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The King Abdullah International Gardens, the world's single largest indoor garden, Saudi Arabia

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GIANT PREHISTORIC GARDEN SET FOR SAUDI DESERT

A futuristic oasis described as the world's single largest indoor garden is to be built in the deserts of Saudi Arabia.

British architecture and planning company Barton Willmore have been commissioned to design the Eden Project-style creation which will be called The King Abdullah International Gardens.

The £100million project, which draws on expertise from Britain's Natural History Museum, will see the creation of the single largest temperature-controlled garden in the world, dwarfing the giant bubbles of Cornwall's Eden project.

The extraordinary scheme will incorporate cutting edge techniques in power generation and water conservation designed to ensure the project is sustainable with minimal environmental impact.

But most ambitious of all, the project aims to give visitors an experience in botanical time travel by re-creating a series of landscapes showing how the planet and its plant life has changed over time.

Beginning with the origins of life, the gardens will reveal what the area on the outskirts of Riyadh, in which the gardens are to be located, was like during pre-historic ages such as the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, when dinosaurs roamed the earth.

The centrepiece of the project, which will be completed in 2010, is a 20-acre paleobotanic building, formed as two interlocking crescents which accommodate a sequence of controlled environments.

Each environment allows visitors to travel through time and experience the changes to plant life and landscape that have occurred on the spot where the gardens will be created. Each historical garden is to be presented as a complete environment, including those species from each era which survive to this day and accommodating the 'ghosts' of species that have been lost.

The gardens are presented as a time-line which lead the visitor through different botanical epoch's. As well as the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods, the gardens will cover the Devonian era, followed by the Carboniferous, Cenozoic and later paleobotanic periods.





The final enclosed garden within the crescent building is the Garden of Choices, an educational space which explores and explains how the lifestyle and industrial choices we make today could change the landscape in different ways for future generations.

The central crescent shaped garden halls will become the world's largest Teflon construction and when completed will be five-times larger than the enclosed space at the Eden Project, towering 40m above the desert.

The garden's power requirements will be supplemented by on-site renewable technologies such as solar, wind and Combined Heat and Power (CHP) sources, while water conservation will be maximised with the construction of massive underground reservoirs beneath the structural elements of the gardens, allowing water to be collected and stored with minimal evaporation, while all collected "grey water" will be recycled throughout the scheme.

Nick Sweet, project director and Partner in charge of Urban Design at Barton Willmore's London office commented: "This is a ground breaking project which draws together some of the best minds in sustainable construction, historical botany, ecology and design.

"In this day and age, we are all, to one degree or another, fearful of the rapid changes in climate change occurring in the world and many are uncertain about how to respond. We wanted to use the scheme to tell the story of a single piece of land through time. It might be a desert now, but there was a time when rivers flowed here and forests grew."

