

Community Together: College Bank and Lower Falinge Newsletter (Summer 2020)

Inside:

- New homes update
- New Pioneers update
- Lockdown Survey
- Working together through the pandemic

A MESSAGE FROM GARETH SWARBRICK, RBH CHIEF EXECUTIVE

We all want to see a thriving Rochdale town centre, with more homes, and the right quality and mix of genuinely affordable apartments and houses for current and future residents.

This goes together with a retail, cultural, and leisure offer that encourages people to live, work, play, and invest in Rochdale. As Chief Executive of RBH, I know that I have a responsibility to work together with the Council and the community to deliver on that vision.

We are proud to be a pioneering mutual, in the home of the co-operative movement. Our tenant and employee members collectively own our 12,000-plus homes. Our members elect our Representative Body, and in turn, our elected tenant and employee Representatives appoint our Board.

I have never been prouder to be Chief Executive of RBH than I am right now. I have seen how our teams have continued to deliver essential services throughout the pandemic, and how our tenants and employees have worked together alongside the Council and community groups to support those who needed help the most.

We know that Rochdale Borough continues to face challenges – including housing. These challenges cannot be ducked or ignored, and not everyone will agree on the solutions. Our heart is in Rochdale and we will always act in the interests of our communities – our member owners would never allow us to act any differently.

Our proposals aim to provide great homes for current and future residents of the College Bank and Lower Falinge neighbourhoods. We know that this is difficult and unsettling for some residents, which is why we have put in place dedicated professional support, and guaranteed that all residents who wish to stay in the town centre area can do so – with the same tenancy conditions and rights.

We have recently held constructive discussions with senior Councillors and more information about this is available in this newsletter. Our door is open to anyone who wants to work with us to deliver what we all agree on – genuinely affordable, great homes for current residents and future generations in Rochdale town centre.

Gareth Swarbrick, Chief Executive, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing

AN UPDATE ON OUR PROPOSALS FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD SECURITY AND CCTV

In June, we wrote to residents in College Bank and Lower Falinge, and also to all residents in Freehold, asking for your views about our proposals to change the way that neighbourhood security and CCTV services are delivered.

Under our proposals:

- We would continue to deliver CCTV services 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with all cameras continuing to record footage in the same way that they do now
- Footage will now be recorded 24/7 rather than monitored, with access to footage being available when required
- We will create a new team of “Community Guardians” who will provide a visible presence and reassurance within the community - this means that rather than being based in the control room, our employees will be more visible in the neighbourhoods

We also confirmed that there would be no increase in service charges as a result of these changes.

We are very grateful to everyone who sent us their views as part of our consultation. We are now looking at all the responses before we make a final decision, and we will be in touch with you once a final decision has been made.

Rochdale Council and RBH Joint Statement

Following discussions with Rochdale Council, we have agreed to collaborate on a high-level review of the investment requirements for the blocks at College Bank. This work will take place over summer 2020 and we will let residents know as soon as any further information is available.

Rochdale Borough Council and Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) are committed to a thriving Rochdale town centre, with the homes that local people need and successful retail, leisure, and cultural options.

Senior councillors and members of RBH’s senior team recently held a productive discussion about future housing needs and investment in the town centre area and specifically agreed to collaborate on a highlevel review of the investment requirements for the blocks at College Bank.

Councillor John Blundell, cabinet member for regeneration, business, employment and town centre living said: “We are pleased that RBH have agreed to collaborate on this piece of work and we will get it started straight away.”

Gareth Swarbrick, Chief Executive of RBH, said: “Our meeting was very constructive, we are happy to support this piece of work over the coming weeks and

will share key information confidentially with the Council to enable it to be completed.”

LIFE IN LOCKDOWN SURVEY

We know that the past few months have been really hard for everyone, having to deal with the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on our day to day lives. RBH continues to review the delivery of our regeneration proposals for the town centre and as part of this we want to understand any additional impact from recent months.

