

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

A message from Gareth Swarbrick, RBH Chief Executive

Welcome to another edition of Community Together, your dedicated town centre newsletter.

We know that 2020 has already been an extremely challenging year for our College Bank and Lower Falinge communities, as we all come to terms with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The latest National Lockdown and Tier 3 restrictions for Greater Manchester will understandably put extra strain on people living and working in our town centre neighbourhoods. We ask that you keep updated on all the latest guidance from Public Health England, to help slow the rate of infection in central Rochdale.

Remember, you can always access up-to-date information on our website at **rbh.org.uk/coronavirus**.

I want to remind all residents that RBH is here to help throughout this challenging time. I would encourage anyone experiencing financial difficulty to get in touch with us directly, so that we can find workable solutions together.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who responded to our recent Life in Lockdown survey. The honest feedback you've provided has helped us to understand how people's circumstances have changed this year.

Our priority during this pandemic period continues to be the health, safety, and wellbeing of all our tenants and employees. In September, we provided an important update to residents of College Bank relating to fire safety and the measures we have put in place to protect people. We have provided this information again in this newsletter, along with an update on our next steps.

Despite many challenges this year, we remain committed to delivering more of the right types of homes to benefit both current and future residents of the town centre. Local people will soon see the first foundations appearing at Abbeydale, our latest phase of truly affordable homes in the town centre, alongside open spaces for everyone to enjoy.

With 2021 fast approaching, and following requests from residents, we've taken the opportunity to reflect on the shared journey we've been on over the past few years, with the timeline opposite. As well as showing how far we've come, it's also a chance to share some of the exciting events on the horizon for our town centre communities.

New Pioneers, our life skills and training programme for town centre residents run jointly with Rochdale Council, has continued to grow this year and is about to enter an exciting new phase. You can learn about the group's recent successes and hear from one of the newest Pioneers in this newsletter.

As ever, our Regen team is on hand to provide support and discuss any concerns you may have. You'll find contact details for Syed and Michelle at the end of this and every newsletter.

Finally, I'd like to personally wish everyone in College Bank and Lower Falinge good health in these uncertain times. If we can support you in any way, please do let us know.

The Journey so far

Our plans for the future of Rochdale town centre have been developed over a number of years through lengthy consultations with the local community.

Last Autumn's newsletter recapped our journey together so far and outlined some key dates on the horizon in 2020.

After an extremely challenging year for everyone, we thought it would be useful to revisit this timeline and look ahead to our plans for 2021.

2016

- Nov: Started our discussions with the community

2017

- Jan: Appointed architect Levitt Bernstein to work on our masterplan
- Feb-Jun: Held workshops with the local community to develop our masterplan
- Mar: Started to build 19 new homes at Toad Lane
- Mar-Dec: Worked with the RSA to develop a support work and wellbeing offer
- Jul: Masterplan proposals presented to community
- Aug-Oct: Visited every household affected by our proposals

2018

- July: Issued Initial Demolition Notices to homes in Falinge affected by our proposals
- July: Supported people to move from the first affected blocks in Lower Falinge
- Sept: Launched prospectus for New Pioneers Programme
- Oct: Completed 19 new homes at Toad Lane
- Dec: Gained planning permission for 55 new homes and a community open space

2019

- Mar: Issued Initial Demolition Notices to homes affected by our proposals in College Bank
- Apr-ongoing: Supported people to move from Mitchell Hey
- May-ongoing: Supported people to move from next phase in Lower Falinge
- May-ongoing: Demolition of five blocks in Falinge
- Aug: New Homes at Toad Lane shortlisted for Borough design award
- Sept: Appointed first careers broker to support first phase of New Pioneers Programme

2020

- Mar: Started on site with 55 new homes and a community open space at Abbeydale
- Mar: Community representatives signed off the RBH commitments in the Resident's Deal
- Spring: More detailed plans for refurbished homes in Lower Falinge
- Spring onwards: Our teams are providing ongoing support for residents during the COVID-19 pandemic
- TBC: Plans for specialist homes for older people developed
- Sept: Advertised for an additional New Pioneers careers broker
- TBC: New Community Guardians employed in College Bank

2021

- TBC: Detailed proposals for new homes at College Bank and in zones 4/5/6 of Lower Falinge
- TBC: New Careers Broker employed as part of growing New Pioneers Programme
- TBC: Detailed proposals for refurbishment of the first College Bank block

College Bank Fire Safety

If you live in College Bank, you should have received a letter from us in September, containing an important update about fire safety in your building. During our latest Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) surveys, we were able to conduct extensive investigations into the structure of our high-rise buildings, which included looking inside the walls.

