facility
MFH	Military Family Housing
OHA	Overseas Housing Allowance
AOHA	Advance Overseas Housing Allowance

UK

EPC	Energy Performance Certificate
AST	Assured Shorthold Tenancy
EICR	Electrical Installation Condition Report
ARLA	Association of Residential Letting Agents
TDS	Tenancy Deposit Scheme
TPC	Tenancy Periodic Check

c) Bank Holidays

English

New Year's Day - 1st January
Good Friday – varies March/April
Easter Monday - varies March/April
May Bank Holiday - Early May
Spring Bank Holiday – end of May
Summer Bank Holiday – end of August
Christmas Day – 25th December
Boxing Day – 26th December

American

New Year's Day - 1st January
Martin Luther King Jr. Day - January
Memorial Day - May
Independence Day – 4th July
Labor Day - September
Veterans Day - November
Thanksgiving - November
Christmas Day – 25th December

6. Timescales

- Around four weeks before arrival, begin your research into rental properties
- Around one week before arrival, contact Balmforth to start setting up showings
- Report to the Housing Office within 2 duty days of arrival to receive information on housing options and Temporary Lodging Allowance (TLA) reimbursement
- On arrival sort out
 - Cellphone
 - Car
 - Rental House
- Processing Advance Overseas Housing Allowance (AOHA) requires additional time, the entire process takes approximately one week. You will be required to complete the paperwork, attain Commander/1st Sergeant approval/signature
- First week, view potential properties
- Second week, set up all lease arrangements
- Third week, move in

7. What to rent

a) Base Housing

Military Family Housing Availability

Military Family Housing (MFH) consists of one-, two- and three-story units. East Anglian Regional Housing Office has 3 separate housing areas located both on base and in the surrounding communities. MFH areas range from on base up to 10 miles away from base. The waiting times are approximate and change monthly. Please check with the Housing Office for current waiting times. Providing you apply for housing within 30 days of your arrival, your effective placement date on the waiting list will be the departure date from your losing installation. Please note that credit for a remote tour (UDR) must be claimed within 30 days of your arrival.

Always verify the available date, preferably before viewing the property, to ensure you will be able to occupy the property within your TLA Allowance. Please be aware that a change in an available date on a property is not justification for a Temporary Living Allowance (TLA) extension.

b) Renting in the community

There is only sufficient base housing for a small proportion of USAF members. The vast majority will therefore have to rent in the 'community', which is done on a private, individual, basis. During the whole letting and occupation process, you will then deal directly with the landlord or the letting agent.

Most will be through a Letting Agent such as Balmforth or a very small number may be direct with a Landlord. Most Letting Agents will follow all the laws and regulations but if dealing directly with a Landlord, you must take great care.

This means you will be responsible for utility costs, council tax declaration, TV services etc. Some USAF members prefer to be in the community where you get an opportunity to experience life in a local economy, others prefer to be on base housing, where there is less for you to organise.

Balmforth are member of ARLA who are a highly regarded regulating authority for Letting Agents in the UK. Balmforth have a comprehensive "lease signing" process, where you will be assisted at all stages with the various documentation.

c) UK Homes smaller

Land in the UK is at a premium, and construction costs are very high, this therefore means that an average UK property will be much smaller than you will be used to in the United States. For example, an average UK 3-bedroom house will be around 1000 sq. ft. and a 4-bedroom house will be 1250 to 1500 sq. ft.

Some areas have no gas so the heating will be oil or electric. This is perfectly acceptable in the UK. Very few homes have (or need) air conditioning.

d) EPC – Energy Performance Certificate

All rented properties must have an EPC, and this has a banding from A to F (and a more accurate numerical value). All rental properties must be in bands A to E, A is the most energy efficient. As your utility allowance is fixed, the more energy efficient the property you rent, the lower your utility costs will be. Older or un-refurbished properties will be less efficient. The EPC is only a guide, as for example, some of the modern electric heating systems are extremely efficient but don't get a very good EPC rating.

e) Heating sources

There are 3 main energy sources for heating, which are gas, oil and electric. Until recently, gas was the favoured as it is relatively cheap and easy to administer. However, many of the villages in this area do not have gas and so other options will need to be considered. Historically, oil was the second choice, which was slightly more expensive than gas, and does require an oil tank to be filled up occasionally, but this is still an acceptable form of heating. The third is electric heating, where older style storage heaters in each room are inflexible and expensive. There are however, some extremely good new electric solutions to include energy efficient electric boiler, or air source central heating (electric). If you are unsure on the type of heating system, you can ask your Letting Agent to explain.

f) Unfurnished

As most USAF personnel have their own household goods, most lettings are on an unfurnished basis. There are some furnished lets available, but these are more for a shorter term, are more expensive and are less common. For an unfurnished letting, the property should still have all floor coverings (carpet/laminate), general fixtures and fittings including light fittings and light bulbs, and window coverings (blinds or curtains). The property listing and inventory should record what furnishings are with the property.