As many residents will already know; we paused all rehousing activity from March but as services begin to open up again, we are now starting to look at how we can support people to move, as well as take forward the options for investment in the retained homes in both neighbourhoods.

We understand the guidelines around coronavirus are regularly updated, including the recent announcement by the Council, and we will always ensure our proposals progress in line with safest practices and the latest guidance.

To help us do this we want to check in with everyone and find out if the lockdown has had any impact on the homes or the support now needed.

To make sure we have an up to date picture we have put together a short online survey and we would really appreciate it if you could spare a little time to give us your thoughts.

You can complete the survey at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/rbhmove. We will also send you an email or text with the link. The survey will be available until 15th August.

If you would like the survey in another format or language, please contact us using the details at the back of the newsletter where a member of the regeneration team can help.

NEW RBH WEBSITE AND CUSTOMER PORTAL

You may have noticed a brand-new look and feel to the RBH website recently – as we continue to improve the service we offer to customers online.

Our new ‘local’ website has been developed in consultation with our communities, who told us they wanted see information that was more relevant to them and their neighbourhoods.

RBH customers also told us that our new website should represent all areas of Rochdale Borough equally, which fits perfectly with our ambitions as a mutual housing provider.

Even more, we wanted to celebrate the places where people choose to live and work, while signposting RBH's services as clearly as possible.

A key part of the new website is our Customer Portal: MyRBH, which puts you firmly in control of your tenancy.

Through MyRBH, you can report repairs, choose your appointments, check your account balance, make payments, update your personal details, easily contact our team, and much, much more.

To register for MyRBH, all you'll need is an email address and your Customer Reference Number.

To help launch our new local website, we held a photography competition which invited RBH customers and employees to send in their favourite images of the Borough.

We were blown away by the quality and number of entries, receiving 150 images that revealed the talent right across the Borough, and made us really proud of our local landmarks and heritage.

The overall winner of the photography competition was Scott Lawson for his photo of the Co-operative Bridge, who will be receiving a brand-new Smart Watch.

A selection of other great images are being used for the Neighbourhood pages of the website. We would like to thank everyone who got involved and wish our congratulations to Scott!

LATEST PHASE OF NEW HOMES FOR LOWER FALINGE

You may remember that our last newsletter included a brief announcement about the latest phase of new homes for Lower Falinge. Despite the current challenges, we're delighted to report that work has already started on site, building 55 new and genuinely affordable homes for local people.

We are working with Engie Construction, a national regeneration specialist with a strong reputation, to deliver our next phase of much-needed new housing in the town centre.

The scheme will also bring in £2.53m in grant funding from Homes England, the Government's housing agency, which is additional investment in central Rochdale and will help us achieve our long-term goal of improving the quality and mix of homes.

This latest social housing scheme in Lower Falinge will provide 55 new homes – a mix of houses and low-rise apartments – all available at genuinely affordable rents - as well as a new community space. These new homes will be a mix of 19 two-bedroom houses and three houses with three bedrooms, together with 20 one-bedroom apartments and 13 two-bedroom apartments.

All of the new homes will have the same tenancy conditions as existing RBH homes. Rents will remain fixed to be no higher than the local housing allowance, and all will remain truly affordable for all in the long term. Clare Tostevin, Director of Growth at RBH, said:

“Being able to live in a good quality home has never been more important. This development of 100% affordable rented homes is all about providing the right mix of good quality homes for local people, offering more choice for the existing community in central Rochdale as well as for future generations. The community worked with us to design these homes to ensure they met local need.

“Partnering with ENGIE and Homes England on this scheme is the latest important milestone in delivering the modern homes and amenities which the community told us are so greatly needed in the town centre.”

Keep your eyes peeled in the newsletter for updates on the new Lower Falinge homes as work progresses on site.

If you would like to sign up to receive our weekly email updates about progress on site, please email us on towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk with your name and address, and we will add you to the mailing list.

