

Community Together: College Bank and Lower Falinge newsletter (text only version). Winter 2020 edition.

A message from Gareth Swarbrick, RBH Chief Executive

I hope you all had a wonderful festive break. As the New Year begins, we can reflect on a year of real progress in 2019 and look forward to working closely with all residents to achieve our goals in 2020.

This year we will make significant steps towards realising our vision for the future of Lower Falinge and College Bank. More than half of our tenants and leaseholders have already moved out of Mitchell Hey – the first tower block where we are supporting people to move. Remind yourself about our proposals and progress so far on pages 2 and 3.

Our commitment remains to each and every resident of College Bank and Lower Falinge. Our Residents Deal is progressing with the help of the local community and we really want you to be involved.

We are committed to ensuring your voice is heard in decision-making, as our mutual relationship is built on listening, trust and accountability.

We'll soon be launching our 'Together with Tenants and Members' charter.

This edition is full of inspiring opportunities to help make 2020 a memorable year. Why not consider starting an apprenticeship or joining Rochdale's growing number of New Pioneers?

If there's anything you'd like us to include in future newsletters, or if you'd like to receive it in any other format, please do let us know.

We hope you enjoy this latest update and wish you a very happy new year.

An update on our proposals

We are now well underway with rehousing residents who are affected by our regeneration proposals for College Bank and Lower Falinge. More than half of Mitchell Hey residents have already been rehoused and rehousing is progressing in Lower Falinge.

We have recently been made aware of inaccurate information being circulated about our proposals and would like to take this opportunity to remind people about our plans for the town centre area.

We want to stress that our proposals have not changed and neither has our commitment to all residents affected by them. If you have heard any rumours that contradict the information here, please speak to our regeneration team, who can always provide accurate information and updates.

These are long term regeneration proposals and as the detail of each phase is developed our commitment is that you will hear about these first from RBH.

- To enable us to ensure the quality of homes needed for the future and provide a more diverse mix of housing for people living in Rochdale town centre, four of our tower blocks in College Bank will be demolished. All affected residents have been informed and are being supported with their relocation. Mitchell Hey is the first block we have focused on and we are helping 1-2 people there move out every week. Following this we will be supporting households in Dunkirk Rise, Tentercroft and Town Mill Brow to move home. We will update all those affected when we know which of these blocks will be the next focus for priority rehousing.
- Our three remaining towers in College Bank – Mardyke, Holland Rise and Underwood – will need to undergo significant refurbishment to bring them up to a modern, decent standard for current and future residents. We are working through the technical details of the extent of these works and we will be speaking to residents in due course about our detailed plans and any likely disruption during these renovation works.
- We have now completed the third phase of rehousing in Lower Falinge and have demolished the blocks at Melrose, Lindisfarne, Johnston, Ibsley and Kirkstall. In their place, we will soon be starting work on 55 new houses and apartments alongside public open spaces; including a new play area and a community garden.
- As part of the fourth phase of rehousing, we are now working with residents of Abbeydale, Yarwell and Exbury to find alternative housing options.
- Demolition notices have also been issued at Zedburgh, Waverley, Ollerton, Vaynor, Newstead, Ullesthorpe, Romsey and Quinton and over the next five years we will support moves for all the residents in these blocks.
- We have started consulting residents living in Thetford, Stavordale, Pershore, Glastonbury, Dunstable, Atherstone, Hinton, Edington and Bromfield about the kinds of improvements they would like to see in these buildings. We do not expect any residents will need to be moved out during these improvement works.

Our Residents' Deal

The Residents Deal took another step closer last month, when the first meeting of our newly-formed group of local residents was held at Touchstones.

The group again viewed the commitments we have made to all College Bank and Lower Falinge residents affected by our proposals. These include:

- Everyone who needs to move as part of our regeneration proposals will be offered a new home of the same size and type
- Anyone who wishes to stay within the town centre area will be able to do so
- Residents who need to move will have the same tenancy in their new home – if you are a social tenant with RBH, your circumstances will not change.

