

RURAL URBAN SYNTHESIS SOCIETY

Board Secretary • Role Briefing Pack

March 2022



Overview

The Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) is seeking to recruit a new Board Secretary, who will sit as a trustee on the Board of Trustees. The Board drives our vision to build sustainable, genuinely affordable neighbourhoods across London, working with our staff, residents and volunteers.

This briefing pack provides information about who we are, a role description and person specification for the Board Secretary role, and an outline of the application process and how to apply.

The deadline for applications is **11.59pm on 4th May 2022**.

You can get in touch with us with any questions or for an informal chat about the roles at info@theruss.org

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About RUSS

RUSS is a Community Land Trust that builds sustainable, permanently affordable and community-led housing in London. Established in 2009, it has grown from a small group of friends meeting around a dinner table to an organisation with over 1000 members, widely regarded as a pioneer in the community-led housing sector.

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.

In October 2021, we started construction of our first development at Church Grove in Lewisham, due to be completed in May 2023. **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. The 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. A group of future residents have co-designed the scheme and will help to build the homes. The development was recently nominated for the upcoming Open City Stewardship Awards.

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 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. This year, the Hub has hosted events for London Open House 2021, teaching sessions for the Lewisham School of Muralism and a 'start on site' event to thank funders, partners and supporters.

In the coming year we will:

- Oversee the successful construction of our Church Grove housing development
- Develop and implement the housing management strategy for the Church Grove homes, which may involve partnering with an existing registered provider that shares our values
- Continue to implement the allocations process for the Church Grove homes, including managing waiting lists and completing financial assessments, sales and lettings
- Seek out sites for new RUSS community housing developments
- Expand the education offer at the RUSS School of Community-Led Housing
- Implement the business plan and secure permanent planning permission for our Community Hub
- Recruit a Managing Director, a Client's Representative, a Self-Build Manager and a Volunteer Manager

Governance

RUSS is a registered Community Benefit Society with charitable status. As of 2022, RUSS has over 1,000 members, many of whom live and work in the Lewisham area. As an organisation, RUSS is governed by the RUSS rules, which are based on the model rules for Community Land Trusts.

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 and working groups, which can be made up of trustees, staff and volunteers.

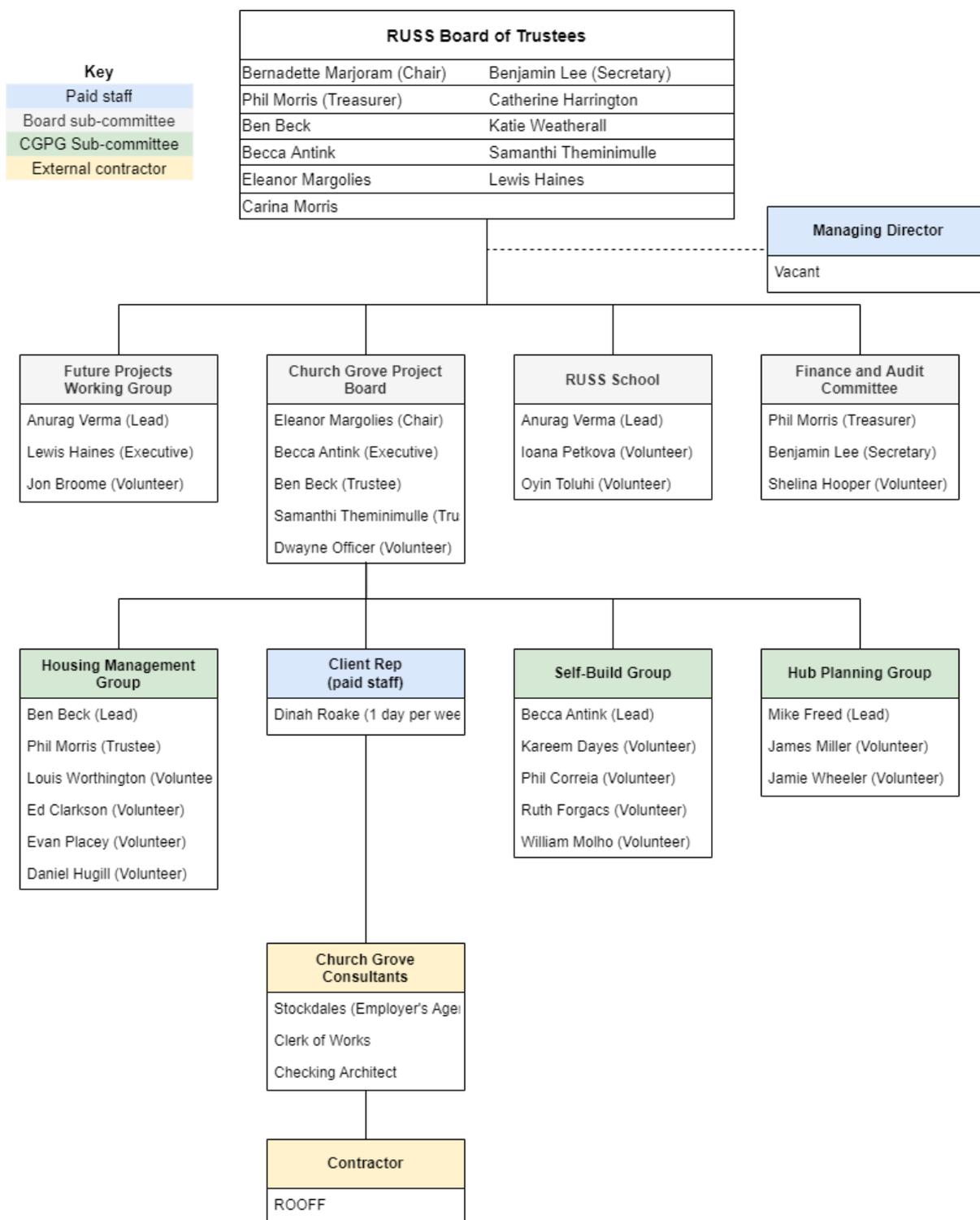
The key sub-committees and working groups currently in operation are as follows:

