

Community Together College Bank and Lower Falinge Newsletter (text only version). February 2022 edition.

A message from Gareth Swarbrick, RBH Chief Executive.

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

I hope that 2022 has got off to a good start for you. We are still living through challenging times but please remember that RBH is here to help.

We understand, even without the impacts of the pandemic, it can be common to experience financial difficulties at this time of year. If you need some further support, do get in touch with us directly so that we can work on a solution together. You'll find all our contact details on page 16.

This first newsletter of 2022 comes with the excellent news of a successful bid for funding for our ground-breaking New Pioneers Programme, which will not only be able to continue to support residents in central Rochdale but is also expanding to Heywood.

You can read more about that along with the latest updates from the programme, including the arrival of a Public Living Room in the area and some excellent job news for some of our New Pioneers on pages 4 and 5.

There's more good news for the area on pages 6 and 7 thanks to an estate regeneration grant from the government's Estate Regeneration Brownfield Land Release Fund for Lower Falinge. This means we can further invest in improvements to homes, green spaces and play facilities as well as works to help bring forward replacement homes more quickly within the neighbourhood.

Together with the approval of the Lower Falinge Area Supplementary Planning document by Rochdale Borough Council (page 8) these are the building blocks for real progress in taking forward the quality homes and improving quality of life in our community.

Elsewhere in this newsletter you can read about how our Equity Assistance scheme has helped another of our residents from College Bank move into their new home (page 9), as well as news about local young people getting work placements on our new development in Lower Falinge (page 12) and some important updates on our work to provide inclusive homes (page 13).

New Pioneers Programme is expanding to Heywood.

We're delighted to announce our ground-breaking New Pioneers Programme can continue and expand in the town centre as well as into Heywood after a successful bid for funding from the Government's Community Renewal Fund.

With new grant funding of £280,000, secured by the joint efforts of RBH, Rochdale Borough Council, and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, the programme will not only continue to support more residents in central Rochdale but is also expanding to create a fresh New Pioneer community in Heywood.

What is the New Pioneers Programme?

New Pioneers is a partnership between ourselves and Rochdale Borough Council, providing tailored support and mentoring to local residents in College Bank and Lower Falinge, helping them to achieve their goals through access to new or improved employment as well as training and skills development.

Dozens of residents in central Rochdale have already seen the benefits of being New Pioneers with us, earning skills, qualifications, new employment and progressing with their careers.

Clare Tostevin, RBH Director of Growth, said:

We are immensely proud of the achievements of our New Pioneers - from new qualifications and career changes to residents who are back in employment for the first time in over a decade.

It is a real demonstration of how our regeneration plans are about the people who live in central Rochdale. I'm really excited that we can now expand the programme in College Bank and Lower Falinge, as well as start a conversation with residents in Heywood about how this approach can benefit their communities too.

College Bank Fire Safety Work.

Your health, safety, and wellbeing is our top priority, and our fire safety work at College Bank continues.

The new fire and emergency evacuation alarms in Mitchell Hey and Dunkirk rise are in the final stages of being installed and tested. Please make sure that the equipment is not damaged - the system will indicate a fault if the detectors are removed or disturbed.

If you are contacted by our contractors about an appointment to fit the alarm system detectors and sounders, please work with them to agree a suitable time. We need full coverage to make sure that we can keep everyone safe.

Our replacement programme for the flat entrance doors continues, with flats in Holland Rise receiving their replacement doors in January. Again, if you are contacted for an appointment, our contractor will work with you to find an appropriate time, and their teams will always carry ID.

Finally, both RBH teams and contractors will continue to observe local and national COVID-19 guidelines. We hope that the recent changes to guidance will help us to carry out these essential fire safety works with as little disruption as possible.

Remember to ask for identification

Remember that our contractors will always have ID on them - do not let anyone into your flat if they are unable to show identification.

New Pioneers update.

The New Pioneers celebrated another successful year with a Christmas party last month, which took place prior to Covid-19 restrictions being put in place and saw staff, volunteers and residents come together for a relaxed and enjoyable party.

You will have already read about the exciting news mentioned earlier in this newsletter about additional funding for the programme and its expansion to Heywood, where the programme is already underway and helping to make a difference, getting referrals and delivering two job outcomes already.

Welcome Louise!

Elsewhere, there have been more reasons to celebrate, including the arrival of a new team member, Louise Dunn, a New Pioneer who had been volunteering with us and is now working in a trainee administrator role.

Meanwhile, two members of staff who received support and training with us on the Kickstart programme have both gone on to start full-time jobs elsewhere which is great news.