The full report from Helen Nicol, the independent advisor who helped us agree on our commitments, is still available to download and view at **www.collegebankandlowerfalinge.org.uk**. If you need a copy in another format, please let us know.

We have been working hard to make sure we are keeping to our commitments. We are pleased to say that the group will be signing these off in the New Year, before developing the next stage of the Deal.

We are always looking for people to join the group and help us take the Deal forward. Are you someone who enjoys problem solving, feels comfortable contributing to group discussions and is a passionate advocate for your RBH home?

If that sounds like you and you'd like to help shape positive changes in your community, please contact **towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk** or call our freephone number on **0800 027 7769 (use option 7)**.

We're holding a community event in February and we'd like to invite you to take part. The event will give the community another chance to see the RBH commitments before they are signed off by local residents and officially adopted by RBH.

Daisy Silva, a Careers Broker on our New Pioneers Programme, will also be on-hand to introduce herself, her scheme and explain how you can become a Pioneer. If you're over 18, either out-of-work or working part-time, live in College Bank or Lower Falinge and want to improve your employment prospects or gain new skills to enhance career opportunities, please come along and chat to Daisy.

The event will also shine a spotlight on local people, telling their stories about the experience of living in the town centre. Do you enjoy writing? We are on the hunt for Neighbourhood Reporters who can help us capture interesting local news. If you fancy getting involved, please contact us at **towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk** or call our freephone number on **0800 027 7769**.

Watch out for further details about the event being delivered to your home in the coming weeks.

RBH Apprenticeships

With National Apprenticeship Week just around the corner from 3 - 7 February 2020, Sarah Wilkinson, a former apprentice who is now a full-time joiner at RBH, couldn't be more enthusiastic about applying for an apprenticeship to open up a new career path.

Sarah discusses how her apprenticeship changed her life and is encouraging any Rochdale residents who are interested to take the plunge and apply.

Sarah studied carpentry and joinery at Hopwood Hall College and was then urged by her tutor to submit an application for an apprenticeship at RBH. After training on the job and attending college for one day a week for three years, Sarah was then employed as a joiner by RBH. Her role involves working on the maintenance and

renovation of houses across Rochdale, maintaining the exteriors of all our schemes and making sure customers' homes are secure.

Please tell us a bit more about yourself.

"I'm 37 and grew up in Middleton, so I'm very much a Rochdale resident. I've also been an RBH customer for the past 18 months and I'm very happy with my home.

"After working in a series of dull office jobs I decided to change direction and do something more practical. I enrolled at Hopwood Hall College to learn a trade. I'd always loved working with timber, so I chose to learn joinery professionally."

How did you hear about the apprenticeship?

"Paul Spivey, my tutor at Hopwood Hall College, really pushed me to apply for an apprenticeship with RBH. I thought I was too old, but Paul was persistent and told me to apply! He was really supportive throughout the whole process - from completing the application form online, to attending the assessment day, where I had to undertake a Maths and English Access exam. The next stage involved attending an interview and another assessment, which meant I had to explain how I'd react to a data breach at work."

What has your apprenticeship involved?

"Over the last three years I've completed a weekly day of academic training at college and four days of practical training. I really enjoy work shadowing the professional joiners in the team and ended up having three fantastic mentors - Steve Barnes who taught me a lot of hand skills, Andy Tommins, who showed me how to use power tools and Liam Saxon who trained me up to fit windows and doors properly."

"I have a whole new perspective on life. RBH is like having a new family, I've been lucky enough to have inspiring mentors and managers, who are also approachable and supportive."

How has an apprenticeship changed your life?

"It's changed everything. I've gone from not having any real talents and skills I knew about, zero confidence and worrying that I wouldn't earn enough to feed my family, to having an actual career and real confidence because I know I'm good at my job. My apprenticeship has given me skills I can take anywhere.

