

Media toolkit: press releases

A press release is a way to brief journalists about something significant, specific and timely. They are a relatively simple and effective way to secure press coverage for your community led housing project.

How press releases can help you to promote your project

Hitting the headlines can help community led housing groups in many ways: promoting meetings, finding new members, raising money, convincing decision-makers, building wider community support, and more besides.

The best way to achieve media coverage is through press releases. Journalists and broadcasters need stories. Especially regional and local media outlets - your community led housing projects are newsroom gold!

How to write a press release

Press releases follow a basic structure and should include the five Ws (who, what, where, when, why) with the most important information coming first. Below is one approach to help you format your own press release.

Structuring a press release

- **Headline:** a short, clear headline explains what the story is about
- **Paragraph 1:** boils the story down to one or two sentences
- **Paragraph 2:** provides context – why it’s important
- **Paragraph 3:** gets into the detail – who’s involved, how it came about, etc.
- **Paragraph 4:** provides the call to action - where people can find more details, get involved, etc.
- **Paragraph 5:** a quote that either adds information, credibility and/or opinion
- **Notes to editors and your contact details**



The headline

Headlines should spark interest in some way as it can make or break whether someone reads your story or not. Basically, it should say 'something/someone has done something interesting or worthwhile'.

You don't need to come up with a clever, pun-filled headline - leave that to the publication's newsroom - but you will need to write a headline that makes it clear what the story is about and will get the attention of the journalist you want to cover the story.

Paragraph 1: summarise the story

This is the line which will determine whether someone reads on. Following on from your clear headline summarise the story in one or two sentences.

Paragraphs 2 and 3: providing context

With the first paragraph covering the 'who is doing (or has done) what' then the second and third paragraphs should go into why and how.

Paragraph 4

Make sure you add some information here about what a reader can do after reading the story - it could be when and where an event is taking place, how to become a member or your project's website address.

The quote

The quote is a great opportunity to breathe some life into your press release. Unlike the rest of your release which focuses on fact, a quote can provide feeling and an opinion to really hammer home the importance of your news.

Got more information to add?

Your press release should be no longer than a side of A4. If you need to add extra information put it in the notes to editors section right at the end of the release. It might also be worth considering whether the extra information merits another press release. Don't forget to add your contact details either.



Example press release

For immediate release: 8 June 2019

Media enquiries should be directed to RUSS Trustee Ted Stevens on
07XXX XXXXX

Headline is to the point and timely

PLANNING PERMISSION GRANTED FOR LONDON'S LARGEST EVER AFFORDABLE SELF-BUILD HOUSING PROJECT

This makes the story particularly newsworthy and different from other planning permission successes

Ooh, exciting! Setting out in the first sentence why this is important news.

The most innovative low cost self-build housing project ever undertaken in London has taken a huge step forward with the formal granting of planning permission. Last night Lewisham Council approved the plans for the 33-home project. The scheme will cost £8.6m and will be built on a one-acre site at the end of Church Grove, in Ladywell, Lewisham.

The whole story is summed up in this one paragraph

The project has been identified by an 800-strong local community organization – the Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS) – and construction is expected to begin late in 2018 or early 2019. Over the last few years RUSS has worked closely with Lewisham Council to progress the scheme to this stage.

Who ✓

When ✓

What ✓

The homes range from one to four-bedroom properties. Fourteen of the properties will be available on a shared equity basis; 12 homes will be shared ownership; six rooms across two shared homes will be for affordable rent, and five of the homes will be for social rent (with the occupiers nominated by Lewisham Council).

The cost of the homes will be much lower than equivalent properties. RUSS has achieved this by: -

- Working in partnership with Lewisham Council to facilitate the site on a 250 year lease. The land will be held in a Community Land Trust, so the homes will be valued based mainly on the value of the building; not the building and the land.
- The residents have had the homes designed so they are simple and cost effective to build. It is also proposed that they will do some of the construction work themselves, bringing the costs down further.



All this means that residents are predicted to be able to buy a 25% stake in a typical one-bedroom home from just £77,500. The monthly rent on the home would then be £429 (reduced by £104 per month because of the resident's contribution to the building work); a three-bedroom shared ownership home is anticipated to cost £141,000 (for a 25% stake) with a monthly rent of £763 (reduced by £208 per month because of the resident's input during the building stages).

In addition, because the homes have been designed to be highly energy efficient, their running costs will also be much lower than equivalent new properties. This will further reduce the overall cost of occupying one of the homes. All the properties have already been reserved for local people who meet the project's affordability criteria.

Good use
of a high
profile
supporter

Lewisham's Mayor Damien Egan is a supporter of the project. In 2017 he said:

"Lewisham has a radical housing tradition and RUSS's self-build Community Land Trust builds on that history. Most importantly this is a development that will keep homes affordable in perpetuity."

RUSS Co-chair Anurag Verma said: "We're delighted to have secured planning permission. It's been a long journey, but after eight years of community effort, huge levels of support from Lewisham Council, the GLA and many other bodies this is a really important milestone. Our members have worked tirelessly to get here; and **we are now confident that we can achieve our dream of delivering genuinely affordable community-led neighbourhoods right across London.** This is the first of, we hope, many similar projects."

The homes should be completed in 2020. The architects for the project are Architype.

