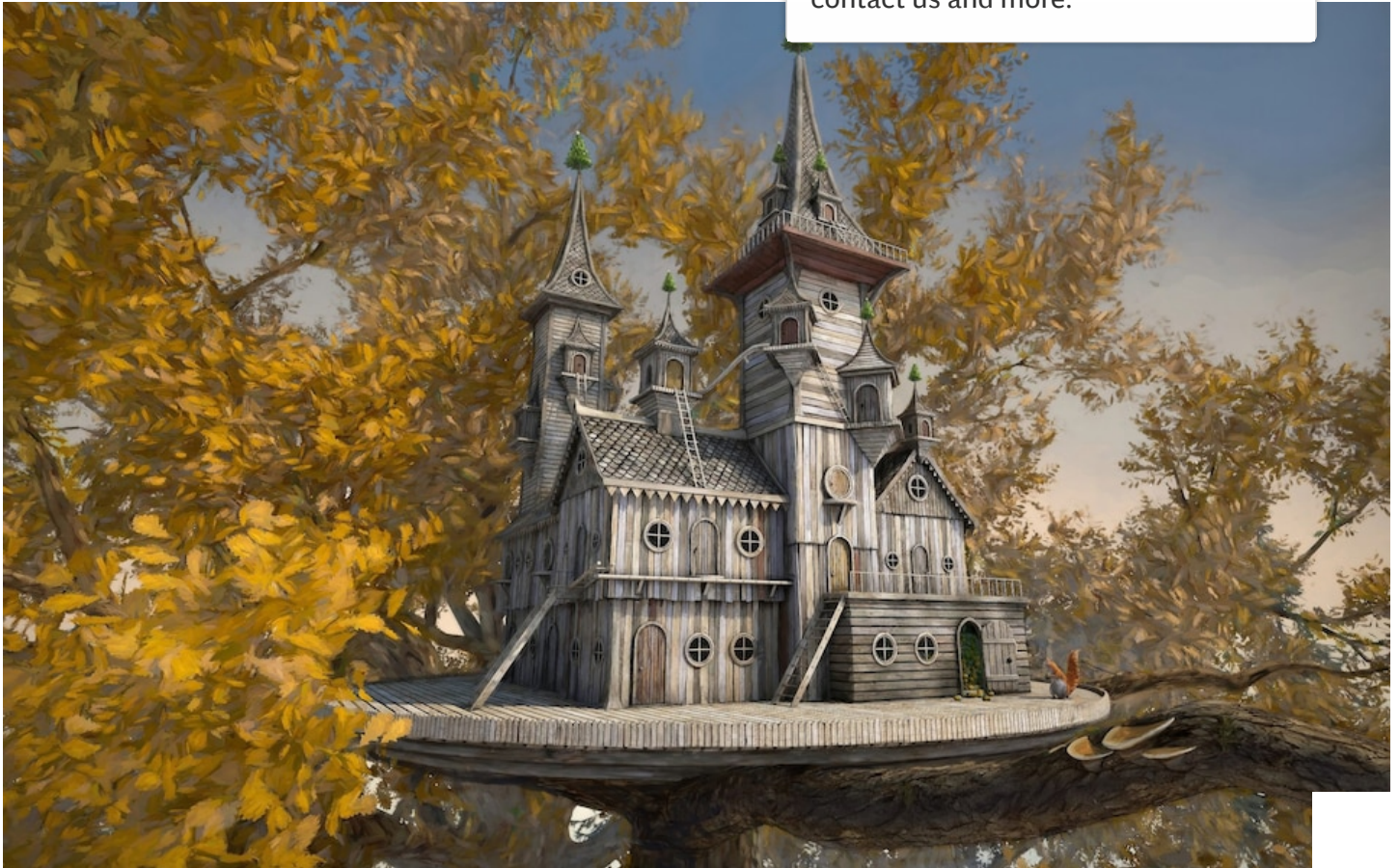


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## Duchess of Northumberland reveals £18m 'magical village' plan with fairy grottos and goblin lairs

Jane Percy will transform The Alnwick Garden into an enchanted park called Lilidorei in an effort to make children put down their phones

By Christopher Hope, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

15 April 2022 • 9:00pm



Jane Percy, the Duchess of Northumberland, might be best known for transforming the ornamental gardens at [Alnwick Castle](#) into an award-winning attraction featuring a



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But she has her gaze fixed on an altogether more tricky challenge - how to wean [children off their mobile phones](#) and encourage them to get involved with the world around them.

