

Tenants Guide to Finding a Property

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Introduction

Finding a rental property can be time-consuming. As demand for rental property can often exceed supply you need to be adequately prepared if you want to make best use of your time and find the right property. This guide will help you with the process of finding a property.

We are always looking for ways to improve our guides, so we welcome any feedback, ideas, or insults!

Assess Rent Affordability

The first step in your plans to move should be to determine how much rent you can afford to pay. There are two common ways of calculating rent affordability:



Assessment based on research - Research by the housing and homelessness charity Shelter suggests that a rent that equates to at least 35% of gross annual household income is not an affordable rent. Calculate your maximum affordable rent as follows:

Gross Annual Household Income X 0.35 = Maximum Affordable Rent Per Annum

X 0.35 =

If you do not have an income that exceeds this level, you will almost certainly fail the referencing though proof that you have savings of at least 35 X monthly rent would be enough to satisfy any affordability assessment.



Assessment used by tenant referencing companies - Tenant referencing companies calculate affordability by multiplying the monthly rent by 30 and if the gross annual household income does not equate to at least this amount it is not an affordable rent. Calculate your maximum affordable rent as follows:

Gross Annual Household Income / 30 = Maximum Affordable Rent Per Month

/ 30 =

For the purposes of this calculation, gross annual household income should not include any Universal Credit, bonuses, overtime, or income from temporary or zero-hours contracts.

If you have no income but have easy access to significant capital, your affordability may be assessed against 2/3 of your available capital.

Decide on Location

The proximity to work, colleges, schools, family and friends, local amenities and public transport links are all factors you may wish to consider in deciding on location. Market rents in different areas may also influence your decision in deciding on location - you may not be willing or able to pay the market rent for your chosen area.

As an example, the rent levels for property in the Mendip district are shown in Table 1

Property Size	Average Rent Per Calendar Month (£)
Room	461
Studio	526
1 Bedroom	650
2 Bedrooms	878
3 Bedrooms	1126
4+ Bedrooms	1747

Table 1 – Average rent levels ~ Mendip district as of September 2023

As a rough guide expect to pay $\pm 10\%$ of the average rents but you get what you pay for, so if the asking rent on a particular property seems low, ask yourself why that may be before committing.

Decide When to Start Searching

Starting to search for a property too early can result in disappointment and wasted effort as you may find your ideal home only to realise the landlord wants a tenant who can move in long before you are willing and able to move. Start to search for a property too late and you may find too few properties available that match your needs as the best properties will have already been let. Timing your search and being flexible on your tenancy start date is key to finding the right property.

Decide on the latest date you are willing and able to move into a new property. Count backwards two calendar months from this latest move date and this will give you the date we recommend you should start searching for a property. However, this recommendation does come with a warning...

Be prepared to start a tenancy up to one calendar month before your latest move date in order to secure a particular property. Yes, this may mean paying rent on two properties for a short time, but you will have peace of mind that you can move into a property that meets your needs. Any overlap between your two tenancies will give you time to do any preparatory work on your new property, move your possessions and prepare your old property for handover. In the excitement of moving to your new property do not underestimate the time it can take to prepare your old property for handover.

Preparation

Ahead of finding your new property there is some preparatory work you can do to make the tenancy application process go as smooth as possible.

Check your credit files

Always check your credit report (or credit file) before applying for a tenancy to minimise the risk of failing the credit references. Do not pay to check your credit report. Your credit report is not the same thing as your credit score. Check EVERY detail; people have had applications rejected because an unused (but not cancelled) mobile contract's address had not been updated after a house move so be vigilant. Look out for entries on your record that are not yours - they may be a sign of ID fraud.

More information on checking your credit files can be found here:

<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/loans/check-free-credit-report/>

Register on the electoral role

Whilst it is not obligatory to be registered on the electoral role most tenant referencing companies will check whether applicants are registered. Being on the electoral role will add credibility to your application so if you are not registered it may be worth doing so.

Ensure you have a bank account registered at your current address – whilst not obligatory, referencing companies will view your application with suspicion if you do not

Prepare proof of earnings



If you are employed, have the contact details ready for whoever can verify your salary such as your line manager or Human Resources (HR) department.



If you are self-employed, have your accountant's details ready to verify your income. If you do not have an accountant have your latest tax return, last 3 years' books or last 6 months bank statements ready.