NEW PIONEERS – UPDATE

There’s seemingly no stopping our New Pioneers, who have adapted to challenging circumstances over the last couple of months, to keep their personal progress firmly on track.

With face-to-face meetings impossible, Lead Careers Broker Daisy Silva moved the entire New Pioneers service online in March, with unexpected success for its members. Using social media platforms like Whatsapp has kept the group connected and reaching for their individual goals.

Andy was one of the first people to join the New Pioneers, a project run jointly between RBH and Rochdale Council to improve life opportunities for Lower Falinge and College Bank residents. Last year, Andy was supported into teacher training at Bolton University and a local work placement, helping fulfil a life-long ambition of becoming a Maths tutor.

During lockdown, Andy has been busy teaching Maths to his fellow New Pioneers on Zoom, as well as sharing handy teaching resources via Facebook. He’s even welcomed new students from nearby Howard St Children’s Centre – leading to even more positive outcomes for local people.

Daisy Silva has also been using social media to expand the New Pioneers service throughout the local business community. In April, Daisy held a mindfulness session for Public Health England via a ‘Virtual Café’ on Zoom. These accessible sessions, open to all New Pioneers, aim to improve mental wellbeing, by encouraging people

to focus on the 'here-and-now' – rather than external distractions. With people spending much more time behind closed doors, Daisy has also been helping the New Pioneers to make their homes happier spaces. This online workshop invited participants to consider their homes as:

- A restaurant: through trying out new recipes and experimenting with flavours. Daisy has recently been sharing her favourite recipes by video and inviting others to do the same.
- A shop: through creating tidier, more organised spaces for activity
- A school: by dedicating a space to reading, learning and personal growth

One of Daisy's longest-serving New Pioneers is a keen artist who has been making good use of his time at home in College Bank lately. His latest painting, which tells the story of the changes happening on his doorstep is making great progress – we can't wait to see the finished piece!

Joining New Pioneers is easy and doesn't affect any financial support you may be receiving, like Employment & Support Allowance or Carer's Allowance.

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

NEW PIONEERS - MEET AMANDA

New Pioneer Amanda, 40, has lived in Lower Falinge for two and a half years with her partner and their four children.

I first heard about the New Pioneers on a visit to my son's nursery on Howard Street. Although it sounded like a great chance to learn something new, I was still a bit wary at first. In the past, I've always been quite shy, and I was nervous about meeting a new group of people.

I needn't have worried though – everyone I've met through New Pioneers has been fantastic, especially Daisy Silva. Daisy really would do anything for anyone; she even helped me bake a birthday cake for one of my children!

There's always lots of new people joining New Pioneers and we've all become really good friends. There's loads of activities to help with different parts of your life, like the parents group. Sometimes the children join in with things like cooking classes, and they really enjoyed it too.

Working with Daisy and the New Pioneers has really helped build my confidence. I've only ever worked as a cleaner in the past, but now I'm feeling excited about other opportunities.

I've just completed my level 1 Maths qualification, which was really hard at first, but I absolutely love it now. Our teacher Andy, another New Pioneer, is fantastic and very patient with everyone. It's a great feeling to complete your homework and get nice feedback from the group.

After such a great experience, I'm thinking about doing an English qualification next, which might help me become a Teaching Assistant in the future.

We've recently started a New Pioneers knitting group, to make clothes for premature babies being treated in hospital. It's a really enjoyable activity that will really help local people in difficult times. I can only really do the basics when it comes to knitting, but everyone in the group is sharing tips and learning from one another – that's what New Pioneers is all about for me.

I'd definitely recommend the New Pioneers to anyone in Lower Falinge or College Bank who wants to build their confidence, meet new people and really have some fun.

Just be patient with yourself and always ask for help if you need it – there will always be someone willing to lend a hand.

THE STRAND KIRKHOLT

Regeneration case study

It's not just Rochdale's town centre that has experienced significant changes in recent years.

Right across the towns and villages of Rochdale, RBH has been working closely with the Council and local partners to provide new, affordable homes and modern community facilities that will stand the test of time.

