

Community Together College Bank and Lower Falinge Newsletter (text only version). Winter 2021 edition.

A message from Gareth Swarbrick, RBH Chief Executive

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

This has undoubtedly been a particularly difficult start to 2021 with a third national lockdown and the closure of schools to most pupils. Having lived through two previous lockdowns and Tier 3 restrictions for many months, we know that these are challenging times for us all.

You can always access up-to-date information on our website at rbh.org.uk/coronavirus and please remember that RBH is here to help. If you are experiencing financial difficulties at a time of year when this can be common even without lockdown, do get in touch with us directly so that we can work on a solution together.

There is light at the end of the tunnel as we see more and more people every day receiving a Covid-19 vaccine and there's more good news with the start of FAST testing in Rochdale for those who cannot work from home and don't have symptoms. If you come into regular contact with the public, it's important to get tested weekly to protect yourselves and the wider community.

On page 3 of this newsletter we have more information for those residents of the retained blocks at College Bank who will need to be rehoused during the refurbishment and modernisation works being undertaken there. I know this continues to be a challenging and uncertain time for many residents. Our team continues to offer support and advice to individuals and families who need it and we are committed to keeping you updated on developments.

We're underway with refurbishments in the communal areas at Lower Falinge, which you can read more about on page 2 with external lighting being upgraded after consultations with residents to find out what improvements were most needed.

Our Regeneration team remains on hand to provide support and to discuss any concerns you may have, and as always you can find contact details for Syed and Michelle on the back page of this newsletter.

We have featured some suggested lockdown activities on page 10 of this newsletter along with some inspiring stories from the New Pioneers life and skills training programme on page 3.

These may be challenging times for everyone, but I'd like to thank residents in College Bank and Lower Falinge for helping us all to work together through lockdown. If we can support you in any way, please do let us know.

Improvements Begin at Lower Falinge

We are beginning a series of refurbishments at Lower Falinge, informed by consultations with residents. We visited homes in the retained blocks and asked what improvements they would like to see, followed by a workshop for residents of both College Bank and Lower Falinge to gain more views on these refurbishments.

The general themes we found were around the general brightness of the neighbourhood; wanting improvements to the communal areas, better use of the space around the back of the blocks and exploring the option of individual areas with gardens at the front.

A clear priority in our discussions was lighting and these external works have already started, upgrading the lights on walkways and stairwells, which had been identified as too dark.

We're using more efficient LED lighting with movement sensors that drop the lighting down to a lower level when there is no activity and now have one light per home.

We have appointed BTP Architects to help us look at options for investment with two tenant representatives from Lower Falinge involved in this selection process and the overall project to ensure input from tenant representatives throughout the project.

RBH is making a significant investment in the neighbourhood and is aiming for the works to complement the designs for the new homes currently being built, which will also see a large green space that will be easily accessible for all Lower Falinge residents to use.

The BTP design team includes Managing Director, Vicky Saunders, Associate Elliot Denby, Architect Henar Palomar and Architectural Assistant Alin Palin.

Vicky Saunders, Managing Director, said: "We're really pleased to be working with RBH on such a worthwhile project.

"The work will modernise the appearance of the buildings, contributing to the improvements being made to the wider neighbourhood.

"We hope these improvements will mean people can enjoy their homes more and feel proud of where they live and have a positive impact on the local community."

We will continue to keep you updated on the plans to build new homes and invest in existing homes in our future newsletters.

We are also sending out regular email updates about the works taking place at the site for our new homes in Lower Falinge, so if you or anyone you know would like to keep up to date with progress, please email our team on **development.team@rbh.org.uk** and we will add you to our mailing list.

Update on Retained Blocks at College Bank

Our regeneration plans at College Bank have now reached the stage where we are in a position to provide more clarity for residents in the remaining retained blocks.

We have written to residents in Underwood, Holland Rise, and Mardyke, to let them know that our refurbishment plans will mean that they will need to move for the duration of the modernisation work.

Over the past few months, we have been carrying out technical surveys, including the recent fire risk assessments, and although we still do not have the full detail of what refurbishment and modernisation work could involve, we do now know for certain that it would be extensive enough that residents would not be able to continue to live in their homes while the work is carried out.

We will continue to keep residents fully informed and we will share any information promptly as soon as it is available. We will also enable as many of these temporary moves as possible to be to other available flats within College Bank

You can contact us on **towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk** or by calling us on Freephone **0800 027 7769** – option 7. You can also complete the contact form at **www.collegebankandlowerfalinge.org.uk**.