If you are retired, have your pension statement or last 6 months bank statements ready to prove your income.



If you have no income but have easy access to significant capital, your affordability may be assessed against 2/3 of your capital so have a statement ready to prove you have capital available.

Prepare additional security or guarantor if required

If you have a low credit score or your household income falls below the affordability threshold you may be asked to provide additional security and/or a guarantor before your application is accepted:



Additional security - Additional security usually refers to paying rent in advance for the whole of the fixed term. If for example you are offered a 6-month fixed term tenancy you could be asked to pay the full 6 months' rent before the start of your tenancy. Additional security is a term sometimes used to describe a higher deposit which could be a level of up to 8 weeks rent.



Guarantor - Guarantors stand surety or in other words guarantee to meet the full obligations under the tenancy agreement on the tenant's behalf. This may include rent arrears, damage to the property, or other liabilities and obligations arising from the tenant's failure to comply with the covenants in the tenancy agreement. A guarantor is contractually bound to accept these legal liabilities of the tenant and will be sued if they do not comply. A guarantor will typically need to be UK resident, own property in the UK and have an annual income of at least 36 times the monthly rent they are guaranteeing. Guarantors are usually referenced, and their property ownership details verified with the Land Registry before being accepted as a guarantor. The additional work of dealing with guarantors adds to the time and cost in setting up any tenancy.

Claiming benefits? Most landlords will not consider applications from certain types of benefit claimant. If you are claiming benefits, try to have a least 6 months' rent and a suitable guarantor available to increase your chances of being considered for a tenancy.

Living outside the UK? Obtaining references for applicants living outside the UK is at best difficult and in some cases not possible. Most landlords will only grant a 6-month fixed term tenancy initially, will require the rent for the entire fixed term of the tenancy to be paid in advance and may require a higher deposit.

Prepare pet information

Most landlords advertise their property as 'no pets' so if you have a pet, be prepared to use your persuasive skills, and offer some or all of the following:



Pay a higher rent



Provide pet information – including details of the veterinary practice you use/plan to use to care for your pet and details of the person who can care for your pet in case of an emergency.



Agree to abide by any pet policy the landlord may have.



Provide a pet reference – from your previous landlord, letting agent or veterinary surgeon.

Have pets? It is always worthwhile contacting landlords and agents who advertise a property as 'NO PETS' and asking them if it is the stick insect in the terrarium or the pack of hunting dogs they do not want and before they dismiss your enquiry, offer them some or all of the above.

Changes to the law in June 2019 (Tenant Fees Act 2019) mean landlords and letting agents can no longer require a tenant to pay a deposit higher than 5 weeks rent, register with a vet, have pet liability insurance, have the property professionally treated for fleas and parasites or professionally cleaned at the end of the tenancy.

Start searching

In order to find a property be prepared to use a mix of the following:



Facebook - Private landlords will sometimes use Facebook groups in your chosen locality to advertise their property. Check groups such as **Glastonbury property for sale to let or wanted** at <https://m.facebook.com/groups/1123694331061236>



WhatsApp! - Be the first to know about available rental properties in Glastonbury, Wells, Street & Shepton Mallet and receive available property directly to your WhatsApp! Message +447714742771 with your name and location to receive alerts.



Property portals - Most rental property is now advertised online through property portals so using portals to find a property is essential. The most popular portals in this area are:

- On The Market (<https://www.onthemarket.com/>) – approximately 42% of all property portal listings
- Rightmove (www.rightmove.co.uk) – approximately 41% of all property portal listings
- Zoopla (<http://www.zoopla.co.uk/>) - approximately 17% of all property portal listings

Based on search carried out for all rental properties within 5 miles of BA6 9FT as at 1200 on 29th May 2020



Notice boards - Private landlords will sometimes use notice boards in your chosen locality or online community forums to advertise their property. Check the notice boards in shops, cafes, newsagents, and public areas regularly and place your own advert saying exactly what you are looking for - make the advert appealing for landlords - landlords may have lots of prospective tenants to choose from so say why they should choose you. If you are trying to find a property in the Glastonbury area search and place a message on the online Glastonbury Notice Board here: <https://groups.io/g/GNB>



Word of mouth - Many rental properties are never advertised as tenants are often found by word of mouth. Tell everyone you know or meet in your chosen locality you are looking for a property. Make sure they have your contact details should they need to contact you quickly.