Public Living room

We're delighted that our New Pioneers Programme has joined up with Camerados to open up a new Public Living Room in the area.

A Public Living Room is a pop-up community living room which is "a no agenda space, where folk can go to just be themselves alongside others, they are warm welcoming places that offer no services just the company of fellow humans."

Camerados believe that the simple act of being more human by 'looking out for each other' can be transformative, especially when people are experiencing tough times.

The Public Living is located at Spotland and Falinge Community Centre, and is open on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 10am until 2pm.

We'd love to see you there!

Central Rochdale to receive more investment.

Great news for our local community as Lower Falinge has been awarded a £1.49m grant from the government's Estate Regeneration Brownfield Land Release Fund.

This will help us to further invest in improvements to existing homes at Lower Falinge as well as bringing forward the future development of new homes to meet the needs of current residents and future generations.

The grant funding will also provide for additional improvements to green spaces and play facilities within our neighbourhood.

So, what does this all mean for you?

Improved green space:

We expect the new park, children's play area, and community growing space alongside our current phase of new homes to be completed in the Summer. The grant means we can make additional improvements that will be ready for the community from day one!

Rehousing of residents:

We are now able to offer all residents in Lower Falinge whose home is within a block identified for demolition the opportunity to register for rehousing and be supported to move to a new home. If you live in Ollerton, Newstead, Romsey, Quinton, Ullesthorpe, or Vaynor, we have written to you with further details and our team will be in touch.

Demolition of Garages on Sheriff Street:

As part of the masterplan we developed with the community in 2017, we plan to replace the garages located off Sheriff Street with high quality new homes. We are now preparing for the garages to be demolished later this year. We have written to everyone who rents one of these garages from us with further details.

Investment in retained homes:

In 2021, we carried out improvement works to blocks which will be retained. Some of this work – such as the concrete cleaning – has already been done, but there is more to do! The grant means we can carry out additional improvements this year, guided by the priorities you shared with us through consultations.

Gareth Swarbrick, RBH Chief Executive, said:

We're really pleased to receive this additional grant funding which will enable us to deliver new and improved homes in the area as well as fantastic new community

facilities. We've worked hard alongside the local community to develop our long-term plans to make sure that Lower Falinge is a great place to live for current and future residents.

We all want to see a thriving Rochdale town centre with more homes, the right quality and mix of affordable homes, and a retail, cultural, and leisure offer that encourages people to live, work, play, and invest in Rochdale. This funding is another part of our partnership working with Rochdale Borough Council to help deliver this thriving town centre.

Green light for Lower Falinge area supplementary planning document.

Rochdale Borough Council has approved the Lower Falinge Area Supplementary Planning document, a masterplan for the regeneration of the area - the product of a six-week consultation in early 2021.

The document is intended to underpin the renewal of Lower Falinge over the next 10 to 15 years with particular areas of focus around Abbeydale Road, Redcross Road and St. Mary's Gate.

The key developments being considered are:

- New and improved homes
- Connectivity and Movement
- Streets and Public Realm
- Public open spaces and play provision
- Non-residential uses and new facilities

The supplementary planning document receiving approval from the Council is excellent news for residents and means a step change for the local area, particularly in conjunction with the £1.49m estate regeneration grant from the Brownfield Land Release Fund.

This will now help us deliver the next phases of the long term plans we have developed with residents since 2017, enable us to deliver more new affordable homes, and provide a better quality and mix of homes to meet the range of needs of current residents and future generations.

Leaseholder looks forward to new home with help of equity assistance scheme.

RBH is continuing to develop proposals for the Lower Falinge and College Bank neighbourhoods as part of the wider Rochdale town centre regeneration.

Some of our proposals directly affect Leaseholders in College Bank and Lower Falinge. RBH has been offering to purchase or 'buy back' privately owned homes in the Lower Falinge and College Bank neighbourhoods since 2017 and supporting people to move home through different options.

One option available to owner occupiers is our equity assistance scheme. The scheme offers owner occupiers the opportunity to stay in home ownership with no additional mortgage commitments and no rental costs.

One of our Leaseholders is in the process of moving out of Town Mill Brow in College Bank with the help of our Equity Assistance scheme. Just before Christmas she completed the purchase of a bungalow in Bamford that she is due to move into shortly.

"It was brilliant" she said. "RBH sent us a letter about the scheme, and it's made a huge difference. Without this scheme I wouldn't have had enough to buy a bungalow so it's a good thing it exists. They were brilliant from start to finish and they kept me updated with everything, so it's been nice and simple."

Have any questions?

If you are an owner occupier and would like more information around eligibility, or just want to discuss whether the Equity Assistance Scheme is right for you, please get in touch with us using the details below:

Email: towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk

Call: **0800 027 7769 (option 7)**

A community update for residents in College Bank.