New Pioneers Update

The country may have gone into another lockdown since Christmas, but that isn't stopping our New Pioneers team from engaging with people and the last few months have been busier than ever. The life skills and training programme for town centre residents, run jointly with Rochdale Council, is now up to 24 regular members and has welcomed two new staff members since our last update.

Career Broker Daisy Silva tells us that the new lockdown isn't getting in the way of bringing people together: "We have been very successful engaging people in lockdown through WhatsApp groups, with cooking challenges and quizzes every Friday.

"It's all a lot of fun and helps to bring people together and build a sense of community. We've even learned how to grow new carrots from old carrots! We are also doing after school activities for children, teaching Spanish, Cookery, German, PE and Animal Welfare activities and already have 12 children keen to start.

“Most important is supporting people with social isolation, whether they are struggling for food or with technology. Ideally we’d be doing it face-to-face but we are still engaging people. Digital inclusion is crucial, so we’re running courses to make sure people can get online and use the tools that we all need more of right now to stay in touch.”

Another way of engaging with the Pioneers and beyond is the new Facebook page, which has been introduced to have an independently-branded communications tool to showcase the activities the group has been doing, as well as sharing inspiring quotes, good news, links to resources and highlight the Pioneers’ achievements.

The Facebook page has been created by one of the two new team members, Assistant Career Broker Agata Gorczyca. A former Pioneer herself, Aggie has been taken on part-time after impressing the team when she applied for the Career Broker role. While she might have not quite had the experience at the time, her six-month contract will help her build that up, alongside a Level 4 Advice & Guidance course she will be attending.

She speaks English, German and Polish and has amazing passion and potential, as can be seen by the great work she’s already doing bringing our Facebook page to life.

Meet Suzan

The other new face on the team is Career Broker Suzan Wilson, who comes to the New Pioneers with 30 years of experience working with people with barriers to employment or issues like homelessness or mental health problems. Having grown up on a farm she lives on a small holding with dogs, chickens, horses, sheep, rabbits, ducks and more – with plans to add an alpaca to her family soon.

Suzan has a B.Ed. in Biology and a Diploma in Animal Welfare & Behaviour and Equine Management. She’s done equine assisted therapy in the past with one of her horses: “He’s very good at picking up people’s emotions and feelings and acts accordingly.”

For New Pioneers, she’s put together an introductory course called Understanding Animal Welfare and Wellbeing, linked in with how that can help improve people’s mental health. The course is open to anyone, will be run over Zoom and starts in February.

After Covid-19 restrictions are eventually lifted the plan is to do the course in group settings with small pets brought for social interaction. Beyond that, Suzan hopes to be able to introduce people to her horse for some equine assisted therapy, so watch this space!

To book your place on the Understanding Animal Welfare and Wellbeing course, contact suzan.wilson@rochdale.gov.uk or **07971797778**.

“I started here in mid-November and working with New Pioneers is a total change from everything else I’ve worked on before. I’ve got lots of experience in this kind of work across various contracts and know the area well, but this is so refreshing and enlightening because for the first time I really feel like I can actually help people.

Sometimes projects can be frustrating because they are very results-driven and once you have helped someone into a job, they can become an ‘outcome’ and you have to move on to someone else instead of providing ongoing support.

This happened in a previous role where I worked with a lady called Janet and helped her get onto a course. That was the end of our work with her and while I kept in touch for a few weeks, eventually my caseload became so much that I couldn’t continue. Eventually she left that course without completing it because the support wasn’t there anymore.

With New Pioneers I’ve been able to reconnect with Janet and this time it will be different. She’s signed up for the course again and I will be able to keep on working with her which is fantastic because she’s not an outcome, she’s a person.

In the short time I’ve been on the team, I’ve seen how we can make remarkable differences to people’s lives. I’ve engaged with six people and instead of simply finding them jobs, I’m able to carry on doing online training that fits around their needs and their career aspirations, helping them to go further than they thought was possible.

We’ve got people who are struggling with their mental health because of lockdown, maybe they’re doing jobs that aren’t what they really want to do, and we’re able to get them the training and placements to help them make that dream come true. People might think they’re trapped by finances in their jobs and can’t change careers, but we can help them.