Our investigations found an issue with the external panels that might increase the potential for a fire to spread to other homes on the same level, rather than being contained as it should be. This problem with 'compartmentation' appears to have been caused by inappropriate work carried out on the buildings in 1998 – before the formation of RBH.

As ever, our residents' safety is our number one priority. We have taken the precaution of installing a Waking Watch, to monitor all College Bank buildings around the clock. These trained individuals are in place to quickly alert residents, emergency services and RBH in the event of a fire.

You should all by now be familiar with our Stay Safe policy, which is published on the main RBH website. While the majority of this advice remains relevant and unchanged, this compartmentation issue meant we need to change our advice for anyone encountering a fire in a neighbouring home:

- If there is a fire in another part of the building on the same floor as you, get out and call the fire service by dialling **999**. If you can, you should alert the neighbours on your floor on your way out, and exit the building using the stairs. You must not use the lift. Once outside, you should assemble at the designated meeting point for your block
- If there is a fire on another floor within your building, it will normally be safest for you to stay in your flat, but you may be advised to leave if the fire is on a floor immediately below or above you
- If you feel unsafe or your flat is affected by heat or smoke, then get out and call the fire service by dialling **999**. If a member of the fire service or the Waking Watch ever tells you to leave the building, you should do so immediately
- If you live in College Bank and someone in your home has mobility or health issues, meaning they would need extra help to leave the building in an emergency, please contact us as soon as possible.

We are exploring longer term options to improve fire safety at College Bank, including the installation of fire alarms and continuing with our planned programme to upgrade fire doors.

We will contact you with more details soon about when we will need to access your home to complete these works.

As well as receiving letters and updated Stay Safe information, we also invited College Bank residents to submit their questions at a Facebook Q&A session on 1st October. For anyone who was unable to attend that session, we have provided answers to the most popular questions here.

If any College Bank resident has any further queries and would like to make appointment with our team, please email us on **collegebank@rbh.org.uk** or call us on Freephone **0800 027 7769**.

Given there have never been any breaches of compartmentalisation in College Bank from fires either before or after 1998, is this waking watch really necessary?

Our overriding priority is the safety of residents at College Bank. After the recent fire risk surveys identified these issues and in discussion with both our independent advisors and Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service, we have put in place measures to keep residents safe.

How do you intend on getting disabled residents out in the event of a fire without the use of a lift?

We have asked all residents if they need any support or assistance during an evacuation. We have asked residents to contact us if they need support. We will work with all residents who need additional support to create a personal emergency evacuation plan. These will also be shared with the waking watch, and with the Fire Service if they attend an incident. We have already spoken to a large number of residents and we encourage any residents who have not done so to contact us so that we can put an evacuation plan in place and provide the support needed.

Can you tell us your plans to keep residents safe?

We acted quickly to put the waking watch in place. This is to keep residents safe by looking for any signs of fire and helping residents to evacuate in the unlikely event that this is necessary. Whilst this temporary measure is in place, we are taking expert advice in order to implement a longer-term solution.

What are the details of the “inappropriate work” undertaken in 1998?

We found a poor standard of work which, in certain circumstances, could contribute to the spread of fire horizontally between flats on the same floor. We are currently taking legal advice on this.

How are the RBH Board holding the Executive Team to account?

Both our elected Representative Body and our Board of Directors have been and will continue to be fully informed of the situation at College Bank. Their overriding focus is on the safety of residents.