Temporary loaner furniture is available (see 2d) or long-term appliance/closets (see 2d).

All houses will need to be equipped with some basic fittings to pass the Life & Safety Inspection.

g) Appliances

Most rental properties will come with a built-in oven, hob and extractor. Some may have integrated washing machines, dishwashers, dryers, fridges, and freezers. However, many properties will just have spaces for these appliances to be freestanding. Most you can attain free of charge from FMO. Your letting agent or landlord should be able to advise what is included and discuss with you any requirements for FMO. They will also be able to help you fill out the forms.

8. Where to rent

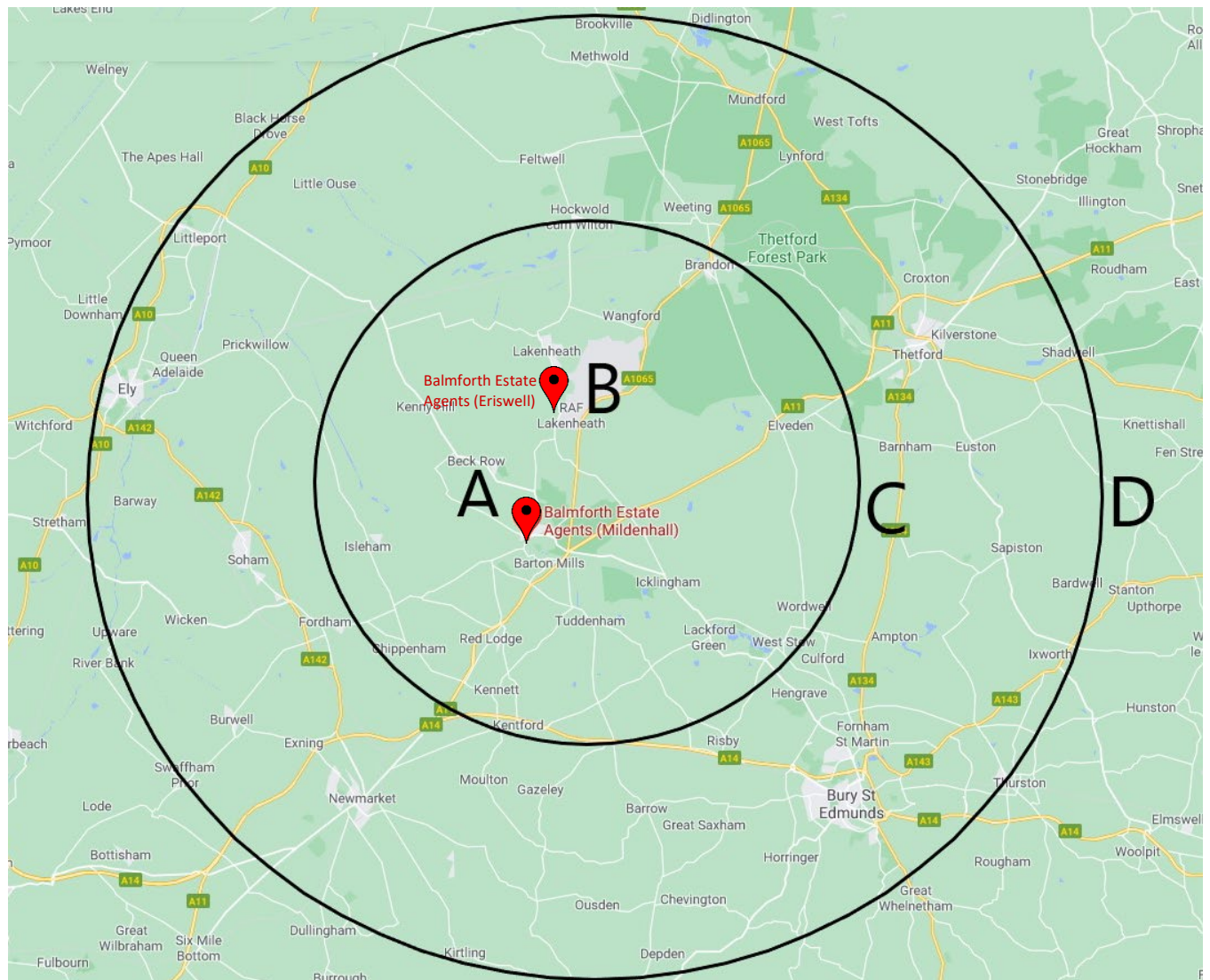
a) Balmforth USAF Guides

Balmforth provide online guides for all the surrounding towns and villages. These can be found at www.balmforth-usaf.com, under “The area”. These guides give a brief overview, including a video tour for all the local towns and villages. Also, on our main website www.balmforth.co.uk under the “USAF Rentals” tab.

b) The local area

The area surrounding RAF Lakenheath and RAF Mildenhall is very rural and comprised of many small towns and villages. Ensure you carefully consider the type of roads you will have to drive when choosing a home. When looking at the drive to the home of your choice, consider the changing daylight hours and weather, depending on the season.