That’s the difference with New Pioneers and it’s what makes this project so special. I’m very happy to be here.”

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 on **07866 143 999** or **daisy.silva2@rochdale.gov.uk**

Online Training - Understanding animal welfare and wellbeing.

Do you love animal? Do you want to learn more about them? Do you want to know why animals can be good for your mental health?

3 Session

1. 18th February
2. 25th February
3. 4th March

To book your place, please contact suzan.wilson@rochdale.gov.uk Tel: **07971797778**

Community Guardians Update

In the last newsletter we told you about plans to change the way that CCTV services are delivered at College Bank, Lower Falinge, and Freehold. Instead of the 24-hour CCTV being monitored, we will record it 24/7 and introduce a new team of **Community Guardians**.

They will be there to be present and visible around the three communities, something we know is a deterrent to anti-social behaviour, working together with residents and the local police as trusted members of the community, and helping to resolve issues as they arise. They are there for tenants and residents to report issues to and will provide help and signposting for tenancy and community-related issues.

CCTV will continue to be recorded and reviewed but having the Community Guardians acting as the eyes and ears of the community, working in teams, is a much more inclusive system for residents. They'll be visiting every neighbourhood, every day in order to have a physical presence in the neighbourhood and give people reassurance.

Recruitment is underway and several positions have been filled with the rest to be hired in coming weeks, which is when walkabouts will start. Over Christmas and in the early weeks of this year, the team's priority has been maintaining the concierge service at College Bank and ensuring the CCTV systems were working effectively for all three neighbourhoods.

In our next newsletter we'll introduce the team members so you can get to know who your Guardians will be. We will be monitoring 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 otherwise – to help us improve our services.

College Bank Fire Safety

We are taking a number of steps to continue to improve fire safety at College Bank this year.

These include work across all blocks, including those which will be demolished, as part of our promise to continue with repair and safety works for all residents.

Fire Alarms

This includes installation of alarm systems across all seven blocks. There are two new separate systems due to be installed.

The first of these is a fire alarm that is intended to complement the existing smoke alarms and reduce our need for the Waking Watch we introduced last year. This was to monitor fire safety and minimise risk caused by the 'compartmentation' issue that was identified in 2020.

This alarm is an automated system and installation is expected to start in February and to take a month per block to complete.

The other Fire Safety alarm system to be installed is an evacuation alarm, which was a recommendation of the Building a Safer Future report, with Sir Martin Moore-Bick advising that all high-rise buildings should have a method for the Fire Service to use to communicate with residents in the event of an emergency.

This system will allow them to do so on a floor-by-floor basis, by groups of floors or to the whole building. It isn't a fire alarm and doesn't work like one as it uses voice instructions rather than a siren but will be loud enough to be heard when it is needed to be used in an emergency at all hours of the day and night.

The installation of these systems does not need to be delayed by lockdown restrictions because they are classed as essential fire safety works, and our approved contractor has completed all the necessary Covid Secure risk assessments.

There will be a minimum of impact and disruption caused by these installations, particularly as both systems operate wirelessly, which minimises the work actually required within people's homes. The main work will be to install the transmitters within communal areas with two brief appointments then needed to complete works in each home. Communications to arrange these will be sent out shortly.

We have also recently sent a letter to every home in College Bank explaining about the work to install upgraded fire doors across the seven blocks.

Fire Service Training in Mitchell Hey

You may have noticed before Christmas that there were some firefighting exercises taking place nearby. In mid-December Greater Manchester Fire were conducting a

number of training sessions for new recruits, including one that saw water being pumped up to the 20th floor of Mitchell Hey and then jetted back down to the grass embankment below.

Further events are planned in the future as Mitchell Hey has the necessary empty flats and floors for the Fire Service to use to train in high rise work as well as for breathing apparatus practice exercises.

Would you need help to evacuate in an emergency?

We know that some residents in College Bank have told us they would struggle to leave their home and exit the flats via the stairs if there was an emergency. We are working with all these households to make sure we have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan in place. We know there are some households who have told us that high rise living no longer meets their needs and we will work with these households to find priority rehousing. If you feel that you may struggle to leave your home in an emergency please get in touch so that we can talk through the best support and options for you to ensure everyone can feel safe in their home.

Have any Queries?

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

Equity Assistance Scheme

The Equity Assistance Scheme can support leaseholders who live in their home and it is affected by the Regeneration proposals, either because it needs to be demolished or to undergo major refurbishment.

