RAF Mildenhall and RAF Lakenheath FAQS

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Changes

What are the changes?

The U.S. Dept of Defense announced on 8 January 2015 that following a strategic review of its European wide deployment it would be closing the RAF Mildenhall base in 2022.

On the same day it also announced that RAF Lakenheath is to expand with new jets and additional personnel.

The first F-35A is expected at RAF Lakenheath in 2020. The major infrastructure development at RAF Lakenheath is expected to start in 2018.

The U.S. Defense Department will be investing a minimum of $120million (£79.64million) in infrastructure construction at RAF Lakenheath to support the F-35A. Forest Heath’s Planning and Growth team will be involved as the USAF develops their construction plans.

The U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense has indicated that the withdrawal from RAF Mildenhall will begin in 2019 and will be completed by around 2022. To date, no details as to how this is to be phased have been published.

On 18 January 2016 the Ministry of Defence (MoD) announced that RAF Mildenhall was one of 12 sites it owned that was to be released for housing. See https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-minister-mark-lancaster-announces-release-of-mod-sites-for-development

The MoD has since said that potentially only part of the RAF Mildenhall site is to be released. The MoD is considering whether the rest of the site will be retained for military use. It said that it anticipates that up to 4,000 houses could be built on the area of land to be released, together with
employment land, although it has been unable to give any details as to the acreage and location within the site that this would occupy.

**So how many jobs will be lost?**

As a result of one base closing and the other expanding there could be a net loss of around 2,900 on-base jobs. We do not have a precise breakdown at this stage as to how many of these jobs are UK workers, and how many of them are American personnel, support staff and other on-base workers.

**What if?**

*What if the new president of the U.S. comes in and overturns the decision to close the Mildenhall base?*

There is lots of speculation as to what may or may not happen as a result of the U.S. elections. Some claim that the new president will, for whatever reason, u-turn on the closure decision. However none of that is definite. While we could wait and wait for the new president to overturn the closure, what happens if he or she doesn’t? We have to prepare on the basis of what we currently know which is that the base is scheduled to close.

**What are the options for the site**

*Who owns the RAF Mildenhall base?*

Both bases are owned by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Following the closure announcement, the MoD began a UK wide review of its estate, to determine whether the Mildenhall base should be kept for military use.

*It is likely to be heavily contaminated land - who is liable for the clean up of the site?*

That depends – there are negotiations between the U.S. Department for Defense and the MoD which owns the site as to which one of the two will be responsible for the clean up. A third option would be that the MoD as site owners, will carry out all the survey work saying what needs to be
done, and then reflect this is the sale price with the new developers paying for the clean up.

**Ok, so what are these engagement sessions all about?**

Following the base announcements Forest Heath District Council held three engagement sessions in 2015 which were advertised in the local press and via social media. Each of these looked at a different group affected by the base changes. One meeting looked at the impact on communities, another was held for businesses, while a third looked at the impact on the local housing market.

Now the MoD has announced its intention to release part of the site for housing, the Council is holding three more engagement sessions. The first took place on 18 April 2016. The dates for the other engagement sessions are 9 May 2016 and 13 May 2016.

At the first meeting it was announced that we will be commissioning a feasibility study to look at a number of options for the site.

**Who is paying for this feasibility work?**

Through the Government’s One Public Estate programme, Forest Heath District Council secured £230,000 towards a project that will help to shape the future of Mildenhall. Part of this money is toward working up a fully developed viable plan for the future of the RAF Mildenhall site, for when the USAF leave in 2022.

**But hasn’t the MoD now decided that RAF Mildenhall should be all housing?**

No, the MoD did announce on 18 January 2016 that part of the site is to be released for housing although it also mistakenly said that it had planning permission for the site and that the site could potentially take up to 4,000 new homes. Forest Heath District Council is the local planning authority and has not given planning permission for this. Nor has it received a planning application for the site. The MoD has since put out a correction via the media, acknowledging that it doesn’t have planning permission after all.
The Council has been working with its local residents and businesses ever since the closure announcement was made. We, on behalf of our communities, have consistently argued that any future use of the site has to be one that meets local needs – and that is not about simply selling off land for housing. We need to be replacing jobs with jobs. The simple truth is that to impose houses here without much needed infrastructure and without new employment is an injustice for our local communities. MoD has confirmed that a master plan would be developed for the site addressing both jobs and housing.

So what would FHDC do if the MoD released the base?

