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# THE EDEN PROJECT IN CORNWALL – AND MORECAMBE?

By Andrew Harris



**T**he Eden Project is amazing. Conceived by (now Sir) Tim Smit in 1996 it has huge biome structures which accommodate plants collected from diverse environments such as the world's rainforests and the Mediterranean climate – as well as botanical gardens for plants and wildlife native to the UK. Many plants have a fascinating history which can date back to pre-historic times.

Since fully opening in 2001 the Eden Project in Cornwall has attracted more than 21 million visitors. Sited on – or in – an old Clay Pit the project started with a Visitor's Centre and two biomes – habitats for flora and fauna – then added many more attractions including

a winter ice rink, Christmas market and performances by choirs and others. It mainly researches, displays, entertains and educates about the diverse climates and plant life of the world. Since 2005 the last activity has been given additional meaning by the opening of The Core which has classrooms and exhibition areas designed to help Eden's central message about the relationship between people and plants. The design of this building was inspired by plants most obviously in its soaring timber roof which is very distinctive.

The biomes are spectacular and innovative structures which use mainly hexagonal transparent thermoplastic panels held together by a tubular steel

frame. The panels are made from several layers of UV-film sealed around their perimeter and inflated to create a cushion which performs as a thermal 'blanket'. It is worth visiting the Eden Project in Cornwall just to see these exciting structures – known as geodesic – but it should be possible to view the different but equally exciting biomes in our region from 2023 as explained later.

In December 2010 the Eden Project received permission to build a geothermal electricity plant which will generate about 4MWe of electricity which will be enough to meet the needs of the Eden Project and about 5,000 households. The project will provide geothermal heating as well as



geothermal electricity. It involves sinking a well nearly 3 miles into the granite crust beneath the Eden site. Funding has been secured – mainly from Cornwall Council and the European Union – and drilling is due to start in the summer of 2020. Part of the dream and message of the Eden Project is

that the world should be powered by renewable energy. As the sun and wind are intermittent Tim Smit argues that the answer lies beneath our feet. The heat underground can be accessed by drilling technology that pumps water towards the centre of the Earth and brings it back superheated to provide

us with heat and electricity. Another fascinating aspect of the Eden Project.

Since 2002 the Eden Project in Cornwall has hosted a series of musical performances called the Eden Sessions. More than 80 artists and groups have featured up to 2019 – including such stars as Amy Winehouse, Lily Allen, Oasis, Mumford & Sons, Eddie Izzard, Elton John, Spandau Ballet, Tom Jones, Blondie, Gary Barlow, Liam Gallagher and Kylie Minogue. It is a major attraction for many reasons.

Morecambe is a coastal town on the shores of Morecambe Bay. It is home to about 35,000 people but has not always been self-governing. Its Urban District Council was formed in 1841 but this became the Municipal Borough of Morecambe and Heysham in 1928. Morecambe was a thriving seaside resort in the mid-1900s. While Blackpool attracted holiday-makers from the Lancashire mill towns Morecambe appealed to visitors from Yorkshire and Scotland due to its railway links. Between 1956 and 1989 it was the home of the Miss Great Britain beauty contest.

From 1974 Morecambe has been part of the City of Lancaster. Since then Morecambe has been in long-term decline. The West End pier was partly lost in 1977 then demolished the following year. The Central Pier – damaged by fire in 1933 – was removed in 1992. In 1994 the City Council closed the World of Crinkley Bottom attraction in Happy Mount Park after only 13 weeks – costing the City Council £950,000 in damages – soon followed by the closure of the Frontierland fairground and Bubbles –





**The Eden Project North will be east of Morecambe's Stone Jetty.**



**The iconic art deco Midland Hotel adjoins the site.**

the Morecambe swimming pool.

Since the year 2000 Morecambe has experienced triumph and disaster. A new statue of comedian Eric Morecambe had been unveiled the year before and became a major draw for tourists. Despite receiving its first RNLI

life-saving hovercraft in December 2002 there was a major loss of life in the tidal Morecambe Bay on the 5th February 2004 when at least 23 Chinese immigrant cockle-pickers harvesters were drowned by the incoming tide.

In 2008 the splendid 4-star art deco

Midland Hotel – built in 1933 and named after the Midland Railway which used to serve the town - was re-opened after a renovation by the Manchester regeneration company Urban Splash. Like the nearby former Morecambe Promenade Railway Station – now a bar and restaurant - and the historic Winter Gardens it is a Grade II listed building. A group of attractions of which any town would be proud.

Despite these positives Morecambe is in desperate need of regeneration. The prospect of the massive Eden Project North investment in the town will – if realised - transform Morecambe and be a major boost to the northwest economy. So what is the Eden Project North?