After speaking to leaseholders, we know that for some, the value of their existing home plus the additional uplift and financial compensation package RBH already offers to all leaseholders is not always enough to purchase a new home which meets their preferred needs and requirements. The scheme helps to fill this gap with no additional fees or rent to pay.

We know that everyone's circumstances are unique and that the solution which works best for some may not be the same for another, so the Equity Assistance Scheme will be applied in a flexible manner so that it can best meet individual needs.

For more information about the Equity Assistance Scheme please contact us at towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or call **0800 027 7769 – Option 7**

Example of how the scheme works

Leaseholder of a 2 bedroom flat who wishes to purchase a typical 2 bedroom flat within Central Rochdale

Average 2 bed flat at College Bank value + 10% uplift	£55,825
Full compensation and disturbance entitlement	£7,250
Total offer from RBH	£63,075
Price of new home to be purchased	£100,000
Fees payable by Leaseholder to purchase	Zero - All paid for by RBH
Potential total equity Leaseholder could use to fund purchase	£63,075
RBH equity under equity assistance scheme	£36,925
Monthly rent on RBH owned equity	Zero (while remaining living in the home)

College Bank Lockdown Temporary Changes

During this latest period of national lockdown, it's crucial that we all support each other and follow the restrictions to keep each other safe. With millions of people already vaccinated, we can start to see the way out of the current landscape as long as we stick together for a while longer.

At RBH our top priority is protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all residents and staff, so we've had to make some temporary changes to visitor access at College Bank.

Until further notice, we're only authorising entry for non-residents for the following reasons:

- The Emergency Services
- Members of the "support bubble" for a resident or residents
- Those delivering essential services such as food, parcels and medication to residents

- Carers and other support workers – who will be asked to please show identification
- RBH employees and contractors carrying out urgent and essential work

Except in emergencies, we'll also ask residents to confirm that they're expecting a visitor beforehand.

We are very grateful for your patience and understanding and are sorry for any inconvenience caused by these essential temporary changes, needed because of the pandemic.

If you have any further questions regarding these temporary changes, please either visit the Concierge Office or contact us via your Intercom where we will be able to assist you. You can also contact RBH on Freephone **0800 027 7769** or by e-mail to **customerexperience@rbh.org.uk**

Face masks or coverings must be worn in communal areas and lifts at College Bank unless you are exempt, and we ask that you maintain social distancing at all times too.

Things to do in Lockdown

The winter months can be a challenge for us all, and we know that living under a third lockdown in less than a year is making life tougher. Getting outdoors is difficult at this time of year but taking care of your mental and physical health is vital more than ever.

Having structure, keeping busy and staying active is so important, especially if you are furloughed, living alone, or shielding. Remember self-isolation does not mean social isolation. We need to keep busy, keep going and work together.

This affects us all, so what can we do to be there for ourselves and each other? We can share ideas. We can spur each other on. We can encourage, reach out and support each other.

We're all missing that face-to-face contact and a hug from a loved one or handshake with a friend and we know staying connected online just isn't the same, but right now that is our only option, and we want to work with our community to support each other by sharing ideas on things to do in lockdown.

Across our social media pages, we're sharing ideas and starting discussions to provide our RBH community with ideas on things to do in lockdown to learn something new and connect with others.

If you want to get involved, simply tag us into your content and we'll share it with the community, in return you may be helping a neighbour on your street, the family who lives down the road from you who you haven't met yet and the person living alone a few streets away who is desperate to connect with others.

- Twitter: @rbhousing
- Instagram: @rbhousing
- Facebook: @RBHousing

Let us know!

Tell us what you want to know more about during this lockdown by heading over to our social media channels or email our customer.engagement@rbh.org.uk to discuss further.

Fast Testing

Rochdale Council is starting FAST testing for frontline workers and those who cannot work from home, e.g. construction and manufacturing workers. Anyone who can't work from home or who comes into regular contact with the public is encouraged to get tested weekly to protect themselves, their loved ones and other residents.

There are sites across the borough which are open from 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 4pm at weekends. The tests are free and pre-booking is not required:

- Rochdale – Nye Bevan House, Maclure Road, Rochdale (near the tram and train station)
- Heywood – Heywood Sports Village (both a walk-in site and a drive through site)
- Middleton – Bowlee Sports Centre, Windermere Road, Middleton
- Pennines – location and opening date to be confirmed shortly

This FAST testing is only for people who do not have symptoms of Covid-19 and you will be guided to a booth to conduct the test yourself.