The map below gives approximate distances and driving times for the various towns and villages.

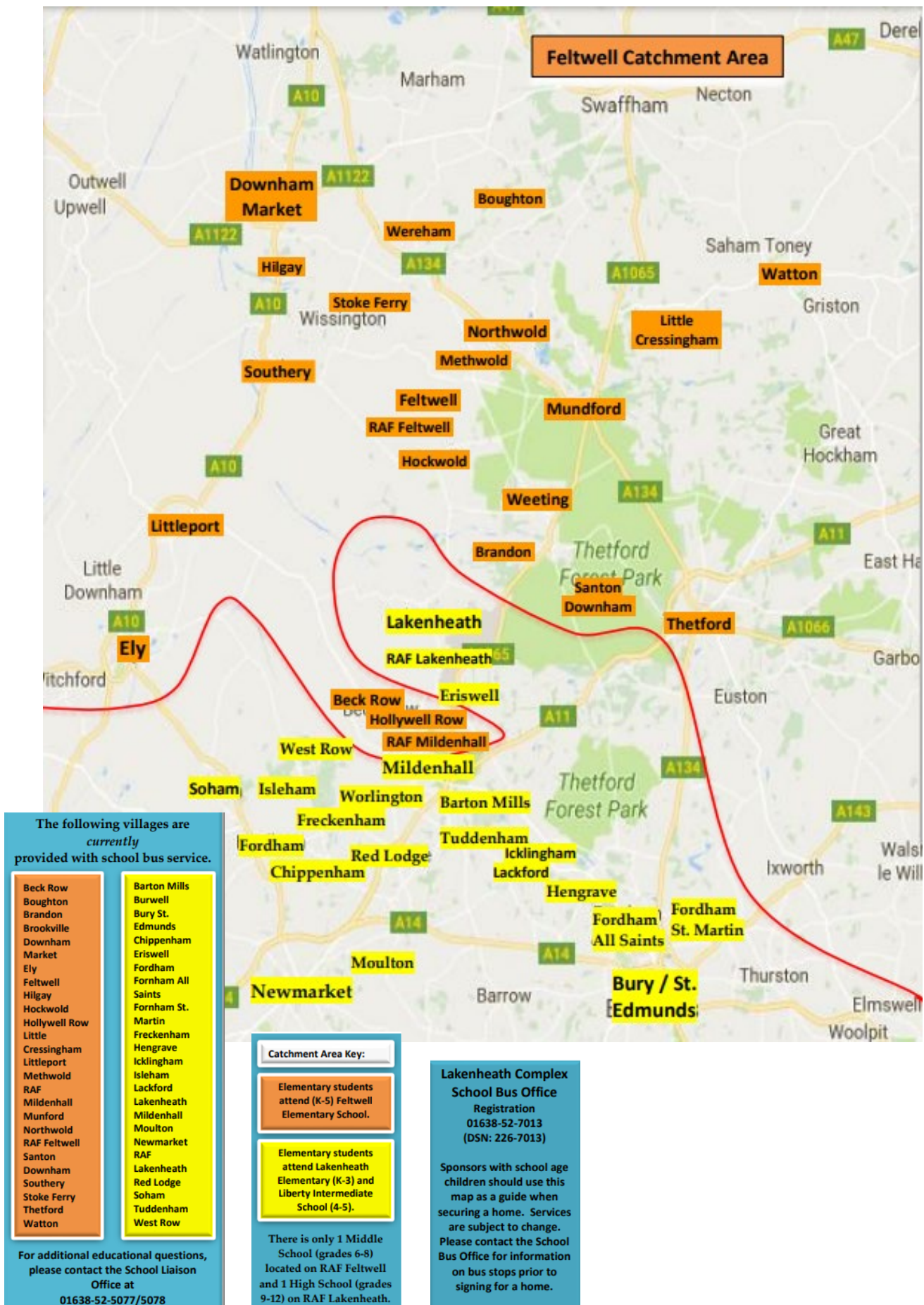


A = RAF Mildenhall
B = RAF Lakenheath

C = 5 miles radius – 10/15 minute drive
D = 10-15 mile radius – 30/40 minute drive

c) School bus routes

Lakenheath Complex School Bus Map



If you have children who will go to the Base Schools, you should consider if your preferred location is on the School Bus routes. Otherwise, you will need to provide your own transport.