Ends

Why



To make the most of this news and content, RUSS also post all of their press releases on their [website](#). Alongside their press releases, they include the high resolution images that they send to journalists too. We go into the importance of good photographs later on in the toolkit.



How to send a press release

Here's how to make sure your press release stands out in a journalist's inbox:

A standout subject line

Make sure your subject line stands out. We suggest using the headline of your press release. This is why it's important that the headline you go with is clear and attention-grabbing.

No attachments

Paste your press release straight into the body of your email. With brimming inboxes and no time to spare, journalists tend not to open attachments.

You can write a little note at the beginning of the email introducing the story and letting the journalist know you're happy to provide further information including images (if you have them).

Clearly dated

If the information you are sharing in your press release can be shared by journalists immediately make sure you say so by putting 'For immediate release: [today's date]' at the very top.

If you are sending the press release before the news can go public, or you want to give journalists some time to write the story up, then you are embargoing the release until a particular time, for instance: 'Embargo date: 00:01 9 January 2020' - again, put this at the top so it's the first thing the journalist sees.

Under an embargoed press release you're sharing information on the understanding that it is meant to remain confidential until the time and date you have set. Embargoes are not legally binding, but it's extremely rare that they are broken.

The recipients

We've created a spreadsheet of media contacts for you, which you can find [here](#).

While it's always better to tailor your press release for a particular news outlet, it's common to send one press release to multiple people. Just make sure you add the recipients in the 'Bcc' line so that journalists don't see who else you're sending the release to.



Getting on the phone

Once you've sent your press release it's worth following up with a phone call (call them in the morning as afternoons are when deadlines are looming). You can check that they've actually received your release, ask directly if it's news they'll cover and if they'd like more information sent over.

Journalists are busy so you won't be on the phone for long. Make sure you make the most of the few minutes you're on the phone for. To help you here is a simple script that you can follow.

Sample telephone script

Hello, can I be put through to the newsdesk please?

I'm calling from X community led housing group. I've sent over a press release on >whatever your press release is about<

Have you seen this? Would you be interested in setting up an interview? We have great case studies and spokespeople available.

Take some time to familiarise yourself with the story you've set out in the press release before giving a news agency a call.

Be prepared to explain a little about your project and what it is a solution too. Make it clear that this is a local issue and their readers will be interested in this story.

Sending a photocall

A picture is worth a thousand words. Nothing beats a good picture. If you've got a big event coming up like a breaking ground or topping out ceremony or maybe your MP is paying a visit to your building site make sure you send out a photocall.

A photocall is really easy to put together - you're basically inviting a publication to send a photographer to your event to capture a key moment. All you need to do is set out what's happening, where it's taking place and what an image would showcase.

Securing a photographer means you've most likely secured space for a full story to go alongside the picture too. Just make sure everyone in your picture is happy to have their picture taken, and get a guardian's permission if children are involved.



Example photocall

Photocall: Breaking ground at Example CLT

When: Friday 28 February 2020

Where: Example CLT site, Example High Street, AB1 C23

Photo opportunity: 10am

Example Community Land Trust (CLT) will break ground on Friday morning - marking the beginning of the construction of 28 new affordable homes that are due to be completed in summer 2021.

Attending the event and 'digging' will be Amelia Jones, Mayor of Example Town, Councillor and cabinet member for housing, Sarah Watson and Jo Smith, Chair of Example CLT.

Ends

Contact: Jo Smith, Chair of Example CLT on 07XXX XXXXXX

Other things to be aware of

Good photographs

As we've already pointed out a good photograph can help you to secure media coverage. That means a high resolution image of something that depicts the story you're telling in your press release. Here are some examples of images that we love:

- [This picture in the Architects' Journal](#) shows people attending a London CLT 'pick an architect' event. It captures people looking interested and asking questions. The fact that the shot shows a group of people suggests that many people attended.

TIP! The photographer has created space and light in this picture by framing the people in the bottom two thirds. Don't feel like you have to fill a whole shot.

- [Positive News produced a long-read about Lancaster Cohousing and the photographs are beautiful!](#) They capture everyday moments and settings demonstrating that you don't need a pristine scene. This piece is all about highlighting the normalness of cohousing and the way residents live - that it's not as different as some might assume - and the pictures do just that.



Before you take any photographs

If you're holding an event and are planning to take photographs that you'd like to share make sure you let people know and how you plan to use the images, be that through your own marketing channels or with journalists. You can use big signs that point this out and announcements telling people to read them too.

Please remember, images where people can be identified are a form of personal data and some people may have reasons for not wanting images of themselves or children shared. Make sure you everyone knows photos are being taken and when children are involved or you're sharing personal stories alongside images get written permission.

An example consent form can be found [here](#).

Being contactable

Sometimes a journalist may want to talk to you for a story they're working on. This is clearly a fantastic opportunity and a brilliant way to start building a relationship for future stories.

To make it as easy as possible for journalists to contact you include an email address or contact form on your community led housing group's website (and make sure you check the inbox regularly!). Often when a journalist gets in touch they are working to a tight deadline, it won't be much use to them if you respond two weeks after their first enquiry. You may find that you get contacted through social media too if you post regularly.



Contact Community Led Homes

Web:

CommunityLedHomes.org.uk

Tel:

020 3096 7795

Twitter:

[@CommLedHousing](https://twitter.com/CommLedHousing)

Facebook:

facebook.com/groups/CommunityLedHousing