

Frequently Asked Questions – July/August 2024 –

What are the next steps now the Exclusivity Agreement has been extended?

We will continue to work closely with Legal and General Affordable Homes (LGAH) and other stakeholders to determine the overall scheme costs and funding arrangements. This will continue throughout the exclusivity agreement period which has now been extended to 30th September 2024.

Why have you had to extend the exclusivity agreement again?

A project of this size and scale takes a long time to plan and prepare for. Before RBH and LGAH could enter into any legal contracts there are a number of legal reviews, building surveys and discussions required, alongside securing external funding as RBH and LGAH cannot fully fund this project on our own. We appreciate this is a time of uncertainty for customers whilst we go through this review period. However, it would be careless – and not in the best interests of our customers - if we were to jump into the project without undertaking the relevant legal and financial reviews.

Does this mean that College Bank will definitely not be demolished?

The ambition is to avoid demolition at College Bank and build a scheme that is sustainable and fit for the future. This will require a significant level of funding that is beyond the capacity of RBH alone. Until this is in place, we cannot say for sure that the project will go ahead but we are working hard with partners to understand this and explore all available funding options.

When will you be starting work if the plans are approved, and funding is secured?

The respective Boards of RBH and LGAH will need to commit to the partnership via a legal contract. This is being worked through currently and is also dependent on the securing of additional funds too, on the ability to fund the overall programme. RBH and LGAH are in discussions with potential funders around how the funding gap may be met and it's not until this is agreed that contracts can be finalised and approved.

We anticipate that the refurbishment of all seven blocks will take around five years to complete, working on two to three blocks at a time. Residents will be updated on timescales once this is clearer, but we do not expect works to start until late 2025. If funding is secured there will still be a number of steps to go through before works can commence on site, including applications to the Local Planning Authority, relocation of residents in the first two blocks, and enabling works. This will take a number of months to complete.

Why has the start on site date changed from early 2025 to late 2025?

This is a project like no other and the size and scale of it coupled with the need to find new ways of funding mean it will take some time to plan effectively. Funding

discussions with potential funders, carrying out building surveys and undertaking a thorough review of the potential refurbishment project is taking time to bring together as this needs to be done fully and properly. The dates proposed were only indicative and carried a lot of dependencies. It is also important to note that key funding streams we are looking to access have application closing dates later in 2024. Whilst RBH appreciates this is a period of uncertainty for customers, please be assured that we are working hard to move things forward.

The timescales suggested are disappointing as this has been ongoing since 2017 and this proposal has been on the table for several months. How close are we to getting the blocks upgraded?

While we appreciate this has been ongoing for a long time, if we accelerate the programme, this could result in the wrong decisions being made. We appreciate the years of uncertainty for many College Bank residents and if you have any specific requirements or needs, please let us know. It is vitally important that we ensure every part of the programme is considered carefully and that takes time. We need to ensure that what we do through the refurbishment is right for generations to come and do not want to rush anything at this crucial stage.

If the proposals go ahead, is it a good use of RBH funds to invest money in the site and then transfer ownership of the blocks to LGAH?

To move forward with the refurbishment of all seven, there will need to be a significant contribution from another organisation for this to work. There would be an independent valuation completed to determine the value of the blocks before the transfer to ensure that the RBH / LGAH partnership is value for money.

How will the proposed heating system work in the RBH / LGAH refurbishment project?

Proposals include an energy centre that is heated through ground source heat pumps – how this works for individuals is not yet known until a system is chosen. The main objective is to give College Bank a sustainable energy source that enables residents to heat their homes comfortably for an affordable cost.

What will the project cost?

The total project costs are currently estimated to be above £100m. The results of survey works will bring greater clarity over costs and enable an up-to-date assessment to be made of the costs to refurbish the properties.

Is there any progress on the regulatory compliance position for RBH?