9. How to search

a) Before you arrive

It is advantageous but not necessary to contact us before your arrival in the UK so that you can get some basic elements of your requirements established. If you email us prior to your arrival to confirm your housing allowance/preferred monthly rent, we can then email you the list of our available properties so you can then look at what is available prior to your arrival. It is generally best not to book any viewings until you have arrived in the UK as the market does change very rapidly. Some advanced research will assist on your arrival in the UK. You should be able to establish the type of property that your allowance will allow, as well as some ideas on your preferred location.

b) Property details

Letting agents have a huge variety in the quality of their listings but should include a general description, indicating its location, list the accommodation, have a selection of photographs of the property. In addition, there should be a copy of the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) and a floorplan. The floorplan will indicate the square footage of the property, but please bear in mind that UK properties are considerably smaller than their US equivalents.

c) Registered Agent - ARLA



If you are dealing directly with a private landlord during the search process, you will have considerably less protection if something goes wrong. There are several letting agent organisation that have codes of conduct, some of which offer little protection to you as a tenant. The industry leading organisation is called the Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA) who are recognised nationally. Balmforth are a member of ARLA which will give you the optimum level of protection. In order to expect an acceptable standard of letting service, you are advised to use an ARLA registered agent.

d) Websites

Whilst it is possible to carry out your search by “word of mouth” or driving around, the normal way is to search using the various websites and letting agents.

The largest and most important website is www.rightmove.co.uk and most letting agents list on this website. In this area, one of the other popular websites www.onthemarket.com is also widely used with a great choice of properties. Most letting agents will also have their own lettings website, with only their own properties listed and with Balmforth being one of the largest lettings agents in the area, www.balmforth.co.uk will give you an excellent choice of properties. Many agents such as Balmforth list properties on their own website first before releasing it to the national websites, so it is worth searching our website on a regular basis.

e) Recommendations

Your colleagues and sponsor will be able to recommend helpful and high-quality letting agents and to suggest poor quality agents which should be avoided. Balmforth continue to offer a successful service with the high quality of our services which get highly recommended by current and past tenants.

f) Local Agents

All the agents in the Mildenhall area are familiar with the way in which the USAF rental market works. You should take care if using an agent from a distant town, as the whole process will be much more complicated for them, from both the viewing process and the required documentation for a USAF letting.

Unlike the USA, in the UK, you cannot view a property listed with a different agent, although very occasionally some properties may be listed with more than one agent.

Balmforth have offices in Mildenhall town centre and Lords Walk, Eriswell (RAF Lakenheath by gate 2) and will be able to discuss with you your requirements, to make a shortlist of properties for you to consider and view.

g) Balmforth Offices

Balmforth are the only agent in the area open 7 days a week, giving you a wider timescale for your various searching activities.

Balmforth specialize in the USAF rental market and generally have a choice of 50-100 properties in a range of styles, locations and rental levels. We can therefore, assist to offer a property that suits your requirements.

h) On-Base advertising

As part of our working relationship with USAF members, we have extensive advertising on both RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath. We have exclusive advertising at RAF Mildenhall "Gateway" incoming accommodation, together with advertising in key on Base locations, such as the new arrivals hotel and public areas. We also have regular advertising in the "At-ease", "Get up and go", "Stars and stripes" publications, to facilitate military members communications with our business. We also advertise on the local radio station Zack FM.

10. Viewing/Showing process

a) Explain what you are looking for

Rent – Most USAF personnel will choose to rent at their full allowance (see section 4 (a)), so you must ensure the Letting Agent is aware of this. If you are prepared to pay out of pocket, advise the Letting Agent to help narrow down the list the available properties.

Area – Ensure the Letting Agent is aware of where you want to let.

Property Features – Ensure you have discussed features, such as the number of bedrooms, bathrooms, etc.

Pets – At Balmforth, we advise our Landlords to accept pets. If you have (or intend to have a pet), you must advise your Letting Agent as you are arranging showings/viewings. They will require some background information on the pet (breed, size, level of housetraining etc.), to assist the Landlord in making a decision.

a) Fees

Unless you have specifically appointed a "property finding service/company" (which we would not recommend), there are no fees payable to either letting agents or landlords to view a property. It is very rare to use a "finding company" as the ability to search and view properties is quite straight forward and you will generally be the best judge in what you are looking for.

Some Letting Agents also charge for services during your tenancy, so it is important to check this with the Letting Agent before taking a property (such as lease renewals, checkouts etc., Balmforth do not.

b) Transport

For military members arriving in the Country, you will organise your own transport almost immediately on arrival. We partner with Reliable Rentals who offer an extensive range of rental cars 01353 675111.

It is generally expected that you will make your own way to viewings, using a Sat-Nav (GPS) to find properties. You should carefully research the location and finding of a property, before setting off for a viewing appointment, to avoid problems in finding it. Most letting agents will only have allowed a half hour slot for a viewing, so if you are late in arrival, you may lose that appointment. If you have any queries, can't find the property or can't make the appointment, contact the Letting Agent as soon as possible.