What Fire Risk Assessment was undertaken in 2017? Who commissioned and provided the report?

The Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) carried out this year go beyond the current requirements and have been carried out in the spirit of the Hackitt report and ahead of anticipated changes in 2021. The FRAs in 2017 met the requirements at the time and still meet current requirements.

Was a survey actually done when RBH took over the flats and what was the outcome regarding fire risk?

Legal warranties were provided by the Council when ownership of the flats transferred to RBH in 2012. We are currently taking legal advice on these.

What do the waking watch do and who do we contact in an emergency?

The waking watch are providing a 24-hour walking patrol around all seven blocks at College Bank. There is one person on duty in each block at any given time. If residents have any concern about a suspected fire, please call **999** and ask for the fire service. For any RBH queries, you can contact the concierge, email us on **collegebank@rbh.org.uk**, or call Freephone **0800 027 7769**.

Why has the broken window in Mardyke only just been replaced?

The window was secured after the tragic incident in Mardyke and was recently re-secured after it was reported that there was further damage.

What was the vehicle with fire extinguishers on it doing at College Bank last week?

These fire extinguishers are from other RBH buildings and are just being stored temporarily in a spare storage room at College Bank.

Will there be another Q&A in the future as not everyone has been able to attend?

We have offered all residents the opportunity to make an appointment with our team to answer any and all questions or concerns that they have. If you would like to make an appointment, please email us on **collegebank@rbh.org.uk** or call **0800 027 7769**.

Life in Lockdown Survey - Results

We know how challenging this year has been for everyone in Rochdale and right across the country, as we all feel the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although we paused our rehousing activity in March, our commitment to improving the quality and variety of homes in the town centre remains. Working to the latest guidance on Covid-19 safety, we will continue to support everyone who needs to move home.

In the Summer, we asked all our College Bank and Lower Falinge residents to tell us about their experiences during lockdown and to let us know whether their situation had changed during the

Covid-19 pandemic. We wanted to ensure that we are providing the right kind of support and options as people's perspectives and priorities change.

More than 300 residents took part in the survey and we'd like to thank everyone for providing their views. We are using the results to further improve the service we

provide to residents and we are pleased to report on some of the anonymous feedback on the next page.

Suitability of homes

The survey gave us a mixed response in terms of whether people's current home meets their needs. 55% of people in Lower Falinge and 75% of people in College Bank said their current home did meet their needs. However, the responses varied widely from block to block in both neighbourhoods.

Broadly speaking, there was a higher percentage of people living in blocks where we are currently supporting people to move, who said that their home did meet their needs. This is to be expected, as it reflects that people who have not yet been able to move have specific needs relating to their current home, while people who wanted to move have been able to do so.

It is telling us that the new home that best meets their needs might be in one of our refurbished blocks, which highlights the importance of progressing with our planned refurbishment. It is also consistent with local housing register information, which shows that around 10% to 15% of households in College Bank are on the housing register for a reason not relating to regeneration – namely because they feel their home does not meet their needs.

The main reason people gave for their current home not meeting their needs was because of changes in personal circumstances, particularly around children and the need for family homes. The next most common reasons were around deteriorating health and not being able to manage stairs. This reiterates the importance of getting a better mix of homes in the area, so that as people's circumstances change, they do not have to leave the town centre to find a suitable home.

Where would you like to move?

The majority of residents would prefer to stay within the town centre (59%) this is similar to the proportion who told us this when we visited every household in 2017. More than 40% of College Bank and Lower Falinge respondents would still prefer to move elsewhere within the borough.

RBH has promised that anyone who chooses to stay in Rochdale Town Centre will be able to do so, but we can also support with moves elsewhere if desired.

Overall, there was little change in the areas where people wanted to live with 75% saying their preference on area had not changed. Of the 40% of respondents who preferred to move away from the town centre Middleton and Littleborough were the areas most given as their preference for where to live. Our ambition is to ensure that having a mix of great new homes as well as support like the New Pioneers Programme on hand will encourage more people to want to stay in the town centre in future.

When would you like to move?

