

## RUSS Chair of Trustees Briefing Pack



Photo: Roy Baron

RURAL URBAN SYNTHESIS SOCIETY

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## Overview

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

This is a rewarding opportunity for someone who is comfortable leading a high-profile community land trust, in collaboration with its members, staff, stakeholders, supporters and Board of Trustees.

This briefing pack provides information about who we are, a role description and person specification for the role, and an outline of the application process and how to apply. The deadline for applications is 5pm on 23rd August 2024. You can get in touch with us with any questions at [info@theruss.org](mailto:info@theruss.org) or contact [anurag@theruss.org](mailto:anurag@theruss.org) for an informal chat about the role.

## 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 to an organisation with over 1100 members and is widely regarded as a pioneer in the community-led housing sector.

We empower our community to shape all stages of community-led development. By learning and working together, volunteers and 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 2024 we completed 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. The homes are a mixture of tenures, including shared ownership, London Living Rent and social rent. The development includes a communal garden, a publicly accessible playground, shared facilities including laundry, office and a guest flat. A group of future residents have co-designed the scheme and the majority have now moved in.

We spread our model and support the community housing sector through the RUSS School of Community-Led Housing with a 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 and hosts our events. It is also available for hire to individuals, groups and organisations as an affordable, innovative hot-desking, meeting or event space.

More information on RUSS can be found on our website at <https://www.theruss.org>

Looking ahead we will:

- Embark on the registration process to become a provider of social rented homes.
- Seek out future sites for new RUSS community led housing development.
- Expand the education offer at the RUSS School of Community-Led Housing.
- Complete of our landscaping project in our Church Grove neighbourhood.
- Review our rule book and membership offer.
- Implement our future business plan

## **Governance**

RUSS is a Community Benefit Society with charitable status. We have over 1,100 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.
- **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 for fellow land trusts, community organisers and placemaking professionals.
- **RUSS Hub**  
Operating and maintaining the Hub for the benefit of future residents and the local community.

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.

In addition to our volunteers and trustees, RUSS has paid roles including our Housing Management Co-ordinator, Core Support/Administrator and Bookkeeper. Currently a Landscape Design and Management Co-ordinator is assisting us with the landscaping works at Church Grove. We are recruiting for a Company Secretary and anticipate this position will be staffed in September 2024.

## Role description

The coming years will be an exciting time to lead RUSS. The completion of Church Grove in 2024 is the culmination of over a decade of hard work and a momentous achievement for RUSS and the community land trust sector.

We have demonstrated that the RUSS model of community led development is viable and achievable. We have cemented our reputation within the land trust community, our network of volunteers, funders, supporters, and stakeholders. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and RUSS has been featured in multiple publications, including the Guardian and RIBA Journal.

In the coming year we will be implementing our model of housing management, expanding the work of our community hub, actively search for new development sites, and promote our development model through our events, our work with partners and our School.

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 engaging RUSS's network and membership, giving direction to our future strategy, overseeing the application to become a registered provider, and working with the future projects working group to secure new sites and strengthening RUSS's profile in both the local community and wider housing sector.

The Chair is expected to support the recruitment of key staff and volunteers and is the line manager for its senior staff.

The role of the Chair involves the following key components:

### Leading the organisation

- Provides strategic leadership to the Board and the organization as a whole.
- Works with the board to develop and achieve an aspirational vision underpinned by a deliverable strategy and business plan.
- Ensures the organization acts in line with its charitable objectives, rules, principles and any regulatory frameworks to which it is subject.
- 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 organization.
- Establishes an effective professional relationship with the company secretary, acting as their line manager and overseeing recruitment and succession planning for the role.
- Grows the organization and its people through widening its volunteer base, mobilizing its members and hiring and developing staff.
- Representing the organization
- 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 organization and the community-led housing sector.

### Managing the Board

- Ensures the efficient conduct of the Board's business and the organisation's general meetings.
- Ensures that Board Members are given the opportunity to express their views and appropriate standards of behaviour are maintained.
- Provides leadership and control of Board meetings, ensuring all 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 15 – 20 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 held in our community hub in Lewisham. Our events will mostly be held in Lewisham or central London.

### Person specification

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. We are looking for:

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



## Skills and behaviour

- Able to build relationships, negotiate and influence at a senior level with a range of external stake-holders.
- 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 a senior level.
- Excellent communication, listening and presentation skills.
- Able to build the profile and reputation of the organization.
- Well-organised and able to manage multiple competing priorities under pressure.
- Values-led, with a strong commitment to RUSS's mission and values.
- Acts with integrity, openness and accountability.
- Strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- A positive, engaging and enthusing style.
- Seeks out opportunities for learning, development and innovation.

## 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



### **Anurag Verma - Chair**

Anurag's background is in architecture. He is focussed on delivering sustainable, community led solutions to housing needs. A Lewisham local, he wants to see the RUSS model replicated widely across London. He has previously lectured at the University of East London and London Metropolitan University. He is associate director at Latitude Architects, where he works predominantly on the refurbishment of historic buildings.



### **Phil Morris - Treasurer**

Phil 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.



### **Daniel Hugill - Trustee**

Daniel works as a secondary school teacher working in East London. He has previously served as Chair of a national teacher subject association working to support the subject community and lobbying stakeholders to support improvement. Daniel is a very keen gardener and tends an allotment in Lewisham. He is a resident of Church Grove with his partner Evan and their son.



#### **Jon Broome - Trustee**

Jon is an architect focussing on providing consultancy services to organizations and individuals who share his commitment to creating community led housing and sustainable neighbourhoods. He brings together imaginative, rigorous thinking and sound practical experience of building and community led projects. Jon has been a member of RUSS since its inception and is active in its future projects working group.



#### **Louis Worthington - Trustee**

Louis was raised in Shepherds Bush but adopted Lewisham as his home since 2016, and has lived at 12 Church Grove with his partner Georgia since April 2024. Louis works on climate change policy and has a keen interest in community and sustainable housing. In his spare time Louis likes to play tennis and spend time in the outdoors.v



#### **Joel Simpson - Trustee**

Joel is a lecturer and researcher who works between University of the Arts London and research organisation Social Life. His first experience in community-led housing was through a project with Homebaked CLT in Liverpool during an MSc in Urban Development Planning at UCL. As a Lewisham resident, Joel joined RUSS as a trustee in 2023 to support community organisation in his local area.



#### **Elly Greig - Trustee**

Elly is a Regional Manager within the social care sector. Elly draws from broad, in-depth management, training delivery and front-line experience of working with vulnerable adults, from young people's services to residential substance misuse with a specialism in domestic violence and homelessness.

## Key dates and selection process

### Application deadline - 23rd August 5 p.m.

We will invite successful applicants to interview by 30th August 2024

### Interviews 2nd – 6th September 2024

Interviews will be held in person at the hub, 12 Church Grove. 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 - 9th September 2024

We will then start an induction process. The official appointment of the Chair by RUSS members will take place at RUSS's AGM on 28th September 2024.

How to apply

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

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](mailto:info@theruss.org).

Feel free to get in touch with any questions ahead of applying by writing to [info@theruss.org](mailto:info@theruss.org).

To arrange an informal chat about the role contact Anurag Verma on [anurag@theruss.org](mailto:anurag@theruss.org).