In addition, the way UK addresses are quoted can be confusing. For example, a property in Lakenheath, an address may be '*111 The Street, Lakenheath, Brandon, Suffolk, IP27 9ZZ*'

This will mean the property is in the village of Lakenheath which is in the postal area of Brandon, NOT the town of Brandon. The postcode in the UK will take you to the correct street, not the actual property. If you have trouble finding the property, contact the letting agent as soon as possible, to help you find it.

c) Open & Informative

Letting agents have a legal responsibility to advise you as much details as possible about the property, but regrettably, many of their descriptions are brief or incomplete. You can ask the agent for more information, and it is often worth a drive around the neighbourhood to get a good feel. The Letting Agent will be used to some regular questions, so do not be afraid to ask. If the Letting Agent seems vague in their answers, take extra caution.

d) Selecting your property

As soon as you have selected the property which you believe meets your requirements, you must let your Letting Agent know as soon as possible and they will require the application process to begin immediately to hold this property for you. This will normally consist of an application form and a reservation fee (£100-£300). This reservation fee will go towards your security deposit and is NOT a Fee to be taken and kept by the Landlord/Letting Agent.

11. Application process

a) Application & initial checks

To reserve a property and start the process you will be required to fill out the letting agent's application form. At Balmforth, this is a simple document. With this document, there are some other supporting documents to explain the process, and these include Military right to rent form and our explanation guide of the process which needs to be signed and acknowledged. We will also need to see a copy of your orders, and visually see your military ID (no copy to be taken).

For tenancy UK applications, we must take credit checks and references, but these are not normally required for USAF tenancies.

From making a reservation on the property you wish to rent until moving in, allow 7-10 days for the documentation and inspections to be carried out.

b) Fees

To hold a property, we require a "holding fee" to be paid of between £100 and £300 (varies depending on monthly rent). This holding fee will go towards your moving in monies and is not a fee taken and retained by us as the agent. A property is not normally secure for you until this fee has been paid and the application form completed. If you withdraw from the letting process before move in, some or all of this fee will be lost.

c) Life & Safety check

Prior to you signing a lease, the property is required to pass a housing office "life and safety checklist" (Adequacy Standards Checklist). This includes around 20 key aspects of the property which must be met prior to you signing the lease. As soon as the application form and holding fee have been paid, Balmforth will book the inspection with the housing office. The inspection is normally carried out by the housing office. Any failed points must be immediately rectified to allow the process to go forward.

You would normally not be able to sign your lease or be entitled to your OHA until the "Life & Safety" check has been completed on the property.

d) Draft Lease

You will require a draft lease for approval by the housing office/finance office to process your OHA, and Balmforth can provide this on request.

e) Rent/Deposit advance

To assist you with the move in process, you can apply for an advance overseas housing allowance (AOHA), which can be up to 3x your rental allowance. This should be applied for through the housing office.

12. Lease Signing process

a) Base compatible lease, the “Military Clause”

It is absolutely essential that your lease has the “military clause” as a standard part, if your letting agent/landlord refuses to insert it, you should not take the property. If you have any doubts whether the clause as presented to you is correct, the housing office will be able to advise.

b) The AST (12 months or tour dates)

The standard UK tenancy agreement is called an “Assured Shorthold Tenancy” (AST) and the majority of Letting Agents, the housing office agreements will be similar. For most new lettings, you will be advised to take out a 12-month agreement, if the landlord or Letting Agent wants a shorter period you must consider that you may be required to move in a shorter period of time. The housing office would suggest that you should not take out a longer lease than 12 months in case either your personal circumstances change, or you wish to move to a different property. Although ASTs are a fixed agreement, at the end of the fixed term they then continue on a rolling basis, normally with 1 months’ notice from you as a tenant, or two months’ notice from the landlord (This is called “periodic”).

If you are moving in the middle of your tour or renewing your lease, it is sometimes possible to set the lease to coincide with your tour end date. Once the AST has been signed, it cannot legally be broken by the landlord or tenant, except when invoking the military clause. If you must break the lease using the military clause, you will be asked to provide the written evidence (orders).

c) Rent to move in

You will normally be required to pay the first month’s rent either just before or on the move-in date. The amount may be adjusted to reflect the regular rent payment date, or you may be permitted to move in with “monies to follow” if your OHA has not yet been processed. These will be discussed with you prior to the lease signing appointment. Your holding fee will be carried forward and form part of your initial rent payment or security deposit.

d) Security Deposit (TDS)

