
The Phoenix is set to rise

Planning permission granted for 'UK's most sustainable neighbourhood' in Lewes, East Sussex



The Phoenix site. Image courtesy of Human Nature and Periscope / Ash Sakula Architects.

- Walkable neighbourhood built around a culture of shared living provides breakthrough model for sustainable placemaking
- The UK's largest timber-structure neighbourhood is projected to deliver exponential sustainability¹, social impact and huge biodiversity net gain
- Plans brought forward by Human Nature working with some of the UK's leading architects, designers and engineers, including Archio, Stirling Prize-winner Mae, Periscope, Expedition Engineering and Whitby Wood

One year after proposals were announced for the transformation of a 7.9-hectare brownfield site into the UK's most sustainable neighbourhood, the Phoenix

¹ Exponential sustainability: practices and initiatives that result in compound acceleration of positive environmental, social and economic impacts over time

development has today been granted planning permission, taking the visionary project a step closer to reality.

Designed to prioritise people over cars, the Phoenix will be a walkable, multi-use development on a former industrial site in Lewes, within the South Downs National Park. The mixed-income, multi-tenure development will provide 685 homes (with 30% affordable – made up of 154 homes at local housing allowance levels and the remainder as First Homes), creating a place to start out in life and a place to stay. When complete, it will be the UK’s largest timber-structure neighbourhood, and a blueprint for sustainable placemaking and social impact that can be deployed at scale.



The Phoenix's courtyard gardens. Image courtesy of Human Nature and Periscope. Sketch by Carlos Penálver.

The project has been brought forward by Human Nature, a campaigning development company that designs, builds and manages intrinsically sustainable places which respond to the crises in climate, nature and health. The Lewes-based company, which was founded by former Greenpeace directors Michael Manolson

and Jonathan Smales, promotes 'exponential sustainability', making it easy and enjoyable for people to live sustainably and well.

Human Nature is working with some of the UK's leading architects, landscape designers and engineers plus local businesses and foundations to create breakthrough models in sustainable placemaking, prioritising social value and impact. The Phoenix was masterplanned by Human Nature's in-house design team, regenerative design agency Periscope, and Kathryn Firth, director of masterplanning and urban design at Arup.

"The current mainstream model of development is catastrophic, baking in deeply unsustainable fabric, infrastructure and transport, fuelling the climate and nature crises; it also creates social divisions and exacerbates loneliness. We aim to show that living sustainably can be a joy, not an exercise in self-denial, made far easier by the design of neighbourhoods. We're working with an amazing team, bringing together best practices in sustainable design, urbanism and construction to provide a new breakthrough model with the Phoenix.

Our focus on radically improving environmental and social impacts through the power of placemaking is uncommon in 21st-century Britain. But the result won't feel unfamiliar, rather a return to traditions we've forgotten: a place of elegantly designed buildings made using local materials, streets safe for children to play in, with most daily needs met within a short walk and where it's easy to meet and socialise with your neighbours."

– Jonathan Smales, Founder and CEO of Human Nature

A template for the towns of tomorrow

An emphasis on building connections and enabling interaction in shared spaces and facilities runs through the design of the Phoenix. In addition to 685 highly energy-efficient homes powered by renewable energy, the new neighbourhood includes public squares and gardens, dedicated community buildings (including a low-cost canteen) and a site-long river walk.

A co-mobility hub will incorporate electric-car share, car hire and car club, electric bike service and a shuttle-bus facility – enabling a shift away from reliance on

private vehicle ownership and creating safe streets for walking, cycling and wheeling.

In Parcel 1, the first homes designed in detail (by Ash Sakula Architects) are interwoven with play areas, communal garden plots and a shared cycle store intended to facilitate interaction and promote a culture of shared living. Designed in collaboration with Periscope, a central courtyard gives residents a place to sit, pause, talk and play and incorporates a rain garden providing protection against flooding – features which will be found across the Phoenix.

