

# RURAL URBAN SYNTHESIS SOCIETY

CHAIR OF TRUSTEES • ROLE BRIEFING PACK

MARCH 2021



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## Welcome message from the RUSS Chair

Thank you for your interest in becoming Chair of the Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS).

This is a rewarding opportunity for someone who is comfortable leading a high-profile community organisation, working in collaboration with its members, staff and Board of Trustees to deliver meaningful, tangible change in our communities.

RUSS is a not-for-profit community land trust, widely regarded as a pioneer in the community-led housing sector. We have developed and implemented an innovative model for delivering much needed homes in London, bringing residents and local communities together to create sustainable, permanently affordable neighbourhoods.

It has been a privilege and honour to be involved with RUSS since 2018, and the experience has been extremely rewarding – I've met many fantastic people and have thoroughly enjoyed being part of such a positive and exciting local movement.

During this time, RUSS has grown into an organisation with over 1,000 members. Notable successes have included the building of a community hub by our volunteers, the expanding delivery of our educational offer through our School of Community-Led Housing, and our Church Grove housing scheme, the largest of its kind in London, which is due to start on site in the coming months. With the Church Grove project on a firm footing, RUSS will be entering a new phase of growth and this feels like the right time for me to step down.

The coming years will be an exciting time to lead RUSS. The construction and delivery of the Church Grove scheme – the culmination of many years of hard work – will be momentous for the organisation and an important moment for the sector as a whole. Alongside this, we will be developing a resident-led model of housing management, expanding the work of our community hub, actively searching for new development sites and spreading our model through our events, our work with partners and our School.

You will be joining an organisation with a clear governance structure, business plan and strategy premised on meeting the needs of the community we serve. You will be supported in your journey by an enthusiastic and knowledgeable team of staff and Trustees, the goodwill of our stakeholders and the hard work and enthusiasm of our members and volunteers.

RUSS is committed to equality and diversity. As a community-led organisation, we're keen for our board to reflect the diversity of our local population, as well as increasing representation of BAME

communities and women within the community-led housing sector. As such RUSS is particularly keen to receive applications from these demographics for this position. We're open to having a co-Chair arrangement – to make the time commitment manageable and to enable people with a diversity of experiences to apply.

We are seeking an individual who shares our values and passion for empowering communities and building affordable, sustainable neighbourhoods, with the ambition and skills to drive our mission for the next stage of our journey.

Anurag Verma  
Chair  
anurag@theruss.org

## About RUSS

TRUSS was set up by the direct descendants of a community-led housing initiative that delivered two highly acclaimed housing projects in London in the 1980s. These projects enabled ordinary people to work together to design and build their own homes.

RUSS is building on this legacy by replicating and updating the model for the 21st century. Established in 2009, it has grown from a small group of friends meeting around a dinner table to an organisation with over 1000 members. It is formally constituted as a Community Land Trust, registered as a Community Benefit Society with charitable status through HMRC.

Our mission is to create community-led, sustainable neighbourhoods of truly affordable homes across London. We empower residents to shape all stages of development, from design to construction. By learning and working together, residents form a collaborative community who take on the ongoing stewardship of completed developments.

The principles of affordability, sustainability, self-governance and community engagement are at the heart of everything we do.

In Spring 2021, we'll start construction of our first development at Church Grove in Lewisham. Church Grove is a pioneering scheme of 36 new affordable homes, with an 'affordability in perpetuity' model in place that means they remain genuinely affordable for future generations. One- to four-bedroom homes will be available on a mixture of tenures, including shared ownership, affordable rent and social rent. The development includes a communal garden, a publicly accessible playground and a community hub offering affordable space for local groups. A community of future residents have co-designed the scheme and will help to build the homes.

We spread our model and support the community housing sector through the RUSS School of Community-Led Housing and a busy calendar of public events. The School delivers a rotating programme of modules to individuals, community groups and housing professionals, sharing the lessons from RUSS's many years of experience on how to set up and run a community-led housing project.