Our recently-completed regeneration of The Strand in Kirkholt is a fantastic example of what can be achieved by working alongside the community – to help understand any local challenges and make the right investments to benefit an area for the long term.

The Beginning

Back in the early 2000's, the Strand was an ageing parade of shops and offices, at the heart of one of Rochdale's most deprived neighbourhoods; Kirkholt. Sadhna Sanghvi has run the pharmacy at the Strand since 1983 and seen plenty of change in Kirkholt over the years.

"I remember in the 80s and 90s the Strand was a really thriving parade. It felt safe here and always seemed busy. From the late 90s, however, it had started to look quite run down.

"Although the prescription service at the pharmacy has stayed fairly busy throughout that time, we always felt there was so much more that we could offer to the local community by attracting new visitors to the area."

In 2005, Sadhna joined the 'Vision for Kirkholt' steering group; a team of local residents and businesses working with RBH and the Council to find new ways of improving the local area.

“Local businesses and residents agreed that before building any new homes, we first needed to improve the facilities and healthcare services at the Strand - which for many people has become the heart of Kirkholt.”

The Way Forward

Regeneration case study In 2013, RBH appointed Manchester-based Triangle Architects to come up with a masterplan for the regeneration of the Strand.

RBH worked closely with the council and the community to develop proposals that would provide new and modern premises for much-loved local shops and services – like the post office, pharmacy and dentist surgery – as well as creating 16 much-needed apartments for affordable rent and a brand-new Community Hub.

Clare Tostevin, Director of Growth at RBH, was delighted with the community's involvement. “As part of our mutual transfer commitments to our communities we set out that we would work with partners on revitalising and regenerating key areas. The new Strand is a real testament to working in partnership and the engagement and input from local businesses and residents was vital in developing and delivering the proposals to revitalise this part of Rochdale.”

After working closely with businesses to find alternative short-term premises, demolition work began at the old Strand building in January 2017. The regeneration project was split into several phases, so that shops and services could remain open for longer, while any disruption to local residents could be kept to a minimum.

A brighter future

Construction work at the Strand officially 'topped out' on schedule in January 2018. Along with eight new shop units and 16 affordable apartments, the Strand now boasts a modern, 750 square metre Community Hub.

The hub is a spacious and welcoming community space, offering a range of facilities and services to local Kirkholt residents. Alongside workstations with free wifi, the hub also boasts a café with an on-site training kitchen, a large community hall & training rooms, and a new community Pantry.

Helen Kelsall has been a Community Partnership Coordinator with RBH for the past two years. She feels the hub is revolutionising the service RBH offers to people in Kirkholt.

“The changes at the Strand have been incredible, especially at the Community Hub. The new pantry is more accessible than ever and has been a vital lifeline for local people on low incomes - especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

“We’ve now got a fantastic base to work from and help tackle some of the key issues in the local area; like preventing people falling into poverty, providing training & employment to help people get into work, as well as helping to improve people’s everyday health & wellbeing.”

Local resident Amy Cocker is delighted with the improvements at the Strand. Through support from RBH’s Together fund, she has been running a Storytime activity for pre-schoolers at the hub and has also benefitted from the community pantry.

“There really wasn’t much disruption during the work at the Strand and everyone’s really happy with how it’s turned out. The hub is used by lots of people and the pharmacy is always busy.

“Regeneration has been really positive here and I think it’s so important for an area like Kirkholt. As well as the hub and the new shops, there’s also new, modern flats for local people which is great.”

FACING CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Our priority during this pandemic period continues to be the health, safety, and wellbeing of all our tenants and employees.

We have all faced major challenges over recent months as everyone adapts to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are really proud of the response from our tenant and employee members, as well as our partners working in the towns and villages of Rochdale.

Back in March, we set up a dedicated page on our website with information on changes to our local services and links to further advice from the Council and the Government.