"I have a whole new perspective on life. RBH is like having a new family, I've been lucky enough to have inspiring mentors and managers, who are also approachable and supportive. An apprenticeship gives you the skills to better yourself, you're paid the National Living Wage and can secure qualifications at the same time."

Would you recommend an apprenticeship?

"I definitely would. With National Apprenticeship Week on the horizon, now is the time to start thinking about applying. An apprenticeship will change your life, it's a

mix of academic and practical learning, so you end up with qualifications you can add to your CV.

“For any potential apprentices I would say you’ve got to be willing to learn and listen, be computer literate and have achieved an Access Level 2 qualification in Maths and English. Part of the role involves communicating with customers in different ways across the borough, so be prepared to chat to and email tenants.”

Sarah was one of four winners in our recent annual Apprentice Awards.

Congratulations to our champion apprentices -

- **Rising Star: Julie Nelson**
- **Trainee of the Year: Jonathan Wenn**
- **Trade Apprentice of the Year: Sarah Wilkinson**
- **Employee Mentor of the Year: Jim Coutts**

Be the first to find out about our apprenticeship and other vacancies – sign up for job alerts at www.rbh.org.uk/jobs.

Together with Tenants and Members

RBH is part of the National Housing Federation’s national campaign to strengthen the relationship between housing associations and tenants.

Through ‘Together with Tenants and Members’ we are finding out what matters to tenants and how we can ensure our relationship is built on listening, trust and accountability.

Andrew Johnson, a College Bank tenant who is leading this work, said:

“So far more than 500 people have shared their views and experiences with us and we’re keen to continue working with tenants and members to develop our Together with Tenants and Members Charter.”

Our Charter will be a set of promises themed around your expectations, including:

- The relationships between RBH, its tenants and members
- How we communicate with you about the things that matter to you
- Sharing your views and influence on our work and decisions, including how we are accountable to you
- The quality of your home
- What happens when things go wrong

How can you get involved?

We're eager for tenants' voices to be heard throughout this process, so please visit our website to find out more at www.rbh.org.uk/TwTM, email us at engage@rbh.org.uk or call us on freephone 0800 027 7769 (using option 7).

Throughout February and March our steering group made up of 12 tenants will finalise our charter, which they will then launch in the spring.

New Pioneers Programme Update

Our New Pioneers Programme, delivered in partnership with Rochdale Borough Council, has been gathering pace. Lead Careers Broker Daisy Silva is now helping 12 local people from College Bank and Lower Falinge take the next step on their career journey.

Since the programme launched in September 2019, New Pioneers has taken a total of 16 referrals, helping local people to access the support that is right for them; whether that's through education, work experience, volunteering or apprenticeships.

With members ranging in age from 18-51, there's so much that the pioneers can learn from one another. There are even plans to start a choir!

One of the New Pioneers – Silvanya Cassandra – shares her experience of working with Daisy:

"I'm originally from Africa, but I lived in Lisbon before moving to the UK. I've been in Rochdale for about four years now and I really like the town. I live in Lower Falinge which is nice and quiet and the people I've met are all really friendly.

"For as long as I can remember, I've had a dream of working in healthcare. It's always been my ambition to have a job where I can help people, but because I don't have any relevant qualifications and I'm still learning English, I've only had cleaning jobs so far, which I haven't really enjoyed.

"I feel so lucky to have found out about New Pioneers and to have met Daisy. She's a really positive, friendly person who definitely sees the best in people. Daisy has already helped me get onto an NVQ level 1 course to improve my English and Maths. Once I have completed my level 2 course, I will be able to start an apprenticeship and begin moving towards my dream job as a nurse.

"I've also met other New Pioneers through Daisy who are in a similar position to me; making positive steps towards achieving their career goals. Andy is on the journey to becoming a Maths teacher and he's been really helpful with my Maths homework!

"Daisy has been great and arranged everything for me. I would definitely recommend people to get in touch with New Pioneers – you never know what you will find out about yourself."

