



THE FRIENDS OF Rowntree Park

The Ark in the Park Project

What's the problem?

Rowntree Park is a popular, traditional park, with a range of play areas, open spaces, sports areas and a woodland zone. The park is a natural basin, and lies next to the river Ouse, so naturally it floods on a regular basis. The Friends of Rowntree Park group was formed to represent the park's users and to work with the Council to support and encourage schemes which will enhance and improve the Park. The Young Friends (5-11) and the Very Young Friends (0-5) groups are part of this work. However, these groups currently have nowhere to meet - unless the weather is fine enough to stay outside - because the 1970s brick-built pavilion they had been using is now uninhabitable due to flood damage. Many of the other regular park users also suffer. Some groups, such as the bowling clubs, have had to stop using the park because they need changing rooms, storage space and level access. Many more local groups would increase or start activities in the park, if only there were an indoor community space.

The current pavilion when flooded:



What's happening with the project now?

Our architect, Phil Bixby, worked with engineers from Dossor Group to draw up plans and in March 2009 we received full planning permission. We were delighted to get the backing of the Council's Advisory Panel for Leisure and Culture and Social Inclusion. We are having detailed discussions with the Council about how to raise the capital needed and how the building will be managed once built. A great start was made on the fundraising with the award of £50,000 from the Environment Agency Flood Levy Fund.

How will the new building work?

In normal use, the building will not look particularly unusual, although it will be constructed to very high environmental standards, which will reduce running costs. However, the Ark will be built on top of a pontoon. The pontoon will be set within a below-ground recess, so that there will be easy level access to all of the community space. When the river rises, the recess will gradually fill, and the pontoon will lift the Ark. Integral piles will keep the building in place. When the floods recede, the Ark will lower back into position, ready for use.

The Ark in Park - the future



The Ark in Park - floating in a future flood



Illustrations by Phil Bixby



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Who else has tried amphibious buildings before?

We believe this will be the first British amphibious building, although there are many floating buildings in the UK. However, Dura Vermeer, a major Dutch construction and engineering company, have constructed a development of amphibious buildings on the banks of the river Maas, as a part of their innovative approach to coping with high flood-risk situations. This has caught the imagination of architects throughout the world. We believe this could be the answer to the problem at Rowntree Park and potentially at many other sites in the UK. For instance, many city centres are increasingly at risk of flooding, and a centrally-located community building that didn't suffer from flooding could act as a focus for repair and restoration efforts, as soon as the waters subsided.

Relevant links:

Phil Bixby (architect)
<http://www.constructiveindividuals.co.uk>

Dossor (engineers)
<http://www.dossor.co.uk>

Dura Vermeer brochure:
http://www.duravermeer.nl/data/pdf/innovaties/innovatie_duravermeer_bow.pdf

Press coverage:
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,377050,00.html>
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6405359.stm>
<http://postcarboncities.net/node/2084>

Who can tell you more about the Ark in the Park?

We welcome your ideas and contributions.

Contact:
Mike Heyworth (Chair, Friends of Rowntree Park)
info@rowntreepark.org.uk

Phil Bixby (Architect, Ark in the Park project)
<http://www.constructiveindividuals.co.uk>

Other questions

Why can't the building be on stilts?

A building on stilts poses obvious difficulty for disabled access. The current pavilion was built about 1m above the footpath level, in an unsuccessful attempt to avoid the floodwaters, and is accessed by a steep set of steps. If a new building on stilts were to stay above the floodwaters, the ground floor would need to be about 3m above the footpath level. Since lifts and flooding are not a good combination, those needing level access - a large proportion of the potential users - would need a very, very long slope to reach the community space.

Why can't the building go somewhere else?

The majority of the park lies under water during a flooding episode. There is a small area at the western edge, adjacent to the Lodge, which does not flood, but this is too small and far away from the bowling greens and tennis courts. Also it wouldn't be possible for the park keepers to supervise the park, from this location.

How is City of York Council involved?

The Friends work with the City of York Council in many different ways, not just for the Ark project. We were very grateful for the help of several Council staff in preparing a Lottery bid for the Ark in 2006. Although this bid was unsuccessful, the work we carried out in preparation was invaluable in developing the project. We have had discussions with the local councillors (Sandy Fraser, Julie Gunnell and Dave Merrett), and with the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion, Cllr Christian Vassie. The Advisory Panel for the Executive Member for Leisure, Culture and Social Inclusion met in December 2009 and resolved to support the Friends' work towards the Ark in the Park. See meeting minutes:
[http://democracy.york.gov.uk/Published/C00000192/M00003628/\\$\\$\\$Minutes.doc.pdf](http://democracy.york.gov.uk/Published/C00000192/M00003628/$$$Minutes.doc.pdf)