Your security deposit is normally equivalent to one months’ rent and UK law prevents agents taking more than 5 weeks. UK law states that the security deposit must be held in one of the approved government schemes. Balmforth use the government scheme called TDS, Tenancy Deposit Scheme, and we therefore hold the security deposit in a client account on your behalf. At the end of tenancy, the security deposit will be returned to you, less any **agreed** deductions, or in the rare event of an unresolved dispute, will be held until TDS give a resolution decision.

e) Regular rent payments

For the second and ongoing rental payments, you will be required to set up a standing order from a UK clearing bank (the community bank meets these requirements). Manual rental payments are only permitted in exceptional circumstances.

f) Inventory

On move in, you will be given a detailed inventory which will record in text and photographs the condition and cleanliness of the property internally and externally, including the utility meter readings. These meter readings are important as you will need to supply these to your utility companies when opening your account. You will be given 7 days within which to make adjustments for any omissions or errors, after which point the inventory will be locked and deemed as accepted. This is a very important document and will be used as a key part of the check out process to determine any appropriate deductions at the end of the tenancy. If you believe the inventory is incorrect, you should immediately notify your Letting Agent.

g) Card charges

Balmforth will pass on any card payment charges at cost (USA cards), and you will be advised of these at the time.

h) Lease Signing appointment

You will normally have a formal lease signing appointment on the day of your move in (sometimes done prior to move in day), at this appointment we will go through all of the documentation with you, and you will pay your move-in monies. The documents that you will be provided at this appointment (or emailed to Tenant) are as follows:

- Lease (AST)
- Inventory (sent via email link)
- TDS (secured security deposit certificate) (emailed once funds cleared)
- EPC (energy performance certificate)
- Standing order
- Property manual (including further documents)
- Gas safety certificate (if required)
- EICR (electrical test certificate)
- Council Tax exemption

i) Check-in

On the commencement of the tenancy, either the landlord or Balmforth (if we are managing the property) will normally meet you to go through key elements within the property, to try and make sure that your tenancy gets off to a good start. The property should have a manual with all the key information.

13. Utilities, Furniture & Insurance

a) Housing referral Tenant check list

TV License- A TV license is required by all households that own a television. For initial purchases and information on license renewal go to www.tvlicensing.co.uk.

Telephone- Contact British Telecom on 0800-872-872 or access their web site at www.bt.co.uk, or choose from the list of telephone providers supplied.

Gas Supply (if applicable) - Your landlord will be able to advise you who your gas supplier is, be sure to contact them with your meter readings to set up your account. This supplier should not be changed without your landlord's permission.

Oil Supply (if applicable) – Your Landlord will be able to advise several companies that can supply oil. Many have monthly payment plans.

Electricity - Your landlord will be able to advise you who your electricity supplier is, be sure to contact them with your meter readings to set up your account. This supplier should not be changed without your landlord's permission.

Council Tax – All military personnel on orders residing in the local community are exempt from council tax. You are required to supply the local council with a completed exemption form and a copy of your orders. The housing office and Balmforth hold forms for most of the local district councils. This must be filled out and returned to avoid being charged.

Water Rates - If they are not included in your rent, phone Anglian Water on 0800-919-155 or access their web site at www.anglianwater.co.uk and give them your name, address and move in date.

Loaner Furniture and Appliances - Your landlord needs to sign the Landlord/Tenant statement found in your lease package. This needs to be taken to building 429 at RAF Lakenheath (226-7030) with a copy of your orders.

Insurance - The landlord will have insurance covering property structure on the premises, but it is your responsibility to obtain renters insurance for your own possessions for fire, theft, and accidental damage.

NB. The security deposit is NOT the last months' rent. If you are to be absent for more than 7 days always advise your landlord/Letting Agent, and guard against burst pipes.

b) British utilities

Please note: This list consists of the most commonly used companies but there are many more.

Telephone Companies

British Telecom www.bt.co.uk

TalkTalk www.talktalk.co.uk

Virgin www.virginmedia.com

Internet Service Providers

BT Broadband www.bt.co.uk

TalkTalk www.talktalk.co.uk - Sky www.sky.com

Virgin www.virginmedia.com

PlusNet www.plus.net

Cable Television

Sky Television www.sky.com

Virgin www.virginmedia.com

Water Supply

Anglian Water www.anglianwater.co.uk

Gas and Electric Providers

British Gas www.britishgas.co.uk

E-On Energy www.eonenergy.com

Npower www.npower.com

Scottish Power www.scottishpower.co.uk

Southern Electricity www.southern-electric.co.uk

EDF Energy www.edfenergy.com

The Gas and Electricity Consumer's Council Energywatch is the independent gas and electricity consumer watchdog. They provide advice and information on a range of gas and electricity issues or helps consumers to resolve complaints about their utility supply. You must give your gas or electricity supplier the opportunity to solve the problem first, but if you are still not satisfied, Energywatch can investigate your complaint further.