Our community hub in Lewisham, built by over 90 volunteers in 2019, serves as RUSS's administrative base. It is also available for hire to individuals, groups and organisations as an affordable, eco-friendly hot-desking, meeting or event space.

In the coming year we will:

- Commence construction of the Church Grove project
- Execute our strategy for enabling residents to self-build their homes
- Develop a resident-led management strategy for the homes at Church Grove
- Apply to become a Registered Provider
- Actively seek new sites to replicate the RUSS model of Community Led housing
- Expand the education offer at the RUSS School of Community-Led Housing
- Implement the business plan for the Community Hub

## **Governance**

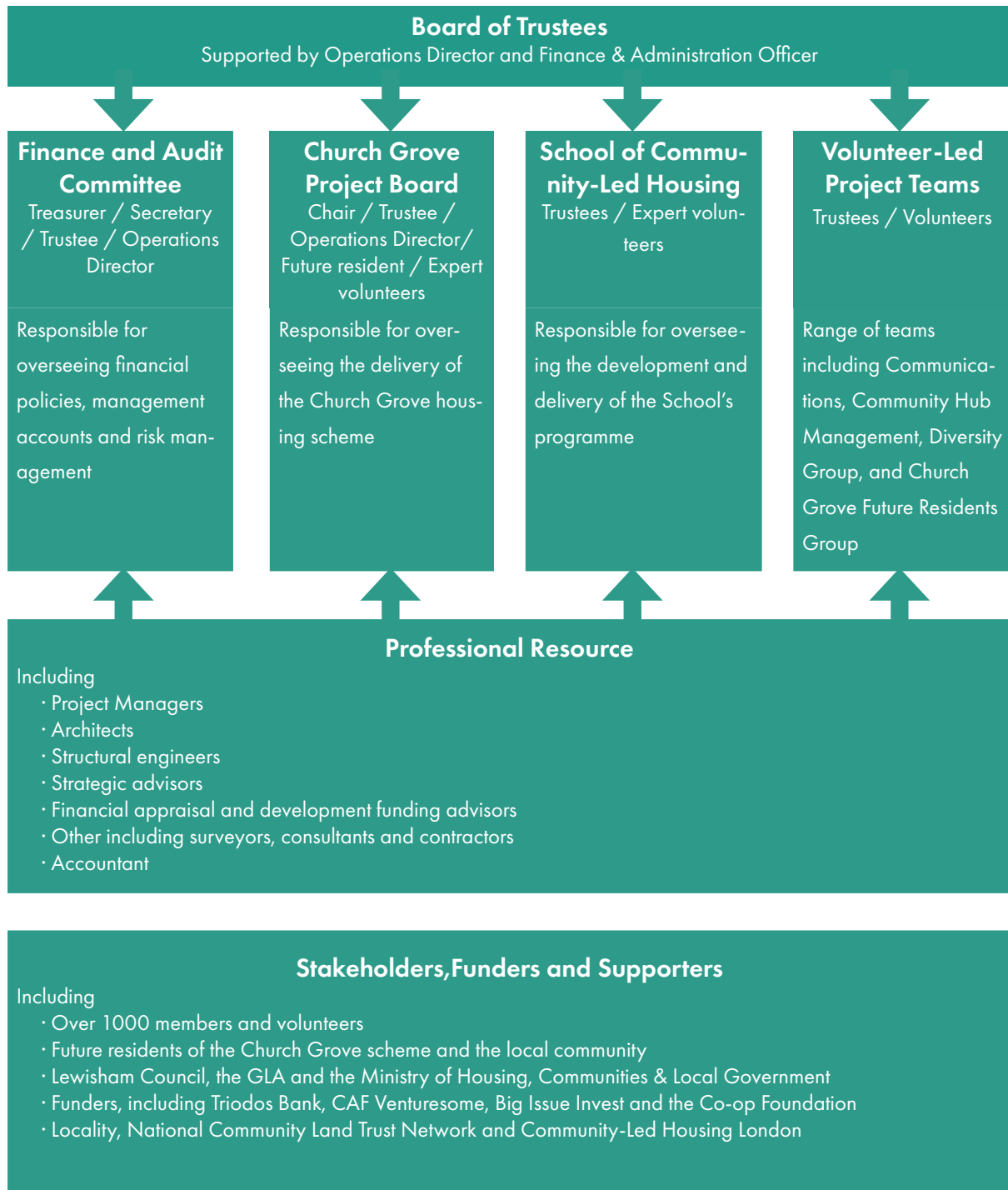
RUSS is ultimately led by its members. Anyone can become a member by buying a community share for £1. Each member has one vote in key decisions, including the appointment of members of the Board of Trustees.

