

PLANNING

Barton Willmore to build Saudi garden

By Susanna Gillman

Barton Willmore is extending its reach beyond the UK with its latest project, a 160ha futuristic botanical garden in Saudi Arabia.

The architecture and planning practice has won an international design competition with civil engineers Buro Happold to create the King Abdullah International Gardens in Riyadh.

The scheme is one of the first that the firm has taken on abroad since appointing urban design partner Nick Sweet 18 months ago. Sweet is in charge of developing business outside the UK and has so far secured projects for the company in Russia and the Middle East.

The botanical gardens will involve building a dome in the Saudi desert that is five times the size of the Eden Project in Cornwall. The project aims to recreate the 400 million-year history of plants on Earth to show visitors what previous ecosys-



Garden design: project will offer model of sustainability

tems were like. It will also showcase sustainable development techniques using renewable energy and rain-water harvesting.

Sweet said: "When we read the brief we decided to acknowledge the irony of producing proposals with an educational message on sustainable development in the heart of the world's principal oil-producing nation.

"In this day and age, we are all fearful to one degree or another of rapid changes in climate. We wanted to use the scheme to tell the story of a single piece of land through time."

He added: "It might be a desert now, but there was a time when rivers flowed here and forests grew." The garden is scheduled for completion in 2010.