The closure of RAF Mildenhall together with the expansion of RAF Lakenheath could result in a net loss of 2,900 on-base jobs. There are a multitude of opportunities for the site to be brought forward for economic regeneration, creating new job opportunities and with it shaping the future prosperity of not just Mildenhall but the surrounding area as well. The £120m dualling of the A11, linking Norwich to Cambridge and London creates a corridor for economic growth. Cambridge’s science and innovation sector is bursting at the seams.

What about making it a civilian or freight airport?

The Government has indicated that the Mildenhall base will not be considered as part of its plans for the future of air transport in the UK. In order for the site to be used as an airport, we will need to find a commercial partner who is interested in operating from the site. As far as we are concerned there are a multitude of options on the table. We haven’t ruled out any of them.

Decision making

So what are we waiting for?

The MoD still hasn’t finished its review of its entire UK estate. We have, and will continue to put pressure on the MoD for a decision as to whether it wants to retain the rest of the site for military use, or release it for redevelopment.
But surely there’s no rush if we have until 2020 until RAF Lakenheath expands and RAF Mildenhall closes the year after?

Yes and no. Yes the changes are not immediate or overnight so we have time to prepare for them. But equally we need to be using that time to prepare. There will be changes to local infrastructure – roads, schools, GPs surgeries, hospitals and more. So we are busy working now not only to understand the implications of the RAF Lakenheath expansion, but also for the MoD’s plans for the RAF Mildenhall site.

Ok, so what’s happening now why we wait for that MoD decision?

Well, for a start we are trying to understand how much of the Mildenhall site, the MoD is actually releasing. We are awaiting the results of an economic impact study, commissioned by Forest Heath, St Edmundsbury Borough, Suffolk County, Breckland and East Cambridgeshire District councils and the New Anglia and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEPs which will be published later in the year. This is all part of our evidence building that backs our case – and that of our communities, that this site should be used to promote jobs growth.

Why should the MoD listen to the council and its local communities?

The Government has already given £230,000 to Forest Heath towards a project that will help to shape the future of Mildenhall. Part of this money is toward working up a fully developed viable plan for the future of the RAF Mildenhall site, for when the USAF leave in 2022. We are best placed to lead on the future regeneration of this site by, on the one hand working with our local residents and businesses, and on the other our partners including our MP, Suffolk County Council, Local Enterprise Partnerships, the MoD and the USAF.

Any indication why the MoD won’t simply hand over all of the site?

The MoD made the announcement in January this year that part of the site would be released for housing. This formed part of a wider announcement about the disposal of 12 sites which the MOD said would
generate £500 million and contribute towards Government housing targets.

The rest of the Mildenhall site is still being considered for military purposes by the MOD.

**But surely the MoD announcement solves all the housing issues surrounding the local plan?**

The MoD has not announced how much of the Mildenhall site will be disposed of when the USAF leave in 2022 and extensive site audits would then need to be carried out.

Therefore, it is not appropriate now for the Council to consider the site as available and deliverable for this Local Plan period (2011 – 2031). The site would not be available until the later stages of the Local Plan and therefore would feed into the future housing need after 2026/2027 and would be considered as an option/opportunity for growth when the Local Plan is reviewed for long term housing growth after 2025.

The Council is likely to commence a full review of the Local Plan after 2018 so the RAF Mildenhall site and future uses together with the necessary infrastructure needed will form part of that review.

**Meetings**

**What is MAM?**

The Government formed the Mildenhall, Alconbury, and Molesworth (MAM) Working Group following the 8 January 2015 announcements. Alconbury and Molesworth are also due to close as part of the US Dept of Defense review. The working group, made up of Government ministers, the MoD, Local Enterprise Partnerships, and local authority representatives including Forest Heath District Council leader Cllr James Waters, provides a national level forum at which local views and concerns can be discussed.

**What is MALAG?**

MALAG stands for the Mildenhall and Lakenheath Airbases Group and was formed by Forest Heath District Council as a way of bringing a cross section of local public authority partners, parish councils, community
representatives and other interested bodies together to discuss work taking place and the local needs and issues surrounding both the closure of RAF Mildenhall and the expansion of RAF Lakenheath. It is chaired by Forest Heath District Council leader Cllr James Waters and the outcome of these meetings is then fed up to the MAM working group.

**Where can I get more information?**

All our press releases and minutes of meetings and of the first three engagement sessions can be found at [www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/MALAG](http://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/MALAG)

Minutes from the latest engagement sessions will also be published after the last of the events on 13 May.