RUSS's Board of Trustees are collectively responsible for setting the overall strategic direction for the organisation, monitoring performance against its strategic objectives and ensuring that the organisation's resources and finances are being managed effectively. Some elements of the board's work are carried out through sub-committees, including the Finance and Audit Committee and People Committee.

The Church Grove project is driven by the Project Board, which consists of RUSS's Operations Director, three trustees, a resident and volunteers with development or construction expertise. The Project Board acts as the 'client' when engaging with RUSS's wider professional team and external stakeholders, including consultants, project managers, architects and contractors. It has delegated decision-making powers, but refers major decisions to the Board of Trustees.

The day-to-day running of the organisation is carried out by the Operations Director and Finance and Administration Officer. Volunteers are central to the organisation's work and play a leading role in a range of projects and ongoing tasks, including communications, fund-raising and events.

## Current Structure



## Role Description

The RUSS Chair is elected by and ultimately responsible to its members. The Chair drives the organisation in meeting its core objectives and vision for building sustainable communities throughout London. The Chair must cultivate and hold positive relationships with a range of stakeholders including senior political figures, housing professionals, local community members and residents.

Over the coming years, the Chair will need to play a central role in overseeing the delivery of the Church Grove housing project; expanding and engaging RUSS's membership; building RUSS as an organisation, including through recruitment and management of new staff and volunteers, and strengthening RUSS's profile in both the local community and wider housing sector.

The role of the Chair involves the following key components:

### Leading the organisation

- Provides strategic leadership to the Board and the organisation as a whole.
- Works with the board to develop and achieve an aspirational vision underpinned by a deliverable strategy and business plan.
- Ensures the organisation acts in line with its charitable objectives, rules, principles and any regulatory frameworks to which it is subject.
- Leads and develops the Board so that it delivers its key strategic and governance functions.
- Cultivates and models a culture of openness, collaboration, constructive challenge and support between board members, staff, residents and members.
- Ensures an effective risk management framework is in place and oversees the monitoring of performance to protect the assets and reputation of the organisation.
- Establishes an effective professional relationship with the Operations Director, acting as their line manager and overseeing recruitment and succession planning for the role.
- Grows the organisation and its people through widening its volunteer base, mobilizing its members and hiring and developing staff.

### Representing the organisation

- Develops and maintains relationships with key external stakeholders and partners.
- Builds RUSS's profile through public engagement, networking, events and media work.
- Acts as a champion for the organisation and the community-led housing sector.



**Managing the Board**

- Ensures the efficient conduct of the Board's business and of the organisation's general meetings.
- Ensures that all Board Members are given the opportunity to express their views and that appropriate standards of behaviour are maintained.
- Provides leadership and control of Board meetings, ensuring all Board members have opportunity to contribute to discussions, decisions are clear and sufficient time is allocated to all business presented, and adjudicating where disputes arise.
- Ensures professional advice is received where needed, whether from staff or external sources.
- Oversees the processes and mechanisms that support effective recruitment, development, support and succession planning of Board members, ensuring the skill mix of the Board and its committees remains fit for purpose.
- Ensures the Board delegates authority to staff, committees and others in a way that best enables effective, transparent and accountable working in line with RUSS's principles.