- **Finance and Audit Committee:** Produces financial statements, management accounts and other financial reports; oversees the annual statutory audit and advises the board about the safeguarding of RUSS's assets.
- **Church Grove Project Board:** Manages each stage of the Church Grove project within the budget set by the Board of Trustees; acts on the Board's behalf as the Client for external consultants and contractors working on the project; reviews risks, issues and exceptions and determines appropriate courses of action, based on recommendations from the Employer's Agent and Client Rep.
- **Future Projects Working Group:** Identifies opportunities for future housing projects within London, bringing proposals to the Board of Trustees; liaises with land-holding bodies on behalf of RUSS for the purpose of securing sites when authorised by the Board of Trustees.
- **RUSS School:** Produces and delivers content for educational courses and School events.

Current staffing consists of a Client Representative, working one day a week. However, the Board has agreed to recruit to a new part-time Director post, as well as a part-time Self Build Manager and part-time Volunteer Manager. Recruiting to these posts will be a priority for early 2022.

Volunteers are central to the organisation's work and play a leading role in a range of projects and ongoing tasks, including communications, fundraising and events.

Current Structure



Role description

This is a rewarding opportunity to help lead a high-profile, cutting-edge community organisation and deliver tangible positive change in our communities, working and learning as part of a team.

The Secretary is part of the Board of Trustees, working closely with the Chair, trustees and members of staff to drive the effective governance and operation of the organisation.

As a trustee, they are jointly responsible for ensuring that RUSS fulfils its charitable duties, delivers on its vision and values, acts in line with its governing documents and the law, and that its finances and people are responsibly managed. Trustees set the overall strategic direction of the organisation and monitor performance against its objectives.

The role of the Secretary involves the following key components:

- Overseeing the roles and activities of board members and volunteers to ensure that RUSS is keeping in line with its responsibilities as a charitable trust
- Organising the agenda and papers for each board meeting and ensuring that those providing reports and updates do so on time
- Attending finance and audit committee meetings to ensure that financial processes including yearly audits are running on time
- Intervening when RUSS activities are not taking place in line with the RUSS Rules & Principles and making recommendations to the Board regarding how to resolve such issues
- Organising the Annual General Meeting
- Submitting the accounts to the Financial Conduct Authority
- Organising Board away days and training
- Overseeing Human Resources

The terms of the role are as follows:

- 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, as well as 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.

Person specification

Knowledge and experience

Essential

- Corporate governance
- Risk management

Desirable

- Financial management and monitoring
- Legal knowledge or experience
- Experience working in a charitable or housing organisation
- Experience working with a board or at a senior level of a comparable organisation

Skills and behavior

- Strong commitment to equality and diversity
- Values-led, with a strong commitment to RUSS's mission and values
- Acts with integrity, openness and accountability
- Good, independent judgement
- Able to work collaboratively with a diverse range of stakeholders
- Strong organisational skills
- Able to manage multiple competing priorities under pressure
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills

Time commitment

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

Diversity

RUSS seeks to reflect the community it operates in, and would welcome applications from people from ethnic minority groups, women, LGBTQ+ people and people with disabilities. You can see our [Equality and Diversity policy](#) on our website.

We particularly welcome applications from people with a connection to Lewisham or South London.

Current Board of Trustees

Bernadette Marjoram

Chair

Bernadette has worked in the public sector for over 40 years, in housing, regeneration, front line services and community engagement, with recent roles as Interim Chief Executive at Hornchurch Housing Trust and Interim Director of Housing at London Borough of Havering. She also has 40 years' service as a Non-Executive Director on local, regional and national organisations, including previously serving as a Councillor on Lewisham Council and a 4-year term on the board of University Hospital Lewisham NHS Trust.