We recently wrote to all residents in College Bank to update them on the next steps for our proposals, and we want to share this update with all residents. We have also recently written to Underwood residents to provide more detail about our plans for this block, which will be the first block to be refurbished.

Refurbishment

We plan to get started with our £12 million refurbishment of Underwood.

We will be inviting all residents in College Bank to help us shape the details of the refurbishment proposals. We hope to be able to confirm a contractor for these works by the end of 2022 with works starting in 2023. We anticipate that the refurbishment of Underwood will be completed in early 2025 due to the scale of work required.

As we told you last year the refurbishment will be extensive and will require all residents to move out while this work takes place. We will have individual

conversations with all residents in Underwood around what this 'decant' move will mean for each household and what support they might need.

We are aiming for these temporary moves to be to homes within Mardyke and Holland Rise which is why we have been holding homes empty across these blocks.

However, we know from conversations with residents that not all tenants wish to stay in College Bank long term (or after refurbishment). This is why we are now in a position to offer a homeloss payment to tenants in any of the three blocks for retention in the masterplan (Underwood, Mardyke and Holland Rise) who wish to move home permanently now. While we cannot offer the priority rehousing which is given to those in the blocks affected by demolition we will now pay homeloss to those who are able to move (whether to another RBH home or their own solution such as buying a home elsewhere). This will also help to ensure that there are enough homes across Underwood, Mardyke and Holland Rise to accommodate all those who will need to move temporarily and wish to stay within College Bank as part of the refurbishment plans.

Rehousing

We are continuing with our rehousing phases as set out in 2021. Only a few residents now remain in Mitchell Hey and we are continuing to support these residents with their rehousing options.

The next phase of rehousing at Town Mill Brow is progressing with 58% of homes in this block now empty.

The timescales remain the same for Tentercroft (with priority rehousing from January 2023) then Dunkirk Rise (with priority rehousing from June 2024).

However, some residents in Tentercroft and Dunkirk Rise have told us they are ready to move sooner than the dates above. If there are additional rehousing needs then we may be able to help with both priority rehousing and homeloss payments sooner than these dates. However, if people are ready to move, for example to buy a home or move into another home with a partner then we are now able to make the homeloss payment to facilitate this move.

This payment is £7,100 plus an additional £500 disturbance payment and £250 towards moving costs.

This means that those who have their own rehousing solution and want to move without priority rehousing and support from RBH are now able to do so without waiting for the rehousing phase for their block.

As set out in relation to refurbishment above this also applies to tenants in Mardyke, Holland Rise and Underwood as well as those in Tentercroft and Dunkirk Rise.

Discussion with Rochdale Council and Save Seven Sisters support group.

We understand that residents may have seen publicity around a recent Council motion asking RBH to rethink the plans for College Bank. We know that while some residents are fundamentally opposed to the RBH plans for College Bank, there are many residents who support them. We have already supported many successful moves of residents who tell us they are happy in their new homes within the local area. RBH has been clear with the Council since 2017 that we are open to options and proposals that would deliver the investment needed for College Bank homes – to keep them safe and decent for current residents and future generations. On this basis we have said that if the Council and residents wished the Council could acquire the blocks from RBH for a nominal amount. However, the only work we have seen from the Council to date is independent confirmation of the level of the refurbishment costs. It is unfair to suggest to residents that the Council has an alternative without setting out what this might look like. We have consistently said we are happy to speak to the Save Seven Sisters / College Bank Support group but this offer has never been accepted. The offer remains open and the RBH team will continue to have conversations with residents both as individuals and via tenant engagement and elected tenant representatives.

Get in touch with the RBH team

Please get in touch with any feedback as we progress these next steps in the future of College Bank.

You can email us at towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk or phone **0800 027 7769** (option 7) with any queries about the next steps overall or for next steps in terms of your own home or rehousing.

Placements give local young people taste of Construction Work.

Working with our construction partners EQUANS and Groundwork Greater Manchester, we were delighted to be able to give local young people work placements on our development of new homes in Lower Falinge.

We welcomed Jordan Shepherd and Aqib Bangash on-site in October as part of their participation in Groundwork's low carbon careers course.

Jordan completed a one-week joinery placement while Aqib undertook a two-week brickwork placement and we are very grateful to EQUANS for accommodating these placements as part of our shared commitment to social value.

Sarah Hopkinson, Head of Social Value

(North and Central) at EQUANS, said:

“We're delighted to have worked alongside RBH and Groundwork to provide vital work experience on our scheme. We're pleased to be helping provide vital skills and

experience for those looking to enter the construction industry and look forward to continuing this across the North West and beyond.”