Although we had suspended all non-urgent home moves before the Government’s instruction, RBH’s HomeChoice service has continued to provide lettings for those in urgent need of rehousing. This has included helping people at risk of homelessness and anyone seeking shelter from domestic violence. Our service has now resumed where it is safe to do so.

To help any tenants with financial worries during the pandemic, we created a Money Advice FAQ page on the new RBH website. In the month of May alone, we provided more than 3,300 tenants with financial advice or support. To help our local suppliers, we also adapted our payment terms to make sure that anyone who provides services to RBH could be paid much quicker.

Our employees made 17,500 calls in the month of May alone, to check on the welfare of our most vulnerable tenants. This includes all residents in our Independent Living schemes. Working with the Council and other partners, we have also provided a range of activities to improve wellbeing during lockdown; including art packs and VE Day activity booklets. We have also signposted tenants to services provided by partner organisations, including Action Together and HMR Circle.

We have kept our emergency repairs service running and all essential safety checks through this challenging period, while adopting new guidelines to keep our tenants and employees safe at all times. To make sure any shared spaces stay as clean and hygienic as possible, our Neighbourhood Environment Team has also delivered additional cleaning in communal areas of all RBH buildings.

Our pantry services in Kirkholt and Smallbridge have been able to continue with the support of our fantastic volunteers, the Council, and local Councillors. We were even able to expand this vital service - supporting more than 150 families every single week through collection and delivery of food donations. We are excited to announce that a third RBH pantry service has launched for residents in Freehold this July.

Our Chief Executive, Gareth Swarbrick, has issued regular updates to our tenants and employees during the pandemic period, as well as to the Council and other local stakeholders. We will continue to work with the Council's communications team to keep the local community informed.

If you are facing any challenges related to COVID-19, RBH is here to help. Email us at customerexperience@rbh.org.uk or visit our website.

WE ARE AT RISK OF LOCKDOWN!

Everyone needs to take action

- You must wear a face covering when in a shop or other public place
- Do not have more than 2 visitors to your home at any one time
- Always keep 2 metres apart
- Avoid close contact with anyone outside your household, including shaking hands or hugging
- Get tested and isolate if you are told to do so

Help stop the spread of coronavirus

<http://rochdale.gov.uk/coronavirus>

TOGETHER IN LESS THAN A WEEK, WE CHANGED THIS YOUNG MAN'S LIFE

We're proud to be a pioneering mutual housing society, co-owned by our tenants and employees. Last month we celebrated co-operatives fortnight by sharing the stories of some of our tenant and employee members. You can find out more by visiting our website at www.rbh.org.uk, our social media, and our YouTube Channel, RBHousingFilms.

One of the stories we shared that week was about how we worked together with Rochdale Council, other agencies, and local employers to help get our tenant John back into work. Here's what happened:

John is an RBH tenant who was being supported by Rochdale's probation service. As an exoffender looking to rebuild his life, John had been struggling to find work for some time, and this was having a significant impact upon his mental health. His ambition was to enter the construction industry but despite efforts he had been unsuccessful.

John was referred to Rochdale Council via a training provider, and was contacted by Amanda from the team. John explained that he had never sustained a job and believed his offences meant no one would give him the chance he needed.

Rochdale Council contacted RBH to discuss John's case and try to broker an opportunity through partnership working. An RBH contractor, Groundwork Ltd, was in need of a reliable labourer who could start work straight away. Having worked with Groundwork before, we were confident that they would be able to provide the right support to help John excel and we set up a telephone interview for later that week. John received interview coaching and confidence building which helped him prepare. Following an informal phone interview John was offered the job.

The final piece of the puzzle was to get John kitted out for his new job. By tapping into the RBH Workwear Workshop for boots, and support from the probation service for work clothes, we were able to enable John to safely and warmly carry out his new role. JCP funded a bus pass to enable him to access the work site.

John has now moved from strength to strength. He said: "I was in a very bad place emotionally and financially, I had never worked and I felt really depressed. I am now feeling a whole lot better, a lot happier and just all in all a lot better as a person and a father."