In the wider plan, climate-progressive innovations include a data-driven renewable energy system set to enable 10–20% reductions in residents' energy bills (part of Human Nature's goal of 'radical affordability'), on-site recycling, waste-management and composting facilities, and an urban-farming and community-gardening strategy.

"While the rest of the world is carrying on as if everything is normal, Human Nature thinks that we have to build in a way that will allow us to live differently in a less hospitable world. But rather than seeing this as a constraint, the Phoenix is an opportunity; for sociable living, for local events, for a greener world. More than anything, it suggests that living sustainably will make for a better life."

– Meredith Bowles, principal, Mole Architects

The Phoenix takes a holistic approach to sustainability. As well as considering operational carbon (emissions from heat and power) and embodied carbon (emissions from materials and construction), the project has been designed to address a 'whole-place carbon footprint', which includes emissions caused by transport and human behaviour on the site all the way until 2100.

Circular-economy principles are embedded into plans for design and operation. The Phoenix's buildings will be constructed from engineered timber including CLT (cross-laminated timber), with prefabricated cassettes made from local timber and biomaterials such as hemp – with local apprenticeships trained on site in modern methods of construction, one of the ways the project will maximise social impact. Where possible, existing materials from the site's industrial past – including cladding, steel trusses, bricks and buttresses – will be salvaged and repurposed or reconstituted.



The existing industrial site. Photography courtesy of Human Nature.

Collaboration, connection and community

The Phoenix team have worked closely with thousands of local residents, three dedicated community working groups and more than 60 businesses and stakeholder organisations to evolve the project in response to community needs.

Since the initial planning application was submitted in early 2023, there have been three rounds of consultation, resulting in a number of refinements to the initial plan including the relocation of the proposed neighbourhood Health Centre to a more accessible site in a future phase.

At the planning committee today (15 February 2024), members voted for a resolution to grant planning permission, subject to section 106 agreements and resolution of outstanding issues with National Highways.

Find out more at phoenixlewes.com

Notes for editors

For more information about the Phoenix Project and Human Nature's vision, please contact emily@zetteler.co.uk.

The Phoenix

The Phoenix is a trailblazing vision to transform a brownfield site in Lewes into a sustainable neighbourhood, designed for the way we need to live now and in the future. It aims to set a new benchmark in urban planning by bringing together best practice in modern methods of construction, sustainable mobility, energy efficient design and landscape architecture, all while providing good homes, jobs, training opportunities and generous public space for the town.

When complete it will encompass 10,000 sqm of service, commercial and employment space in healthcare, light industry, creative business, hospitality and retail. At the heart of the neighbourhood will be a series of public squares connecting to a community canteen, event hall, taproom, fitness centre, workspace and makers' studios, much of which will be housed within repurposed industrial structures. Shared courtyards, parks, green corridors and rooftop gardens will enable social interaction, promote communal living and provide habitats for local wildlife.

The masterplan has been recognised with the Pineapples Future Place Award, AR Future Place Award for masterplanning and regeneration, and a commendation from the Oslo Architecture Triennale Neighbourhood Index.

phoenixlewes.com

- **Masterplanning:** Human Nature, Periscope, Kathryn Firth (Arup)
- **Architects:** Adam Richards Architects, Archio, Al-Jawad Pike, Ash Sakula Architects, Charles Holland Architects, Human Nature, Mae, Material Cultures, Mole Architects, Rabble Architecture, TDO
- **Executive civil engineer:** Expedition
- **Executive structural engineer:** Whitby Wood
- **Environmental engineers:** Atelier Ten
- **Transport:** WSP, Urban Movement
- **Timber engineers:** Eurban
- **Ecology:** Ecology Solutions
- **Planning consultant:** Whaleback

- **Cost consultant:** RUA

Human Nature

Human Nature is a campaigning development company, founded by former Greenpeace directors Michael Manolson and Jonathan Smales. It designs, builds and runs intrinsically sustainable places and communities at the neighbourhood and village scale, where it is easy to live happy, healthy and sustainable lives. It is based in Lewes, East Sussex, where it is bringing forward the award-winning Phoenix project.

humannature-places.com