Liz Simons, Groundwork Greater Manchester Low Carbon Careers employability coach & course leader, said:

“Jordan and Aqib were both keen to get hands on experience in construction and a chance to understand how new construction techniques will impact the sector.

“They’ve received really great insight and advice from the team and come away with a better understanding of the construction process having spent time on site. Our thanks goes to RBH and the EQUANS team for brokering and hosting these placements.”

Working towards Inclusive Homes.

An important part of our corporate strategy is to provide better inclusive homes for all, designed to meet the changing needs of the widest range of households. With that in mind, we have developed an Inclusive Design Guide.

You can download the full Inclusive Design Guide at <https://www.collegebankandlowerfalinge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/RBH-Inclusive-Design-Guide.pdf>

We have designed this with a group of tenants, employees and older people and it has been created to highlight key design considerations for both new build homes and improvements to existing homes.

An inclusive environment is one that is meant to assist use by everyone, regardless of their age, gender or disability. It doesn’t attempt to meet every single need but considers the varying needs of people and households so that it can break down unnecessary barriers and be flexible and adaptable for a diverse range of needs over a lifetime.

These needs can change as a result of accident, illness or aging, resulting in reduced mobility or sensory loss, so homes need to be accessible for residents and for their visitors. This Inclusive

Design Guide will help RBH ensure that the needs of everyone are reflected in the design of new homes and the investment decisions we make in existing homes.

Building accessible homes

Our plans for College Bank and Lower Falinge are for a mix of refurbished retained homes and new homes. All our new homes as a minimum will be built to category 1 standards, which are classed as visitable dwellings where provision is made for all people to be able to gain access and use the dwelling and its facilities.

Many of our new homes will also meet category 2 standards, which means they are accessible and adaptable dwellings where the provision made means that the needs of occupants with differing needs, such as some older or disabled people are met. These homes will also allow adaptation to meet the changing needs of occupants over time.

We have also made a commitment that a minimum of 5% of all of the new homes which RBH builds will meet category 3, which is the highest accessibility standard. This means that the home will meet the needs of occupants who are wheelchair users.

Housing to suit your needs

We know that there are people living in College Bank and Lower Falinge whose home needs to meet the needs associated with a disability and that the needs of households will vary considerably.

We have put dedicated support in place to ensure that we understand and consider your needs so we can put in place reasonable adjustments tailored to those needs.

We are committed to working with you to make adjustments where we can, to ensure that needs are met. If you would benefit from an adjustment to meet your accessibility needs, please talk to us.

The time to get your vaccine and booster is now.

Did you know that there are regular drop-in vaccination clinics all across Rochdale Borough?

Find a vaccine clinic: www.rochdale.gov.uk/covidvaccine

Latest RBH information: www.rbh.org.uk/coronavirus

New free high-speed internet coming soon!

Back in 2021, we informed you about an amazing offer coming to College Bank and Lower Falinge. Thanks to partnership working between RBH, Rochdale Borough Council, and the Co-operative Heritage Trust, we have been able to install a high speed WiFi network that is completely free to use.

This network (known as a “mesh” network) has just been launched and is currently available to those living in Mardyke, Holland Rise, and Underwood. Residents of the remaining flats will see the network available to them in the next few weeks.

Following the installation of the network across College Bank, we will be extending it to Lower Falinge - watch this space for updates about when this work is completed later this year!

Feel free to use the network as you would your home broadband and connect as many devices to it as you want. The WiFi network is called “Co-operative Rochdale Open Wifi”.

We hope the speed and quality of the network will be equal to that of a broadband connection, and that residents will be able to save money by using the public network instead of paying for their own. We would love to hear your feedback about the network, good or bad, so we can continue to improve the service for everyone living in the town centre. You can provide feedback to community.partnership@rbh.org.uk.

Stop press news flash!

As some of you may have read in the local media, we’re really pleased to have secured a new £75m funding package to help us invest in new homes and existing homes across the entire Borough of Rochdale.

This money will help us to continue our record investment in College Bank and Lower Falinge. It will also help us to work towards making sure that all 12,000 homes owned by RBH across the Borough are carbon-neutral by the Greater Manchester target of 2038.

Make an appointment with our team...

If you’d like to meet one of our team in person, please get in touch with us by e-mail or phone to make an appointment and we’ll make sure that we drop by at a time which is convenient for you.

You can still contact our team by e-mail on [**towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk**](mailto:towncentre.regen@rbh.org.uk) or by phone on Freephone **0800 027 7769** (option 7).

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

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