What's so special about the Church Grove Community Housing project?



Church Grove – site location plan



About RUSS

The Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) is a member-led, not-forprofit, Community Land Trust based in south London, founded in 2009 with the aim of creating sustainable community-led neighbourhoods and truly affordable homes right across London.

RUSS was established to empower residents – from design and construction to management of their homes – and integrate this ethos into the wider community. RUSS engages and shares knowledge via the RUSS School of Community-led Housing and a rolling programme of public events. The homes in RUSS projects are affordable in perpetuity and the residents have the opportunity to be involved in the design, construction and long-term management.

The Church Grove Project

The Church Grove Project (CGP) is a pilot scheme to create sustainable community-led neighbourhoods and truly affordable homes. The CGP is intended to provide a replicable model for housing development that involves local people and residents in addressing the housing crisis and building vibrant, connected neighbourhoods. The site is in the borough of Lewisham, on a disused site next to the Ravensbourne river. It's a short walk from Ladywell train station and Lewisham High Street, with University Hospital Lewisham, Lewisham Council offices, Lewisham College and Goldsmiths College all within a 15-minute cycle or short bus ride.

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The CGP is a new-build, mixedtenure, mixed-income development of residential dwellings, indoor and outdoor communal areas, a shared biodiverse landscape and a publicly accessible community space (the Hub). A group of future

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Church Grove – typical upper floor layout © SEH architects



Church Grove – landscape plan © ME landscape studio

residents has been assembled through an allocations process and they have been, and will continue to be, actively involved in the project process.

The amendments to the scheme proposed in 2020 increase the number of flats by three, including one additional flat at social rent. The project will now contain 36 flats of different sizes and types of tenure, ranging from single rooms within a shared flat to 4-bedroom duplex flats designed for families of six. Three flats are designed for wheelchair users; all the flats are accessible by lift. They have identical standards of environmental performance, space and specification regardless of tenure.

Building a new community among the residents

The future residents are of a mixture of ages and backgrounds, type of employment and income. They have chosen to live in a scheme which offers more control and mutual support than housing developments offered by commercial developers or even housing associations.

Many residents will be involved in the construction process, working on tasks such as carpentry and tiling, in exchange for a discount corresponding to the construction cost saving their involvement generates.

The design promotes social interaction through:

• space for a table and chairs on the deck outside each flat to allow for outside eating, and for small scale food growing.

• an opportunity for immediate neighbours to combine their paired amenity space and chose to share their balcony, green it jointly, or retain the integrated, but removable privacy screen. They will be in control of the degree of privacy or communality they wish from one another.

• a generous walkway linking the two blocks

• community terraces at the eastern end of the bridge on both the second and third floors. These community terraces are accessible by the lift, and will have watering points

• the community hub for residents' meetings and social events

• a communal laundry

• a shared and self-contained guest bedroom with ensuite bathroom that can be booked by residents, allowing visitors to stay without increasing the size of individual flats. (An unanticipated potential use of this bedroom may be for isolation due to coronavirus.)

• generous space inside the main entrance for collecting post and informal incidental interaction

• on-site office to help with receiving large packages and dealing with queries and management or maintenance issues.



Artist's impression of future shared amenity spaces © SEH architects

Bay study with walkway omitted © SEH architects



Bay study with walkways © SEH architects

Building connections with the communities surrounding Church Grove

The Church Grove project is designed to benefit not just its future residents but the community within which it sits:

• the temporary community hub, built by more than 90 volunteers in 2019, is available for use by local community organisations for meetings, social events and shared workspace

• a playground between the flats and the river will be accessible to the public

• the landscaping provides new public access to the Ravensbourne, supporting Lewisham Council's long-term aspirations to open up access to the river

• the whole building is raised a metre above ground which – as flood modelling confirms – means that it will have no measurable impact on flood risk to neighbouring houses.

Design for a low-carbon future

• use of electricity rather than gas, with an air source heat pump providing metred hot water and photovoltaic panels generating electricity

• insulation to a standard higher than the national Building Regulations requirements

• all flats fitted with smart meters and high-speed broadband to allow for home working

• raised beds for food growing and green roofs on the main building as well as some of the bin and cycle stores

• rainwater harvesting to water butts on each floor

• provision for residents to grow plants in pots on the deck by their flats

• a car-free scheme with very limited car parking, and cycle storage meeting the proposed London Plan requirements; three disabled parking bays, one car club space and an electric vehicle charging point

• planters along the walkways to

create a green screen of climbing plants that will reduce the risk of flats overheating in summer and help mitigate air pollution.

Social value and encouraging self-build amongst the future residents

Our Design & Access Statement for the application states:

The construction of the Church Grove Project will be carried out by a general contractor with RUSS members contracting to self-build defined packages of work. The proposal is to offer different levels of self-build varying from carrying out the majority of the work to leaving it all to the contractor. Those that choose the latter will still have the benefit of taking part in the development of the design and management of the project.

The current proposals for delivery of the scheme allow for flexibility in residents' decision-making about how much they wish to construct



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themselves at the finishing stages of the project and how much 'sweat equity' they may be able to contribute as part of their particular deal with RUSS to achieve a new home.

As well as self-build by future residents, RUSS is contributing to Lewisham's 'Local Labour scheme, and will be working with the contractor so that apprenticeships are offered with them and their subcontractors.



Find out more

RUSS is powered and directed by its members. The organisation currently has over 1,000 members who want to contribute to our vision of enabling people to create new affordable neighbourhoods across London.

Becoming a RUSS member is simple, affordable and directly contributes

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to making our vision a reality. As a Community Land Trust, membership takes the form of a non-profit community share purchase. Each share costs £1 and membership starts with the purchase of a minimum of one share.

The voluntary nature of RUSS means we welcome thoughts, ideas

Church Grove – community hub

and contributions from everyone, and rely on our members to get things done.

We invite you to get in touch: info@theruss.org

www.theruss.org

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CHURCH GROVE, LADYWELL SE13