**Terms of the role**

- The role is unremunerated.
- The time commitment involved is 10-15 hours per month. This includes a two-hour board meeting every six weeks, two strategy away days per year, ad hoc events and stakeholder meetings, as well as regular meetings with staff, committee chairs and board members.
- Board meetings are currently being held virtually, but in the longer term will be held in our community hub in Lewisham. Our events will mostly be held in Lewisham or central London.

## Person Specification

### Knowledge and experience

- Strategic leadership experience, including board-level experience.
- Significant experience in the housing and/or community-building and/or charitable sectors.
- Substantial experience in at least some of the following areas:
  - Community engagement
  - Strategic management and planning
  - Risk management and corporate governance
  - Financial management and monitoring
  - Organisational development and change management

### Skills

- Able to build and lead a high-performing team.
- Able to create a culture of collective responsibility, constructive challenge, collaboration, support and inclusivity.
- Able to chair effective, focused and inclusive meetings at senior level.
- Able to network, build relationships and influence at a senior level with a range of external stakeholders.
- Excellent communication, listening and presentation skills with a range of internal and external audiences.
- Able to build the profile and reputation of the organisation.
- Well-organised and able to manage multiple competing priorities under pressure.

### Styles and behaviours

- Strong commitment to equality and diversity.
- Values-led, with a strong commitment to RUSS's mission and values.
- Acts with integrity, openness and accountability.
- A positive, engaging and enthusing style.
- Seeks out opportunities for learning, development and innovation.

### Time commitment

- Able to commit up to 10– 15 hours per month.

## Our People: RUSS Board and Staff members

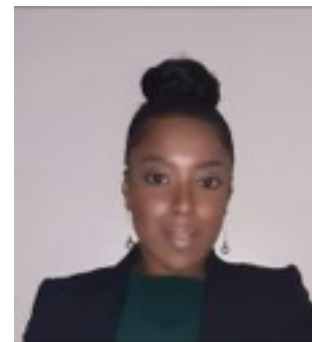
### Anurag Verma - Chair

Anurag studied architecture in India and worked in Germany before moving to London for further study. He lives locally and is an associate director at Latitude Architects. He is passionate about RUSS's innovative 'model' for delivering affordable self-built homes and wants to see it replicated widely across London and other cities.



### Shelina Hooper - Trustee

With over a decade of social housing experience, Shelina works at the Regulator of Social Housing as a financial analyst. She has extensive experience in assessing and improving the financial viability of housing projects, as well as the governance and regulatory compliance of housing developer organisations. She brings her in-depth knowledge of social housing regulations, funding, finances and management to RUSS



### Anne Kennedy - Trustee

Active with RUSS since 2015, Anne has experience as a Trustee and Secretary. She runs the RUSS School, manages our membership system and is part of the team developing the use of the community hub. Her long standing contributions demonstrate her passion for our vision and give her a thorough understanding of what we do, how we do it and the sector.



### James Kinnersly - Trustee

James is a Chartered Town Planner with a decade of experience in both planning and development. He has wide-ranging expertise that includes negotiating and holding relationships with planning authorities, conducting feasibility studies, engaging and involving residents, and advising and overseeing housing projects through to delivery.



**Benny Lee - Secretary**

Benny has experience in accounting, finance and risk management. Previously secretary to the Board of Trustees for one of the largest pension schemes in the UK, he has valuable insight into how to establish, improve and use best practice governance procedures. His experience in cashflow modelling and company accounts, both as an actuarial consultant and a company secretary, enables the board to maintain effective oversight of our finances and develop the functioning of the organisation.