The Eden Project North will have a focus on health and wellbeing for both people and the environment and aim to inspire wonder and connection with the natural world. It will have the following features –

- There will be a series of zones housed in mussel-shaped domes linked



**Part of the Eden Project North will be located on the site of the former Bubbles swimming pool.**

together by an entrance to be known as the Bay Hall.

- An area to be called Above the Bay will be an environment filled with

plants and art exhibits. It will showcase nature's abundance and the rhythms of life linked to the sun.

- The Below the Bay area will

provide an immersive series of theatrical experiences which will bring lunar rhythms and tides to life.

- The Natural Sanctuary will be an area with a focus on the health-giving aspects of the seaside with bookable wellbeing treatments.

- The Natural Observatory will be the home of Eden Project North's research and education programmes.

- A 4,000-capacity outdoor arena designed for live music and entertainment is planned.

- In August Lancaster & Morecambe College launched a new Eden study programme as part of a suite of new educational developments in the Morecambe area. More benefits are likely as the college has signed a 25-year Memorandum of Understanding with Eden Project Learning – the further and higher education wing of the Eden Project.

- Additional or satellite attractions along the promenade and on the sands of the Bay are also planned.

- To summarise the Eden Project North will aim to combine indoor and



**The former Morecambe Promenade Railway Station.**



### The Morecambe waterfront.

outdoor experiences which will connect people to the internationally significant natural environment of Morecambe Bay and enhance wellbeing.

The Eden Project in the south has similar structures accommodated in a former Clay Pit in sparsely populated Cornwall. Morecambe, on the other hand, is fully developed so where can the Eden Project north be located? The answer is to make the most of Morecambe's spectacular outlook over the Bay. The site previously occupied by the Bubbles swimming pool and the Dome theatre is ideal as it overlooks Morecambe Bay and has iconic neighbours: the 4-star art-deco Midland Hotel, the Grade II Listed Winter Gardens, the former Promenade Railway Station – now an iconic bar, restaurant and visitor information centre - and Morecambe's Stone Jetty.

The Eden Project North does not plan major car parks as the aim is to make the Morecambe project carbon-neutral. The vision is for a project free of 'fossil-fuelled vehicles' – with exceptions for supplies and access for the disabled. Visitors will be

encouraged and helped to use public transport and park-and-ride schemes.

This amazing project is expected to cost £101 million, provide about 500 permanent jobs and attract about 760,000 visitors a year with the capacity to cater for up to a million people a year – estimates made credible by the experience of the Eden Project in Cornwall which has contributed an estimated £2 billion to the economy of that county. It would be transformative for Morecambe – and all of Lancashire – but is it just a dream? Or will it happen?

The organisation responsible for implementing the ambitious plans is Eden Project International Limited known as EPIL which is already has contributions or pledges for £1.1 million from Lancashire City Council, Lancashire County Council, Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, Lancaster University and the UK Government. An Environmental Impact Assessment - required before an application for planning permission - has already been completed and submitted. Extensive consultations with local people have

taken place. An application for planning approval from the local authority will be submitted in the spring of 2020. Subject to a suitable consent and the successful completion of funding negotiations now underway, a 2-year construction period is planned which will lead to the Eden Project North opening in spring 2023.

EPIL is also working on Eden Projects in Australia, China, Dubai and the USA. It is a very credible organisation with a track record of great success. Chief Executive David Harland - commenting on the recent public consultation attended by your columnist – said *“This was an important milestone for the Eden Project North. Having a positive impact on the internationally significant environment of Morecambe Bay is fundamental to our vision for this project. We have been overwhelmed by the support we have had from the local community and we look forward to working closely with everyone in the coming months and years as the Eden Project North takes shape.”*

The Eden Project North will be a huge attraction but also offer four wider benefits -



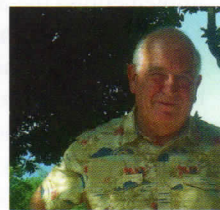
**A computer-generated image of the project from the east.**



**An aerial CGI of the Eden Project North and adjoining uses.**

- Be a catalyst for wider investment in Morecambe and the region.
- Be an opportunity to support education and skills development.
- Be a 'living laboratory' with a focus on health, wellbeing and the natural environment.
- Be a model of sustainable tourism providing benefits without doing harm.

The Eden Project North is ambitious, exciting, well-supported and feasible. It is good news for Morecambe and all of our region.



**Andrew E. Harris** ([www.andreweharris.co.uk](http://www.andreweharris.co.uk)) gratefully acknowledges the help provided by the Eden Project in Cornwall and EPIL in the preparation of this article. Except where described otherwise the images

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