

# RURAL URBAN SYNTHESIS SOCIETY



Company Secretary Recruitment Briefing Pack

August 2024

## Overview

The Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) is seeking to recruit a new Company 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 Company Secretary role, and an outline of the application process and how to apply.

You can get in touch with us with any questions or for an informal chat about the roles at [info@theruss.org](mailto:info@theruss.org)

## 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 1100 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 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, affordable 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. It is also available for hire to individuals, groups and organisations as an affordable, meeting or event space. The Hub has hosted events for London Open House for a number of years and teaching sessions for the Lewisham School of Muralism. RUSS volunteers have recently secured permanent Planning Consent for the Hub, so our community and future residents can benefit from the space for years to come.

More information on RUSS can be found on our website at <https://www.theruss.org>. We've also been celebrated in a range of national publications, including [the Guardian](#) and the [RIBA Journal](#).

In addition to our volunteers, who are the heart of our organisation and deliver on a wide range of projects and tasks, RUSS has paid roles including our interim Managing Director, Client Representative for our residential scheme, Core Support/Administrator and Bookkeeper. Previous paid roles have included our Volunteer Manager and Self-Build Manager.

In the coming year we will:

- Oversee completion of our Landscaping project around our Church Grove housing development
- Complete and implement the housing management and financial management strategy for the Church Grove homes, having partnered with Registered Provider CDS, who share our values
- Seek out future sites for new RUSS community housing developments

- Expand the education offer at the RUSS School of Community-Led Housing
- Implement our future Business Plan

## Governance

RUSS is a registered Community Benefit Society with charitable status. As of 2024, RUSS has 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.

Details of our current Board of Trustees can be found on our [website](#).

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 and School events.
- **RUSS Hub:** Operating and maintaining the Hub for the benefit of residents and the local community.



## 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 Company 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.

Overall workload priorities, Company Secretary capacity and monthly commitment can be discussed at interview, as well as being supported by the Board, once appointed.

The role of the Secretary involves the following key components, supported by all Trustees, staff, active volunteers and wider RUSS team:

- 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, alongside other Trustees
- Submitting the accounts to the Financial Conduct Authority
- Organising Board away days and training, alongside other Trustees and the Chair
- Overseeing Human Resources, alongside our interim Managing Director, Trustees and the Chair
- Line management of bookkeeper and other part-time admin roles
- Liaising with our lenders regarding our long-term loan
- Leading the process of applying for Registered Provider of Social Housing status: research and scoping, setting up and engaging with a working group and appointing consultants, to work towards making an application in 2025.
- Liaising with our estate management company (CDS) to ensure that service charge and hot water accounts are supplied promptly and accurately

**Time commitment & remuneration**

- Target start date: 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024
- Contract type: contractor (anticipated to develop into a permanent staff role, subject to accounts review prior at AGM)
- Rate: £250-£350 per day, subject to experience and discussion
- Time commitment: 6 days per month
- This includes a two-hour board meeting every four to six weeks, two strategy away-days per year, as well as meetings with staff, committee chairs and board members.
- Board meetings are held in our Community Hub in Lewisham SE13, with hybrid/online options being available for those that can't make each meeting in person.

## Person specification

We are looking for someone with a range of experiences, who can play an effective governance role, are committed to our aims and values, and are willing to put in time to help us achieve them.

You don't need to have been a Trustee before to apply for this role. Leadership and governance experience is desirable but not essential. You will be supported by the Board and the wider RUSS team.

### 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 behaviour

- 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

### 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.

## How to apply

To apply for the role of Company Secretary, 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 are accepting applications now. We will review applications as they are received and will appoint as soon as a suitable candidate is identified.

We therefore encourage early expressions of interest and applications.

RUSS is committed to equal opportunities and is an inclusive organisation. 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, including to arrange an informal chat about the role – contact Anurag Verma (Chair) on 07779 081172 or [anurag@theruss.org](mailto:anurag@theruss.org)