

Community Together College Bank and Lower Falinge Newsletter (text only version). Spring 2021 Edition.

A message from Gareth Swarbrick, RBH Chief Executive

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

Spring is in the air and along with it a sense of hope as lockdown restrictions start to ease. It is a big step forward. Experience tells us we need to continue to be cautious, but the reopening of shops, gyms, salons, attractions and outdoor beer gardens and dining will be a relief for many.

The last year has been one like no other and we've taken the opportunity to reflect on the shared journey we've been on. As we come out of lockdown, find out about the latest with our services.

Despite the many challenges this year, we remain committed to improving the quality of life for our residents. We know from your feedback how important it is for you to be digitally connected and I'm delighted to announce that free internet access is on its way.

We are also continuing to work hard to deliver more of the right types of homes to benefit both current and future residents of the town centre. You will have seen building work progressing well on our latest phase of truly affordable homes.

In this newsletter, we also have more information about apprenticeship vacancies.

It has been a busy few months for New Pioneers, our life skills and training programme for residents run jointly with Rochdale Council. I'm delighted that it has continued to grow and we now have passed our target of 30 members!

Hear from Amanda, one of our inspirational Pioneers, about how the programme has changed her life. Amanda is one of many looking forward to visiting Falinge Park with friends as restrictions lift .

We are committed to keeping you updated on developments. Our team remains on hand to provide support and advice, if you have any questions please contact us at towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or call **0800 027 7769** (option 7) and ask to speak with **Syed** or **Michelle**. You can always access up-to-date information on our website at rbh.org.uk.

The last year has been exceptionally challenging for everyone and I'd like to thank residents in College Bank and Lower Falinge for helping us all to work together through lockdown.

Mesh Network Brings Free Internet to Rochdale

We are committed to looking at ways to improve the quality of life for residents in Lower Falinge and College Bank.

As part of the feedback on the regeneration and the Residents' Deal, people told us how important good quality digital access was and the past year has highlighted this even more.

We are delighted to announce that free internet access will soon be available for all residents in these neighbourhoods.

The 'Mesh Network project' will create a high speed, reliable WiFi network that will be available to residents in and around College Bank and Lower Falinge, thanks to a partnership of RBH and local organisations working together to support people to be more digitally connected.

Lockdown has shown how important it is to be digitally connected and internet connection is often needed to do a job, to catch up with friends and family and to access online services.

We also know that the cost of broadband can be unaffordable, especially for those who have seen reduced income as a result of the pandemic.

Funded by Rochdale Borough Council and installed by RBH, the network will be managed by the Pioneers' Museum, where the internet will be broadcast from.

We hope to have our first users in College Bank connected by May, with the network being rolled out to the full target area, including Lower Falinge, in the months that follow.

Derelict Mill Site to be Transformed into Housing

RBH has completed a deal to purchase land at the former Red Cross Mill site, at Redcross Street.

RBH head of Development and Regeneration, Gemma Wood, said:

"We know this site has been an eyesore for a long time and this is an opportunity to work to bring forward new homes that really meet the needs of local people.

We are hoping to bring a mix of new quality, affordable homes here in the future. Our first priority will be to clean and tidy up the land."

The mill buildings were partially demolished in the late 90s and fully cleared in the early 2000s.

Falinge Park

Now that the weather has become warmer and sunnier and lockdown restrictions have been eased to allow more people to meet up outside, don't forget that we've got Falinge Park nearby which offers a lot of space for all ages to have fun out in the fresh air. Whether you're walking around to get some exercise, feeding the ducks or letting the kids blow off some steam, what better way to enjoy life after lockdown?

New Pioneers Update

Despite lockdown restrictions, it has been a busy few months for the New Pioneers team, not least because we reached – and surpassed our target of 30 members.

We've been keeping people active and entertained with kids' activities like after-school Portuguese bingo and German classes over Zoom, with each child getting a diploma and sweet treat for their efforts.

One of our main activities right now is the New Pioneers Eco Hub, a community garden with six Pioneers volunteering to help out as well as attending a course on Food Hygiene and Manual Handling, organised through RBH.

We're still working in collaboration with Spotland Community Centre, delivering wellbeing, numeracy and literacy courses with them.

To find out more about what we do, have a look at our Facebook page – just search for Rochdale New Pioneers.

Do you think you would benefit from free life coaching or mentoring or do you know someone who might? We welcome referrals – contact suzan.wilson@rochdale.gov.uk or give her a ring on **07971 797778**.

Meet Amanda

New Pioneer Amanda has lived in Lower Falinge for 3 and a half years with her partner and four children. Last Summer, 41-year-old Amanda had just completed her level 1 Maths qualification. A year later she is now on her way to finding a job as a teaching assistant.