Newspapers - The readership of newspapers is in steep decline and as a result they have become a less important medium for advertising and finding property. By the time the newspaper hits the streets the property listings are out of date and most of the advertised property will have been available several days before. There may be rare instances where a letting agent will only advertise their property in newspapers and landlords will sometimes use newspapers in preference to using an agent to advertise. Find out what newspapers serve your chosen locality and on what days they are published. The advice on placing your own advert on notice boards above applies equally to newspapers.



Letting agents - A significant number of properties are now let through agents, so they are vital to helping you find a property. Compile a list of agents that let property in your chosen locality. Property portals are a quick and easy way to do this. Routinely work through the list contacting each agent in turn via telephone or visit in person. Carpet bombing all agents with the one e-mail will not be as effective as a telephone call or personal visit. With the arrival of stricter data protection (General Data Protection Regulations) laws in May 2018, many agents will be unwilling to retain your details and those that do should ask for your express consent to do so and provide you with a copy of their privacy policy/notice. Use the telephone call or personal visit as an opportunity to ask for any advice the agent may have to help you find a property. When you get to the bottom of your list of agents, start again at the top and keep going until you find a property.



Gumtree - <http://www.gumtree.com/flats-houses>

Private Ad Health Warning! Be extra vigilant when responding to private ads – online or in printed media. Private ads are a haven for scams and rogue landlords so as a minimum check the following before paying any money or signing any contract:

- Photographic proof of identity for the landlord – valid passport, drivers licence or photo ID
- Proof of ownership – To verify who owns a property download the Title Deeds for the property from the Land Registry - <http://eservices.landregistry.gov.uk>
- Expect the person showing you the property to provide you with a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) – if not ask for one
- If the property has a gas installation, expect to see the current Gas Safety Record/Certificate – never start a tenancy without one
- Check the overall repair condition of the property which will be an early indication of how good the landlord is. If the property needs any repairs or you agree any improvements, ask for this in writing before making any commitment

Letting Agent Warning! Avoid agents who have unfair terms of business or indulge in illegal practices such as:

- Requiring a relevant person to make a payment of a fee in connection with a tenancy of housing such as administration fees, set-up fees, tenant referencing fees and check-in/check-out fees.
- Requiring a relevant person to enter into a contract with a third party in connection with a tenancy of housing for the provision of a service or insurance including, but not limited to, tenant referencing companies, tenant liability insurance providers, professional cleaners, chimney sweeps, waste clearance companies for septic tanks, vets, pet liability insurance providers or pest controllers.
- Do not publicise details of its fees at its premises, on its website or any third-party website the property is advertised on (or a link on that website to a part of the agent's website where a list of those fees is published).
- Advertise in commercial media (online and printed) property that includes cost information such as rent but do not include non-optional fees and charges.
- Do not make it clear when non-optional fees and charges, that could not be calculated in advance, were excluded from quoted prices, and do not provide enough information to allow the consumer to establish easily how further charges would be calculated.
- Advertise rent and other charges without including VAT.
- Do not publicise details of any ongoing or future fees or charges likely to be incurred by the tenant, for example, costs for variation, assignment, or novation of a tenancy.
- Have terms that make a pre-tenancy payment non-refundable in all circumstances. Pre-tenancy payments should, in principle, be refundable if the landlord decides not to let the property to the prospective tenant because the landlord decides the tenant's pre-tenancy checks are unsatisfactory.
- Are not members of a government approved redress scheme (this includes individuals acting on behalf of the landlord).
- Do not have client money protection insurance.
- Do not make available free of charge a valid Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) to any prospective tenant at the earliest opportunity (this includes landlords).

Still not found a property?

If you have followed all the advice above and 1-2 months later you have still not found a suitable property it could be that the property you are looking for does not exist or very rarely comes on the rental market. At this point it may be time to revise your search criteria and in particular:

- Increase your budget
- Widen the geographical area you are searching
- Re-evaluate whether your next property must have all the features you are looking for - do you really need all those bedrooms?

Your next property may not be your ideal home but see it as a stepping stone to something that is. If you are re-locating from another area the challenges of not being able to view property at short notice will be alleviated once you have a property closer to your chosen location.

Finally, when you find a property you think may be suitable for your needs act quickly! Be prepared to view the property as soon as possible and in all cases within 24 hours. More information on property viewing can be found in our Tenants Guide to Viewing a Property.

Happy house hunting

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