When asked whether the Covid-19 pandemic had affected how urgently people wanted to move, almost a third of people (30%) said they would ideally need to move sooner than planned. We will soon be re-contacting those residents whose circumstances have changed and will try to agree a timeline that works best for them.

There were 8% of respondents who said that they would now need longer before they were able to move. We will work with all these households to understand their specific needs and how we can offer the best tailored support for them.

Support during Lockdown

We're pleased that more than two thirds of respondents (69%) said they felt that they'd had enough support from us during lockdown, but we really want to help as many residents as possible.

If you need further support or are experiencing difficulty with any tenancy matters, including rent payments, please contact us as soon as possible so that we can help you work through any issues.

Our Regen team have now contacted everyone who asked us to get in touch via the survey. Michelle and Syed are available to talk through any questions or concerns you may have about your tenancy or a planned move. You can reach them by emailing towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or calling - **01706 274100 / 0800 027 7769** (use option 7).

New Pioneers Update

It's been a busy few months for our New Pioneers in Rochdale town centre, with new members joining all the time and some exciting projects coming to fruition. Our life skills and training programme for town centre residents, run jointly with Rochdale Council, has grown rapidly since it launched in 2019 - welcoming its 18th regular member last month.

The programme has been so successful, helping local people make personal and professional progress in their lives, that it will be extending and expanding further next year. Running until the end of 2021 at the earliest, the New Pioneers will soon welcome a second Careers Broker, to support the incredible work being done by Daisy Silva in conjunction with Rochdale Training Association.

One of the very first New Pioneers, Andy Littlewood, has been pursuing his ambition to become a maths teacher since the programme launched last year. Andy has recently been running weekly maths training sessions for fellow New Pioneers at Howards Street Community Centre, and recently helped all his charges achieve Maths Functional Skills Level 1.

Andy said: “Throughout the course, students showed courage and determination to overcome their maths difficulties and all went on to pass. I feel extremely proud that I have touched their lives and that they want to continue learning so they can further better themselves.”

But the New Pioneers is about far more than just academic courses. This Summer, Lead Careers Broker Daisy Silva helped launch a knitting group after being approached by one of the Pioneers. Over the past few months, the knitters have been making clothes specifically for premature babies, who would otherwise have nothing suitable to wear immediately after being born.

Daisy Silva said: “The knitting group is a great example of what can be achieved when we work together for a great cause. It’s been so rewarding to make something that will help children and parents in the local community, and the process of learning and making has been fantastic.

Rochdale Council’s Work Health and Skills Team have supported Spotland Community Association in Lower Falinge to work in partnership with the New Pioneers Programme and helped them secure funding through the ESF Community Grants managed by the WEA. This will help equip local residents, including New Pioneers with basic skills required for daily home & working life. This will provide wraparound health and wellbeing support to aid learning and give people the tools to help them on their learning and employment journey.

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

If you’d like to find out more about the New Pioneers and how you could get involved, Contact Daisy Silva today on **07866 143 999** or **daisy.silva2@rochdale.gov.uk**.

Meet Piotr

Piotr Sipowicz has been living in Rochdale since 2016 and joined the New Pioneers this year.

I moved to Rochdale from Poland to be nearer to my children, one of whom is now studying at Manchester University. I really like Rochdale; it reminds me of my hometown just outside Kraków – it’s close to the countryside and has a similarly diverse community.

When I arrived here, I had no job and very little money. I’d left everything behind in Poland and was really starting afresh. I remember going straight to the local rugby club, as I had been a coach in Poland, and everyone was so welcoming straight away – I really felt at home.

I feel really fortunate to have been given a home in College Bank. I’m living on one of the top floors and can see for miles around – it’s just like where I lived in Poland. I

felt like I'd won the lottery when I secured my tenancy with RBH and was successful with only the second flat I bid on.

I was working in a civil engineering job until the start of the year and was unfortunately made redundant during lockdown. I have been lucky to find another role with some great colleagues, but I felt that I could be doing something more inspiring, which is why I got in touch with Daisy Silva.