The test should take no longer than a few minutes and you should wear a face mask at all times except when taking the test. Results are given by text or email after half an hour of your test.

If you test negative you must continue to follow all the guidelines in place. Please continue to get tested weekly.

If your test is positive, you will need to self-isolate and take a test for those with symptoms at one of our COVID-19 test centres. If that also comes back positive you will need to remain isolating for 10 days from the date of your FAST test.

Support of up to £500 for those that test positive is available if isolation would impact on your income. You can find out more at rochdale.gov.uk/testandtracepayment

Andrea Fallon, director of public health at Rochdale Borough Council, said:

“We cannot get away from the fact that 1 in 3 people who have COVID-19 show no symptoms.

“This means that those people who cannot work from home and are more in contact with the public could unknowingly pass the virus on, with devastating consequences.

“The whole borough has given up so much and supported us all throughout these hard times. Now, more than ever, we need to pull together and get tested; not just for ourselves, but for each other.”

For more information on FAST Testing please visit rochdale.gov.uk/FastTesting

RBH Welcomes Rochdale Bid For Slice Of Towns Fund

We're pleased to report that Rochdale Council has submitted a bid for £25 million of the government's Towns Fund, to help drive forward the next major phase of the borough's regeneration programme.

Spearheaded by the Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government, The Towns Fund is a £3.4 billion pot of cash set aside by government to help drive economic regeneration in selected areas. 100 different towns from across the UK were given the opportunity to bid for a share of the money.

Rochdale's ask will help support the borough's ambitious growth strategy, which aims to create more jobs and build more than 10,000 new homes over the next two decades.

The towns fund bid, if successful, will support us to deliver new homes as well as improvements to St Mary's Gate:

- **New homes in Central Rochdale:** this will support the delivery of new homes in Lower Falinge through acquisition of land as part of wider regeneration of the area.
- **Major improvements to the A58 (St Mary's Gate):** the A58 currently cuts through the town centre, making it difficult for residents living in the neighbouring areas of Lower Falinge and College Bank to access it. This proposal seeks to improve connectivity on this key route by introducing new safe surface crossing points and exploring additional walking and cycling options.

We're really excited to be part of this bid which would help us to deliver new homes for local people in Rochdale town centre as well as make St Mary's Gate a much safer place for pedestrians and cyclists.

We will keep you updated on developments with regards to the Towns Fund bid.

Congratulations to our VIP Award Winners!

Our annual Values in Practice (VIP) awards say thank you to members, tenants, employees, and residents who make a real difference in our communities.

This year we received well over 100 nominations and our community funding panel of tenants and employees had the challenging job of choosing the shortlists and the overall winners! Our awards ceremony with a difference was held on Thursday 28th January and our winners are:

- Community Volunteer: **Kirsty Fearnough**
- Best Newcomer: **Michael Dollard**
- Constant Contributor: **David Haigh** and **Graeme Pearson** (joint winners)
- Team of the Year: **Community Investment Team**
- Outstanding Leader: **Nina Kissack**
- Community Spirit: **Amanda Roberts** and **Robert Wilkinson**
- Volunteer Group: **Q Gardens** and the **Kirkholt and Smallbridge Pantries** (joint winners)
- Support RBH colleagues: **Raki Dad**
- Supporting RBH customers: **Paula Warwick**
- Chief Executive's Choice: **Smallbridge and Kirkholt pantry volunteers**

A full list of all the shortlisted nominees is available at www.rbh.org.uk/vip

We'd like to say a particular "well done" to town centre residents **Amanda Roberts** and **Robert Wilkinson**, who won our "community spirit" award after being nominated for the kindness and generosity that they showed for their neighbours during the pandemic. They said:

"It feels lovely to win the award. It's been nice to be there to help people."

RBH Chief Executive, Gareth Swarbrick, said:

"RBH is all about people and about what we can collectively achieve and deliver - and how we can support each other. These awards are about recognising the difference that we can make in our communities when tenants and employees work together. I am extremely proud of all the nominees and of the way that our communities have responded over the past year when we have been tested in ways that we could never have imagined. Well done and congratulations to all the nominees and the winners!"

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. Email: **towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk** Tel: **0800 027 7769**

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).