Our recovery plan is all but complete and is set to be finalised this month. We have made significant progress in addressing the issues and shortfalls that were identified by our regulator. We now need to provide assurance that the changes are embedded.

Why can't LGAH apply for the funding if they are a G1/V1 organisation?

We are working with partners to shape this project and if the conditions of any funding needs us to work in a different way, we will. LGAH, as a registered provider, accesses the same funding pots as RBH which have specific timescales. Access to funds will be assessed on the eligibility and viability of the proposal. There is no specific funding pot that LGAH can access currently, and we are continuing to speak to government agencies to try to secure the funding to complete the work that is needed.

Can LGAH guarantee that they will deliver these proposals?

LGAH and RBH are continuing to work closely to develop a proposal that is affordable and deliverable. RBH does not have the funds to deliver this project without partners including LGAH and the wider public sector.

Will all homes be for social rent or affordable rent?

The plan is to continue to have a mix of social rent and affordable rent tenancies across College Bank. We are continuing to work through the detail of what that would look like under the RBH / LGAH proposals. For any existing tenant with a social rent tenancy, you will stay a social rent tenant for as long as you remain in College Bank. We are also exploring the potential of market rented units under the RBH / LGAH proposals, which will need further analysis as we move forward.

What are the rent levels?

All rents are set using the guidance issued to housing providers by the government and under the stewardship of the Regulator of Social Housing. This will continue to be the case.

Are you still planning to empty out Town Mill Brow and Mitchell Hey?

If the refurbishment works are to go ahead with LGAH, two blocks will be required to be empty to enable work to start. There are very few residents left in these two blocks, so they are the obvious choice to prioritise. This will ensure that works can start quickly, if the funding is secured and contracts are signed. These two blocks will then be completed first and available for residents to move back into.

Will tenants be required to move during any refurbishment?

Assuming the project with LGAH moves forward and the works to refurbish College Bank progress, there will be a requirement for any residents living in the first two blocks for refurbishment to move into alternative temporary accommodation. After that, we are hoping to complete works in the remaining five blocks with residents remaining in their homes, however we need to work with residents, Lovell and LGAH to scope this out in more detail. The programme for which blocks follow on from Mitchell Hey & Town Mill Brow has yet to be confirmed.

What if tenants still want to move away from College Bank permanently?

Any current College Bank tenant wanting to move permanently can apply for rehousing through the Rochdale Housing Solutions website. The clearance priority for rehousing and an entitlement to a Home Loss Payment is no longer valid because the current plans for College Bank no longer involve demolition.

Can I move to a refurbished flat in a different block when the work is completed?

It is still too early to be able to confirm this level of detail. Our focus at present is to secure the funding to complete the work and this detail will be considered at a later stage

What type of tenancy will I have as an LGAH tenant and what will new tenants have?

Existing tenants will continue to live in College Bank under their current tenancy terms, and this will be preserved for as long as they live there. New tenants will need to agree to the terms of a LGAH Tenancy Agreement.

Are remaining residents still getting the same offer as previous residents?

The offer has been changed to reflect the changes to the proposals for College Bank. We will continue to make disturbance payments along with financial and practical support for any temporary moves, if required. Home loss payments no longer apply for any move.

Why have you moved people out of their homes and paid compensation to them and then changed the offer for remaining tenants?

Any rehousing already carried out was done under the previous regeneration proposals to demolish four blocks and compensation was a statutory requirement for RBH. As our current proposals do not include the demolition of any homes, RBH is no longer required to pay the home loss payment to remaining residents as they will be retaining their homes.

What are the plans for leaseholders?

The arrangements for leaseholders are specific to each household and we will discuss this with them individually. If the partnership goes ahead, all existing leases will transfer to LGAH on the same terms and conditions and RBH will continue to manage and provide the services you receive.

Can we all still be members of the Mutual Society?

Yes – the rule changes which were approved by the Membership in November 2023 ensured that all current and future tenants of College Bank can continue to be a member of the Mutual Society.