To find out how New Pioneers could help you, contact Daisy Silva on 07866 143 999 or daisy.silva2@rochdale.gov.uk

Information for leaseholders

If you're a leaseholder in College Bank or Lower Falinge, RBH is offering to buy back your home with a number of additional benefits:

- Our offer on your home will be the open market value plus an additional uplift
- RBH will cover all reasonable expenses in the sale, as well as the purchase of a new home; like solicitors, mortgage or survey fees
- Resident owner occupiers are entitled to receive Home Loss Compensation
- RBH will make an additional £250 payment towards the cost of moving and a £500 disturbance payment to resident owner occupiers.

Options for Buying a New Home

As well as buying a new home on the open market there are some affordable home ownership options which can help with finding a new home. These include:

- Help to Buy Shared Ownership: www.helptobuy.gov.uk/shared-ownership
- Older People's Shared Ownership: www.helptobuy.gov.uk/shared-ownership
- Help to Buy — Equity Loan: www.helptobuy.gov.uk/equity-loan/
- Rent to Buy

We are also happy to talk to leaseholders in College Bank and Lower Falinge about their options for Equity Assistance in owning a new home. If your home is due to be demolished, RBH could help finance your new home by supporting a share in the ownership of your new home which may help you to purchase a new home with a higher value than your existing home.

If you think this might be a suitable option for you, please get in touch with us so that we can discuss your needs in more detail.

Options for renting your new home

If you would prefer to rent in future; for example, with RBH or another housing association, we can support you by providing advice and information.

If you would like to discuss options for selling your home back to RBH, please email us at towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or call us on 0800 027 7769 (option 7).

Community Feedback

We spoke to two former RBH residents, who had purchased homes from us and then sold them back. We discussed their experiences and how simple and stress free the moving process was.

“My partner and I loved flat our flat at Dunkirk Rise, I'd lived there for 20 years and my partner moved in 15 years ago. I'd rented it for five years and for the last 15 we'd

owned it. When we heard about the demolition plans, we decided to move, and we were able to sell the flat back to RBH.”

“My partner and I had always talked about buying a house together, as she loves gardening and we both wanted to own a dog. With the money we received from selling the flat back to RBH, we could finally afford one. Michelle and Syed organised the whole process for us, helping with the valuation and all the paperwork.”

“It was a shock when we first heard about the demolition plans, but we feel really fortunate now to own a four-bedroom cottage that we would never have been able to afford otherwise.”

Anon

I purchased a flat from RBH with my late husband a few years ago. We’d previously rented the property and lived in it for years. After chatting to our neighbours, we decided it would be a good investment to buy the flat.”

“However, after my husband passed away, I decided to sell it back to RBH. I felt it was time to move into sheltered accommodation, also run by RBH.”

“Michelle and Syed knew I couldn’t live in the flat on my own anymore. They’ve both been very supportive, I can’t thank them enough.”

“I’ve now been here for four weeks. I feel really settled, everyone is nice. Karen, the manager, is so helpful, she can’t do enough for you.”

“Living here means I’m not on my own any more, I can get involved in communal activities, enjoy meals cooked by someone else and take part in group activities.”

Anon

Shared Ownership

Are you dreaming of owning your own home but unsure how you will afford it? Shared ownership is a fantastic, affordable, government-backed scheme that gives you the opportunity to purchase a share in a new build or resale property.

It works through you, the buyer, paying a mortgage on the share you own and paying rent to us on the remaining portion. It works well for first time buyers with smaller deposits, or someone who has had a change in financial circumstances.

This year we have two brand new developments available to purchase through Shared Ownership or rent to buy.

The Cottons in Smallbridge

This new development, which is due to launch in spring 2020, will comprise 39 stunning two-, three- and four-bedroom new homes. 16 are offered through Shared

Ownership and 23 are available through Rent to Buy. These homes are perfect for singles, couples or families and will be designed to a high-end specification. The development is within easy reach of amenities and open green space and is located within walking distance of the popular village of Wardle.