The Duchess's answer is Lilidorei, a £17.5 million magical village of make-believe set in the 40-acre The Alnwick Garden, complete with fairy grottos, goblin lairs and what might be the world's biggest slide.

The Duchess, 63, has spent the past 10 years imagining a play park for children where she hopes they will be excited and enchanted by their surroundings that they forget about their screens, if only for a few hours.

“Lilidorei is a magical village which has nine clans living in it,” she says. “Goblins, elves, dwarves, pixies, hobgoblins, trolls - and they're always fighting, but they celebrate Christmas.

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“So that's the only time they come together - because they're planning it throughout the whole year. But they're trouble - half of them are bad, half of them are good.”



A CGI image of what a fairy house could like at the site



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down. That's the whole point of Lilidorei,” she says.

Lilidorei is due to open at Easter next year (the Duchess is hoping the Prince of Wales will do the honours) after a six-part series on Channel 4 which details how her dream turned into reality will fuel interest.

Visitors will be greeted by a large magic mushroom with a door in it where they will have to justify why they should be allowed into the fantasy village where the clans live.

The Duchess says: “The door says, ‘are you a goblin - you've come to make trouble, haven't you?’ I'm not opening, go away’, and then there'll be whispering, saying ‘go in the side’. So it's the first thing that puts the phone back in a pocket.”



A CGI image of Lilidorei. The Duchess said the main reason for the project is to get children off their mobile devices

Every last detail has been thought through by the Duchess. The goblins and hobgoblins have fingers that are like screwdrivers and pliers so they can help make presents and prepare for Christmas.

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There are huge mushrooms that belch smoke, a scary cemetery, “the biggest play

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She adds: “When you're in the clearing all around you, you're hearing goblins running, at all levels and heights. This is what makes children put their phones away

“You can't see them. But you can hear them, hissing and slithering. You can hear cackling, crying because something unsettling has happened in Lilidorei.”

Guided tours of Lilidorei are banned (“just so boring,” she says) - instead children will be encouraged to explore and go where they like.



Children can explore different houses across the site including a hobgoblin house illustrated

Lilidorei will be open 365 days a year for “full-on play”. The two main seasons will be Hallowe'en - which will start in mid-September - and then of course the preparations to celebrate Christmas, which are year-round.

She says: “One of my real bugbears is how badly people do Christmas in the UK. It's tacky. It's not cheap. My children love going to Hyde Park's Winter Wonderland - [but] God it's expensive. And it's shocking.

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“For parents, all we want for our children is to give them an experience at Christmas, for

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The hope is that Lilidorei will draw up to 280,000 visitors to the Northumberland site. The daily ticket price has not been set, but there will be a £75 annual membership to be a 'Lilidorean' which would allow a child in every day or every weekend.

The Duchess has committed to 'Free Fridays' during term times to ensure local children can come on school trips free of charge.

"Once the summer season's over, people leave the North and there's nothing and I don't think people understand quite what's going to hit them, especially with the way we're doing this," she says.

Mark Brassell, the director of The Alnwick Graden, and the Duchess of Northumberland, in her London apartment | CREDIT: Heathcliff O'Malley

The Duchess has made her name as an entrepreneur with the way she has developed The Alnwick Garden into an attraction that has generated hundreds of millions of pounds for the local economy.

Presently she is in regular Zoom calls with Los Angeles-based writer Shaina Fewell, about a series of books charting the story of Lilidorei.

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Her focus is on making Lilidorei stand on its own two feet financially through “secondary spend” such as hiring out the rooms for parties.

“It's a horrible feeling when the visitor goes into somewhere and you just feel all the time you're shelling out. But this is different,” she says.

A proposed site plan for the fairy park

This is very much the Duchess's vision. Her husband [Ralph - the Duke](#) - “is not involved,” she says. “He has just written a book on the War of the Roses which I have yet to read. He is not really into the goblins.”

The Duchess is confident her vision will be a success. She even hopes that adults in need of company will want to come to alleviate loneliness, a particular problem in parts of the North East.

“I'm not worried at all about Lilidorei not working, not for a second. It doesn't even enter my brain that this might not work,” she says.

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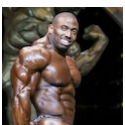
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