I have always been interested in engineering, ever since I was a young boy. I remember my father once gave me a battery powered car and the next day it was in pieces – I'd taken it apart to try and find out how it worked!

Daisy has been fantastic – she gave me the confidence to enrol in a Masters Degree with the Open University and I'm finding it really interesting. She also connected me with Mark at Rochdale Training Association, who has helped me get some hands-on experience with local engineering firms.

I'm really enjoying learning new skills and having new experiences. I wish I had started down this path earlier in life, when I didn't have so many responsibilities, but I'm proof that you're never too old to learn. I'm definitely finding it challenging, but I'm improving and it's all been worth it so far!

I really feel that if you feel like trying something new, you should do it. Sometimes everyone needs a helping hand to make big decisions and that's what Daisy and the New Pioneers are there for. It's been so useful to get another perspective and think about all the things that I could achieve.

I would definitely recommend people to join the New Pioneers, it's really been life-changing for me.

Work progressing on new homes in Lower Falinge

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, we're pleased to report that work on the latest phase of new and affordable homes in Lower Falinge is progressing well.

You may have seen our construction partners Engie busy on site over the past few months, preparing the ground for future building work. The first phase of ground remediation is now complete, with the first housing foundations appearing this month.

Drainage systems for the new homes is now nearing completion and underground cabling is being removed to make way for new systems.

The 55 new homes will be in 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 new homes will be available at genuinely affordable rents.

Noise and disruption are inevitable with any construction work but our partners Engie are doing everything possible to keep this to a minimum. Health and Safety around the site is of utmost importance and we ask that no one enters the site at any time.

In the event of any urgent concerns, Project Manager Alastair Mail can be contacted on **07773 008 672** during working hours (8.30am – 5pm.) If you need to speak to someone outside of these times due to an emergency, Engie can be contacted on their out of hours number **0800 2888 200**.

Our contractors are sending out fortnightly emails with updates on their work in Lower Falinge. If you or anyone you know would like to keep up to date with developments, please email our team on **development.team@rbh.org.uk** and you will be added to the mailing list.

Keep your eyes peeled in the newsletter for further updates on these new homes as work progresses on site. A new open, community space will also be provided alongside the new homes.

Could you be one of our new RBH Apprentices?

We are excited to let you know that we have four new business apprenticeship roles - in our IT, Finance, Income Services, and Repairs Planning Teams.

These roles are reserved for RBH tenants and people who live in RBH homes.

Applications are open from Friday 30th October until Friday 13th November.

- We're offering four great business apprenticeship roles in our teams.
- We pay all our apprentices the Real Living Wage
- RBH offer a range of attractive employee benefits
- Our apprenticeships are fully-funded and include a nationally-recognised qualification
- RBH apprentices receive ongoing mentoring, training, and support

To find out more, visit our website at **www.rbh.org.uk/jobs**, call **0800 027 7769**, or e-mail **workandskills@rbh.org.uk** for more information.

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.

If you need this report in a different format or language, please contact us to ask how we can help.

Introducing our community guardians

Earlier this year, we wrote to all residents in College Bank, Lower Falinge, and Freehold about our proposals to change the way that neighbourhood security and CCTV services are delivered. We are very grateful to all the residents who provided feedback on our plans.

You told us that security continues to be a high priority for residents of College Bank, which is why we want to deliver a service which provides the most assurance to you, and tackles the issues you have raised.

The Community Guardians will be there to be present and visible around the community, something we know is a deterrent to anti-social behaviour. There was some feedback around the name. We have chosen the title 'Guardians' rather than 'Security' as they will be trusted members of the community who will build relationships with residents and work together to stop issues as they arise. We also expect them to work closely with the local police to reduce anti-social behaviour, but they are not there to physically intervene, and will call the police when necessary.

The team will start their induction on 1 December. We are going to monitor the new service to ensure that we are reducing anti-social behaviour and improving the neighbourhoods in the ways we anticipate. We will keep all residents informed and we always appreciate your feedback - positive and negative! - to help us improve our services.

Web: collegebankandlowerfalinge.org.uk

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