New Pioneers has changed my life. I've not been at work for eight years with bringing up my kids and I want to get back into work. I just didn't know what I wanted to do.

I've always worked – doing different things, mainly cleaning jobs in offices. I had a Saturday job in a shoe shop which I liked. I've also worked in warehouses for different companies like Boots, JD and Index, which was a long time ago!

It was talking to Daisy Silva which gave me the confidence to do a teaching assistant course. Daisy pushed me to do it and I'm so glad that she did. She was so

encouraging – she saw how I was with my children and reassured me that I had the skills.

I've now passed my teaching assistant course and I'm doing a 10-week placement at Spotland Primary School. I volunteer two days a week and I absolutely love it.

The first time I went in I was nervous because I've never done anything like this. But everyone was so welcoming and nice. I'm helping children in reception class and they are so lovely. I really get on with them, especially with having two children of my own of a similar age.

After my first day I rang Daisy and told her how much I loved it, and she was so happy. I keep grinning to myself. This is something I'm doing for me, and I am really pleased.

When I finish my course, I will start looking for teaching assistant jobs in the local area. My family's really proud of me and I've had loads of support from my partner and my eldest, who's 22.

I'm still having Zoom lessons for my level 2 Maths with my fantastic tutor Andy. I'm also doing an English qualification. I see the friends I've made on my lessons and when we're allowed to, with covid restrictions, we are going to have a play date in the park and have a big picnic.

New Pioneers has really helped me to build my confidence. You get so much support from really nice people like Daisy, Andy and Mark. If you've got a problem, they will solve it. Daisy, especially, has been brilliant. She has coached me so much and she's always at the end of the phone if I need her.

My advice to anyone thinking about New Pioneers is go on it, grab it and go for it. I'm so glad I did.

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**

Local Students Gain Virtual Construction Skills on Work Experience

Work experience is an important part of how young people start to move from education to employment, but lockdown restrictions have made it difficult for this to take place in person.

This has been especially challenging for students looking to find out about careers in construction but a new partnership in Rochdale has found an innovative solution.

Eight local Hopwood Hall College students were able to get a taste of the construction site in a Covid-secure manner thanks to a pioneering virtual work experience programme run by ENGIE in partnership with RBH.

ENGIE have been on site in Lower Falinge since March 2020 to deliver 55 new houses and apartments for RBH as well as new community green space. These homes are a key part of a wider masterplan, developed by RBH working together with the community, to deliver the right quality and mix of homes for residents in Rochdale town centre.

Their virtual work experience programme was designed to provide a wide overview of the skills required and the routes available for a career in construction. This included site management, construction skills, health and safety, and commercial and quantity surveying.

Paul Vicario, ENGIE Community Engagement Officer, said:

“Due to COVID-19, we recognised that people were missing out on the opportunity to gain vital work experience on site. In order to combat this, we adapted our offer into a one-week virtual work experience.

The students at Hopwood Hall College took part in activities from various professions and received input from people they may not necessarily interact with if they were out on site.

We feel this broader look at construction as a whole will inspire people to think about the many different career opportunities that there are in the construction industry.”

The students had to complete tasks that they may not have encountered if they were on site. The week finished with a session focused on employability including a mock interview with individual feedback to help students to build their confidence.

They all reported improved skills in areas such as problem solving, confidence, and job readiness at the end of the experience - as well as gaining new insights into the world of construction.

Clare Tostevin, RBH Director of Growth, said:

“Our plans for Rochdale town centre are about people, not bricks and mortar, so we’re really proud to be able to work with our construction partners ENGIE to deliver these great opportunities for local young people.

This is just one example of how we’re delivering additional social value by working with businesses who share our values, not just in Rochdale town centre but all across the borough.”

RSPCA Moves Closer to Hollingworth Lake

Rochdale Animal Centre has moved another step closer to its new home at Hollingworth Lake thanks to continued partnership working between Rochdale RSPCA, Rochdale Borough Council, Link4Life, and RBH.

A planning application has been submitted by the RSPCA to refurbish the premises at Hollingworth Lake Visitor Centre, providing the Animal Centre with a modern facility at a more accessible location for the public.

The move comes as RBH brings forward plans for new homes on the current RSPCA site, along with other land acquired in the area.

New Homes for Lower Falinge

Work continues to progress well on our 55 new affordable homes.

We have been working with national regeneration specialist ENGIE Construction since March 2020 to deliver these new houses and apartments at the site in Lower Falinge and you can now see progress on the walls and roofing to the apartments and houses.