By pooling our resources and connections, the partners were able to work together to support this young man to make the change he was ready for.

REFURBISHMENT OPTIONS AT LOWER FALINGE

Over the past few months, the team at RBH has been working hard on developing the next stage of our long-term proposals to improve the quality and mix of homes in Rochdale town centre, which will include further refurbishment of retained blocks in Lower Falinge.

We are now ready to take these proposals to the next stage and are currently looking to appoint an architect to develop options and we aim to have chosen a suitable architecture practice by the Autumn.

The options will then be developed by our chosen architect building on the feedback and comments we have received from residents to date, and with further consultation with local residents as the detail is worked up.

We will of course continue to update you on our progress through this newsletter, as well as through direct communication if you are living in one of the affected homes. If you have any questions about the next stage of refurbishment in Lower Falinge and

how you might be affected, please feel free to get in touch with Syed or Michelle from our regeneration team by emailing towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or calling our Freephone number: 0800 027 7769 (opt 7).

Thank you Bevan!

We recently presented some shopping vouchers to say thank you to our tenant Bevan who lives in Lower Falinge. During the recent spell of bad weather, the rain came down so quickly that the car park drains were overwhelmed and within mere minutes the flood waters were approaching nearby flats and shops. Although Bevan lives on the top floor he was straight down to clear the drains, despite getting soaked in the process! His quick-thinking and selfless actions prevented a lot of damage and were spotted by our CCTV team – well done!

REFURBISHMENT WORK AT COLLEGE BANK

We would like to thank all residents in College Bank for their understanding and cooperation as our contractors carried out further technical surveying work at Underwood, Holland Rise and Mardyke last month.

As part of our long term proposals for improving the quality and mix of homes in College Bank and Lower Falinge, we said we would explore options for the refurbishment and modernisation of these three towers, while four other blocks at College Bank (Mitchell Hey, Dunkirk Rise, Tentercroft and Town Mill Brow) would be demolished once all residents had been supported to move.

The survey work that has just been completed will help us gain a better understanding of the work required to bring Underwood, Holland Rise and Mardyke blocks up to a high standard of living. This more detailed information will help us to begin working up some options to discuss with the local community.

Some of the feedback we have already received from residents is that they would like more certainty about what exactly this refurbishment and modernisation could involve, as well as when and how it may affect them. The results of this technical research will help us to understand this more clearly.

We appreciate that this kind of building investigation, which was limited to empty homes and communal areas, will nevertheless have created some noise and disruption to residents. We are grateful for the patience and flexibility of all residents affected by this important work.

We know that everyone will be mindful of the risks posed by COVID-19 in Rochdale and would like to reassure all residents that all work was carried out by our contractors in line with social distancing guidelines - to ensure the safety of residents, the RBH team and our contractor partners.

If you have any further questions about these recent works or our refurbishment proposals in College Bank, please do contact a member of the Regeneration Team

in the following ways: Email us at towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk Call Freephone 0800 027 7769 (option 7) and ask to speak with Syed Hussain or Michelle Kelly

YOUR NEWS AND VIEWS

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, 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.

Nominations are now open for our 2020 Values in Practice (VIP) awards! Our annual Values in Practice (VIP) awards say thank you to Members, tenants, employees, and residents who make a real difference in our communities. We want to hear about those special people who go above and beyond to help their communities and the people around them. Do you know someone who deserves to be recognised as a VIP? If so, the nomination process couldn't be simpler – visit www.rbh.org.uk/vip now and complete our short form!

Drop-in sessions remain suspended Our top priority during the coronavirus outbreak is the health and safety of our tenants and employees. For this reason, our drop-in sessions at College Bank and Lower Falinge remain suspended until further notice. We are sorry for any inconvenience and thank you for your patience and understanding. You can still contact our team by e-mail on towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or by phone on Freephone 0800 027 7769 (use option 7).