For free independent advice with your gas and electricity problems, please contact Energywatch on:

Telephone: 08459-06-07-08

Email: enquiry@energywatch.org.uk

Website: www.energywatch.org.uk

Ofgem

Ofgem's overriding aim is to promote choice and value for all gas and electricity customers, where it can be competitive, and through regulation only where necessary. You can contact Ofgem at 9 Millbank, London, SW1P 3GE, phone 020-7901-7000 or Regents Court, 70 West Regent Street, Glasgow G2 2QZ, phone 0141-3331-2678, or access their web site at www.ofgem.gov.uk

Energy Price Comparison Services

There are a number of internet price comparison services that can provide a comparison of prices offered by domestic gas and electricity suppliers. E.g., www.uswitch.com

Utility Suppliers

Balmforth would recommend that initially, you stick to the existing suppliers until you have had more chance to investigate what suits you best. The cheapest is not always the most suitable. Take care when signing up for fixed term deals.

14. Your new home and management

a) Lease renewals

At the end of the fixed period of your lease, it continues to be a rolling (periodic) agreement, with normally 1 months' notice (tenants) or 2 months' notice (landlord). On occasions, both tenants and landlords prefer to have additional security that the lease could be renewed for either a further 12 months or to the end of your tour. Balmforth do not charge for this service but many letting agents do. If you wish to extend your lease, contact your Landlord or Letting Agent.

b) Rent increases

At the end of the fixed period of your lease (AST), your landlord or letting agent may want to put in place a rent increase. Although most letting agents would only attempt to put in place a "fair" increase which is likely to reflect any changes in OHA's.

c) Access into your home

Most landlords and letting agents understand that as a tenant with a lease on a property, their rights of access are limited. However, in some circumstances, rights of access are permitted, and it is always best for all parties if this is done cooperatively. The landlord or agents' rights include access for regulatory inspections (EPC, EICR etc). Access for boiler servicing and gas safety certificates, access for repairs, access for regular visits (TPCs – regular inspection visits).

15. TPC – Tenancy Periodic Check

Tenancy checks are scheduled every 4 months', in order to ensure it is being properly maintained and to prompt you as a tenant in case there are any necessary repairs. At Balmforth, we will notify you in advance of these visits and you are welcome to be in attendance but there is no need for you to be there. We normally group all the properties in a certain area together and cannot guarantee the exact time, so we normally use our office key for access. These visits are very important and, in most circumstances, should not be postponed.

16. Repairs (Fixflo)

Letting Agents operate a variety of repair reporting processes. Balmforth operate an industry leading system "Fixflo". This is a **Interactive Repair reporting system**.

Tenants can report repairs via an online, white-label reporting portal in 40+ languages, anytime, anywhere. The portal also requires occupiers to provide all the essential information you would need to obtain accurate quotes and carry out effective first-time repairs including media files for better diagnoses. Should the issue fall under the remit of the occupier, for example, a report of mildew in the bathroom, the portal advises the occupier that it is their responsibility and provide guidance on how to resolve the issue safely. 25% of issues are resolved directly via the software. The other 75% are dealt with more effectively with an audit trail to record all the correspondence.

Some issues such as spiders or ants, are the responsibility of the Tenant. If you have any doubts, check with your Landlord/Letting Agent.

If you request a repair and it subsequently turns out to be your fault, you will be charged for the cost.

E.g.

- Electrical faults caused by faulty 110V transformers
- Blocked drains caused by non-degradable items

17. End of the lease

a) Notice

If you wish to end your tenancy

- After the initial fixed period
- During the fixed period if invoking the “Military Clause” (evidence will be required)
- At the end of your tour

You are required to give at least 30 days notice in writing. Failure to give 30 days notice in writing will leave you liable to further rental payments.

You should ensure that your Letting Agent acknowledges this in writing and advises you of the checkout process.

b) Preparing the property

You should arrange for your household goods to be removed. The property should be cleaned and must be in an acceptable condition. Items to check include;

- Bins emptied
- Windows cleaned
- Light bulbs all replaced and working
- All rubbish removed
- Garden attended to
- Property cleaned to a professional standard
- All utilities settled
- All keys returned

c) Checkout

Your Letting Agent will NOT book the checkout until you have confirmed the end of the tenancy and returned the keys. The checkout should happen within 2-3 days of the keys being returned. You are able to attend the checkout, but you must understand that the visit is only to assess the property. No conclusions can be reached until the inspection is then compared with the initial inventory and discussed with the Landlord. A few days later, the Letting Agent will then advise you on any proposed deduction or actions. You have various rights to rectify any issues or to contest the findings. Most Letting Agents appreciate that USAF military members have a very tight timescale to complete this process (7 days), whereas the UK TDS process allows 30 days.

d) Security Deposit return

Once any (if any) deductions have been agreed and they MUST be agreed by both the Tenant and the Landlord/Letting Agent, the full or part security deposit will be returned to you. English law allows 30 days from the end of the tenancy for this to be completed. However, most Letting Agents appreciate that military members need to close their affairs within 7 days and so will do their utmost to complete the process as soon as possible.

e) Sign out

Prior to leaving the UK, you are required by the Base authorities to be “signed out” by your Landlord or Letting Agent. This will normally be done once all the end of the lease processes have been completed.