As well as these great quality new homes at genuinely affordable rents, this phase of development includes a new shared community garden space.

A Year in Lockdown

It's now more than a year since the UK's first national lockdown was announced.

While it's been an incredibly difficult 12 months for all of us, we're proud of what our tenants and employees have achieved together. It has been a year of hard work, community spirit and reaching out to protect those who needed our help the most. Here are just some of the things we've achieved together over the past year:

Providing extra support for those who needed it...

- We held 30,000 conversations with tenants seeking money advice and support.
- We made over 47,500 proactive welfare calls to our tenants to check on their wellbeing.
- 7,500 visits were made to our pantry projects, saving pantry members £150,000 on their groceries, and saving 45 tons of food waste from landfill.
- Our Independent Living Service kept in daily contact with all of our 980 tenants.
- We prevented over 250 households from becoming homeless

Repairing and investing in our homes...

- We completed 25,000 emergency and urgent repairs.

- We maintained 100% compliance on gas servicing and legionella testing.
- We completed repairs to 650 empty homes to make sure they were ready to let again.
- We built 39 new homes and we're continuing to work on a further 122.

Focusing on our communities...

- We awarded £95,000 of community funding to 21 projects and organisations.
- We paid over 16,000 invoices and introduced a new faster payment system to support local suppliers.
- Our neighbourhood environment team completed almost 80,000 service rotas.

Delivering services through the pandemic...

- We've put in place clear procedures to keep our tenants and employees as safe as possible.
- We built over 1,000 laptops and mobile devices to enable colleagues to work effectively from home and in the community.
- We received over 3,600 applications for our vacancies and welcomed 51 new starters!
- We thanked colleagues through an additional payment for front-line workers and two additional days off for all employees.
- Over 4,500 tenants are now registered to access online services with our MyRBH portal.
- Our contact centre and income accounts team handled 120,000 calls from customers.

RBH Roadmap Out of Lockdown

We want to let you know when we are planning to make changes to RBH services and locations as the coronavirus restrictions are reduced

Our service changes will mirror the Government guidance, and may be subject to change if Government advice is changed. Our latest Coronavirus updates are available at www.rbh.org.uk/coronavirus.

On 29th March...

- We recommenced some non-urgent outdoor repairs such as fencing and roof repairs.

- We restarted our electrical inspection programme and our asbestos surveys.
- Communal gardens fully reopened at our Independent Living Schemes, with social distancing in place.
- Our team members were able to meet up outside for team catch-ups whilst maintaining social distancing and the “rule of six”.

On 12th April...

- We restarted our a full repairs service - we’re very grateful for your patience and understanding as our teams work to clear the backlog of appointments and continue to work safely.
- The RBH Paint Shop reopened.
- The hair salon at Hare Hill reopened and hairdressers were allowed in to our ILS schemes with appropriate safety measures in place.

On 17th May...

- The pantry schemes will reopen fully with no requirement to queue outside.
- Visiting restrictions at Hare Hill, Independent Living Schemes, and College Bank will end.
- Reception at the Strand Hub will reopen.
- We’ll reintroduce some home visits and face-to-face meetings, with social distancing in place, but only where it is safe and tenants are happy to do so.
- Indoor spaces, such as the communal spaces in our Independent Living Schemes, will reopen in line with social distancing guidance.

On 21st June...

- We’ll resume home visits and in-person viewings, subject to the vaccine roll-out continuing on schedule.
- Community facilities and community bases can reopen for regular use.
- Our teams will be able to resume in-person meetings, in line with guidance.
- St Alban’s House will remain closed as we develop plans to provide a service that is accessible for all residents of the Borough of Rochdale who need it.

Do You Live in an RBH Home?

Could You be One of Our New RBH Apprentices?

We are excited to let you know that we have six new apprenticeship roles - two Electricians, two Joiners and two Plasterers.

Applications are open from Friday 7th May until Wednesday 2nd June.

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

Applications open 7th May until 2nd June. Apply online at www.rbh.org.uk/jobs.

We are excited to recruit 6 new apprentices to join our Repairs team. We're looking for Electrical, Joinery and Plastering apprentices who want to make the next step in their career with us.

We're hosting an online information session where you can hear from our current apprentices and find out about support available to help you apply. Join us on zoom.us on **Thursday 13th May at 5.30pm until 7.30pm**. No need to pre-register, just enter the code **993 1619 8417**.

If you're not able to join us for the online session or you would like to find out more information please visit our website at www.rbh.org.uk/jobs, calling **0800 027 7769**, or e-mailing us workandskills@rbh.org.uk.