**Eleanor Margolies - Trustee**

Eleanor is an experienced campaigner and community leader, she was Chair of the East Dulwich Estate Regeneration Project Team for five years, where she worked with residents and Southwark Council to plan and oversee new building work and refurbishment of estate landscaping, ensuring that residents' views and interests were heard and acted upon. She is a future Church Grove Project resident and long standing member of RUSS.

**Phil Morris - Treasurer**

Phil is a semi-retired accountant who has worked in social housing for most of his career and is a board member of Coin Street Community Builders. At South London Family Housing Association, he developed funding arrangements for self build housing, and worked with Chisel Neighbourhood Housing Association. This resulted in innovative self build schemes in South London, Brighton and Essex.

**Jessica Tsang - Trustee**

Jessica is a Vice President in Operational Risk Management at Goldman Sachs. Jessica is a longstanding RUSS volunteer with a background as an economist researching land use, planning, growth and regeneration. She has experience in managing relationships with financial sponsors and aims to support RUSS to manage and secure grants and loans for Church Grove Project and our core organisational work.



**Ethan Williams - Vice Chair**

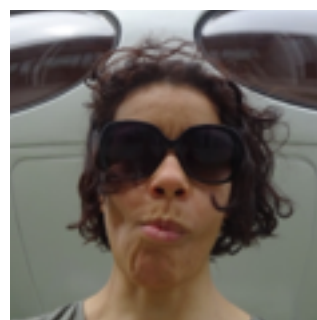
Ethan Williams is a researcher at the King's Fund healthcare think-tank, where he explores ways in which local government, the NHS and the third sector can work together to strengthen the health and social infrastructure of the communities they serve. Ethan oversees RUSS's communications and fundraising work.

**Dinah Roake - Operations Director**

Dinah has experience of working at a senior level in the private, public, housing association and third sectors. Her previous roles include leading a 300-home community-led housing scheme in Brixton, working for Peabody Trust on a major estate regeneration and helping to draft the business plan for the London Community-Led Housing Hub. Dinah is responsible for overseeing RUSS's finances and co-ordinating the Church Grove project, with the professional team, key stakeholders and funders.

**Debbie Noel - Finance & Administration Officer**

Debbie brings experience from many sectors in project support and project management particularly focusing on internal engagement and inclusion. She is currently working on RUSS's migration to Microsoft Non-Profit 365, volunteer recruitment and training and toughening up RUSS's systems and processes. Debbie is also active in hyperlocal environment projects in Lewisham and is a cycling instructor with Wheels for Wellbeing.



## Key dates and the selection process

### Application closing date

**2nd May 2021**

We will notify candidates of the outcome of their applications during the week commencing 9th May 2021. Interviewees will be asked to fill in a declaration form and to provide the names and contact details of two referees, who will not be approached without their permission.

### Interviews

**15th – 22nd May 2021**

Interviews will be held by video conference. They will be conducted by a panel of two to three members of RUSS's People Committee.

### Appointment

**26th June 2021**

The successful applicant(s) will be notified by 29th May 2021. An initial induction process will follow, ahead of official appointment at RUSS's 2021 AGM on 26th June 2021

## How to Apply

To apply for the role, send the following to [info@theruss.org](mailto:info@theruss.org):

- A copy of your CV
- A supporting statement (up to 2 sides of A4), setting out why you are applying and key skills and experience that you have that equip you for the role.
- Please note that we are open to receiving applications for a co-Chair position –to spread the workload and enable people with a variety of skills and experiences to apply. If you would be open to being Co-Chair as well as Chair, please state this.

**The deadline for applications is 11.59pm on 2nd May 2021.**

RUSS is committed to equal opportunities and is an inclusive organization. Please let us know about any adjustments that we can make or support we can give you for you to make your application by contacting [info@theruss.org](mailto:info@theruss.org).

For an informal chat about the role or application process, please contact our Chair, Anurag Verma on 07779081172 or [anurag@theruss.org](mailto:anurag@theruss.org).