Prices will be released in Spring 2020. For more information, please visit www.thecottonssmallbridge.co.uk.

Hopwood Green in Middleton

We have 25 two- and three-bedroom homes for sale in Middleton. Each property offers modern fitted kitchens and bathrooms, turfed rear gardens, offroad parking and a 10-year NHBC new homes warranty. The development is conveniently located with excellent transport links and local amenities.

This has been a popular site with over 70% of homes already reserved. Our two-bedroom homes are available from £60,725 for a 35% share or £65,625 for a 35% share of a three-bedroom house.

February 2020 update: all homes at Hopwood Green have now been reserved.

Safety First

Following the first report from the public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower fire, we wanted to take this opportunity to reassure you about our ongoing commitment to resident safety in all our buildings – and report on how we are implementing new guidance for landlords.

We are closely monitoring the inquiry's recommendations, which have so far focussed on the use of materials on buildings, knowledge sharing with local fire services, as well as improving and maintaining fire management systems & procedures.

RBH completes its Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) on a regular basis, which includes reviewing all materials used on building exteriors, as well as ensuring that all internal emergency signage and fire doors are fit for purpose. Details from the FRAs, including floor plans for each high-rise building, are shared with Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue (GMFR) for their information. A key recommendation from the Inquiry was on how lifts work in a fire. All seven of our tower blocks in College Bank have had new lifts installed in 2013.

The local fire service were consulted during this process and override switches were included to assist in fire response. We will also be fitting 'Fire Safety Boxes' at the base of all our high-rise buildings, which will contain important information about each building for GMFRS to access in an emergency.

All our high-rise residents have received a copy of our 'Stay Safe' information sheet, with instructions on what to do in the event of a fire. As a reminder, our fire policy is as follows:

- If there is a fire in your flat, leave immediately, closing all doors behind you if it is safe to
- If there is a fire elsewhere in the block, the safest option is to remain in your flat. The blocks are designed to support this approach in the event of a fire. If you wish to leave however, you are free to do so.

We would also urge residents in College Bank to ensure that delivery cupboards remain closed. Our Caretaking team carry out daily checks to close these, but it is also important that residents keep these cupboards closed from the inside.

While we carry out FRAs on more than 400 RBH homes each year, we recognise that our high-rise homes at College Bank are our highest risk homes. Following a recent discussion with tenants on our RBH Homes Panel about the most helpful information for tenants living in homes with FRAs, we have published the Fire Risk Assessment Action Plans for all College Bank blocks on our web site, at www.collegebankandlowerfalinge.org.uk.

Your News

We're always keen for College Bank and Lower Falinge residents to send us their news, events and suggestions to help us shape this community newsletter's future.

If you have any ideas for a better way to receive updates - through the post, by email, face-to-face, or in some other way – please let us know and we'll enter you into a free draw for a fantastic prize.

Please do contact us at towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk with any ideas for our next editions.

CCTV – update

As you may know, RBH currently monitors CCTV in commercial areas of Rochdale town centre for Rochdale Borough Council. Our contract is due for renewal in June 2020 and we have taken the decision not to seek to renew this contract. We will work closely with Rochdale Council to ensure a smooth transition and handover of the service to a new provider.

This decision does not affect the CCTV services we provide to residents in our neighbourhoods. In fact, we are committed to providing extra CCTV support and visibility for residents in College Bank and Lower Falinge as our regeneration plans progress.

Drop in & see us

Remember that Michelle and Syed from the Regeneration Team are happy to meet you to talk through the moving process or to discuss new housing options on the following days:

- Tuesdays 10am – 12noon, drop-in at the Falinge office
- Thursdays 10am – 12noon, drop in at Town Mill Brow

Email: towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or call our freephone number: 01706 274100 / 0800 027 7769 (use option 7).