18. Conclusion

We hope this guide has been helpful in the journey of your housing process, in the UK. We must reiterate that, whilst it includes many aspects in a general way, it has been put together by Balmforth (the leading Letting Agent in this area).

We very much appreciate the importance of the USAF rental market and firmly believe we provide a first class service.

Recent reviews

"Thank you so much for your help. You guys are a great agency and would gladly use you guys again if I am ever to be stationed in England again thank you very much"

"What we liked best about Balmforth, is that they responded back very quickly. When we first got here we didn't have a UK cell number yet so we could not call so we had to email. Out of all the houses we inquired about Balmforth was the first to respond, while some other agencies didn't reply back or it took a day or two to get a response. Also, they had multiple houses within our budget and our needs that we looked at all in one day, back to back to back. Highly recommend! All the staff we had were very nice and professional"

"Thank you for all the help and information. I would like to pass on that you and your colleagues have all been great to work with and we really appreciate how smooth this move has been"

"I also wanted to take the time to say thank you for everything. You guys are always so on it and willing to help and so flexible. I really do appreciate it and you guys have honestly made my transition to the UK amazing. Thank you guys again."

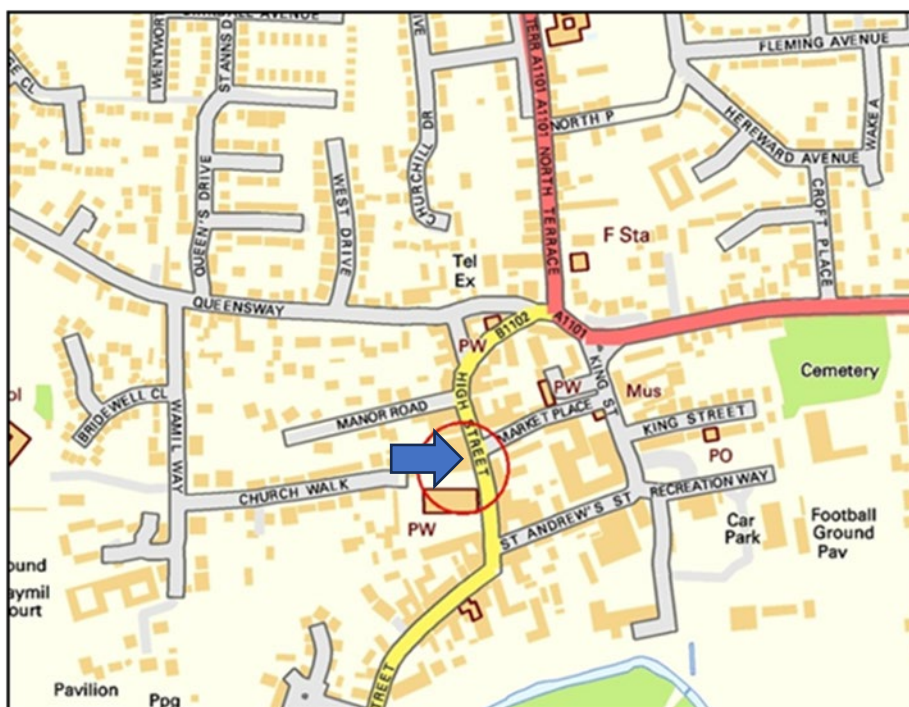
"Very helpful and professional. Great communication during the search and closing on a rental. Answered all my questions and concerns. Overall great company"

"Satisfied and happy that I found a home thanks to the agency- Very professional and nice agents. I will be happy to recommend them to my friends."

"Perfect and to the point '- Very accommodating to say the least. Very knowledgeable of the property and kind. Got me all the information I asked for in a very timely matter!"

"Professional, competent company, we dealt with their Lettings department. During business hours phone is answered promptly and emails are returned in timely manner. They were able to answer most of our questions and follow up further inquiries with landlords. We received very informative and professional customer service. I would recommend using this agency in search of a rental property"

19. Balmforth Offices - Location Maps



Location of our office in Mildenhall

There is free, short stay parking in the Market Square opposite, behind 'Pitstop' or a long stay car park beside the Jubilee Centre behind Sainsburys.



Location of our office in Lords Walk Adjacent RAF Lakenheath Gate 2

There is free parking to the rear of the building.

22-26 High Street, Mildenhall, Suffolk IP28 7EQ

T: 01638 711171

E: mildenhall@balmforth.co.uk

W: www.balmforth.co.uk