Becca Antink

Trustee

Becca has broad experience in local and city government, most recently in her role delivering affordable housing at the Greater London Authority. She also worked for several years as a researcher, at the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce and Institute for Public Policy Research. She holds an MSc in Social Policy and Planning from the LSE, for which she conducted research with residents of Lambeth housing estates about their experiences of regeneration, gentrification and displacement.



Ben Beck

Trustee

Ben was involved in the tenants' movement in Lewisham from the 1970s, when he moved to the Milton Court estate in New Cross. He was a founder member and the first chair (and is currently acting treasurer) of Five Ways Housing Management Ltd, which is one of the two Tenant Management Organisations in Lewisham set up under the Right to Manage. He worked in housing from 1989 to 2016, including for Lewisham Council and as a member of the Tenant Management Initiatives team in Southwark Housing. He was chair of Voluntary Action Lewisham for two years before its merger with the METRO charity.



Lewis Haines

Trustee

Lewis is a Head of Practice at Collaborate, a social consultancy focused on helping the public and voluntary sectors tackle complex social issues. Lewis previously worked at Crisis and The Children's Society. He has recently completed Leadership and Management in Homelessness and Housing through London South Bank University and the London Housing Foundation. Lewis is also a volunteer Homelessness Advisor and delivers Advice Services across the Crisis at Christmas Project.



Catherine Harrington

Trustee

Catherine is the former Chief Executive of the National CLT Network, having founded the organisation in 2010. She helped grow the CLT movement from 30 CLTs to nearly 350 and was instrumental in securing the £300m Community Housing Fund. Catherine worked at MHCLG, including for the Minister of Housing and Notting Hill Housing. Catherine currently works as a freelance consultant, supporting charities on advocacy and policy, and is a member of the Right to Build Task Force Expert Panel, advising local authorities on self and custom build.



Carina Kusi

Trustee

Carina has over 7 years' experience working within community and stakeholder roles. She is currently a Stakeholder Engagement Consultant at CJ Associates, with previous roles at Moat Homes and Axis Europe. She prides herself on building and maintaining strong relationships with all types of people from residents, business owners to Board members and Senior Councillors, and enjoys connecting with new people.



Benny Lee

Secretary

Benny has experience in accounting, finance and risk management and has been a RUSS volunteer. 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 and Chair of Project Board

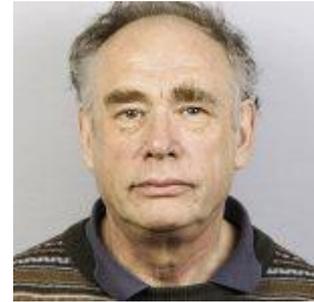
Eleanor is an experienced campaigner and community leader, she was Chair of the East Dulwich Estate Regeneration Project Team for five years, where she worked with residents and Southwark Council to plan and oversee new building work and refurbishment of estate landscaping, ensuring that residents' views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



Phil Morris

Treasurer

Phil is a semi-retired accountant who has worked in social housing for most of his career. He is a board member of Coin Street Community Builders, having been involved at Coin Street since 1984. In the early 1990s he was the finance director at South London Family Housing Association, where he developed funding arrangements for self build housing for rent and shared ownership, and worked with Chisel Neighbourhood Housing Association. This resulted in innovative self build schemes in South London, Brighton and Essex.



Samanthi Theminiulle

Trustee

Samanthi grew up in Lewisham and is currently a researcher at the RSA (Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce), leading work aimed at inserting community voices into decision-making about housing and neighbourhoods. She has experience in community engagement, network-building and amplifying community voices, with roles as a Community Engagement Advisor at Heard Storytelling and a Peer Researcher at Toynbee Hall. Her work at Toynbee Hall involved working with young private renters and the Renters Reform Coalition to lobby for safe, affordable and secure housing.



Katie Weatherall

Trustee

Katie Weatherall is a Programme Manager at the UK's international cultural relations organisation British Council working on Arts programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa and a global radio project. With over 10 years arts and public sector experience she has extensive communications and fundraising experience. She is local to the area and has lived in Lewisham for many years and is passionate about community.



Key dates and the selection process

Application deadline **4th May 2022**

We will invite successful applicants to interview by 10th May.

Interviews **13th – 20th May 2022**

Interviews will be held by video conference. 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.

Appointment **25th June 2022**

Successful applicants will be notified by 26th May 2022. We will then start an induction process. The official appointment of trustees by RUSS members will take place at RUSS's AGM on 25th June 2022.

How to apply

To apply for the role, send the following to info@theruss.org:

- Your CV
- A supporting statement (up to 2 sides of A4), setting out why you are applying and the skills and experience that you will bring to the role

The deadline for applications is **11.59pm on 4th May 2022**.

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 with making your application by contacting info@theruss.org

Feel free to get in touch with any questions ahead of applying, including to arrange an informal chat about the role. Contact Ethan Williams on 07824427430 or ethan.williams@theruss.org