

# The Rye



# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## Summary

Wycombe District Council commissioned Atomik Architecture to conduct a public consultation on the existing facilities on offer to visitors to The Rye, and to undertake a feasibility study to establish what new facilities or improvements could potentially be made to further enhance the Green Flag Award-winning park for its visitors.

## Introduction

Based on the findings of the first Public Consultation in 2016, a number of issues affecting the visitor experience on The Rye were identified. These can be described as:

- A lack of a 'sense of arrival';
- Absence of good quality public toilet facilities at the western end near playgrounds;
- Capacity and proximity of car parking;
- The Boathouse Cafe building is in poor condition;
- Lack of knowledge regarding parking in the area;
- Insufficient disabled parking spaces.

In addition to the points above, there were also discussions regarding the future development of Pann Mill and what part it possibly could play in any future development of The Rye. Although outside of the scope of this study, the introduction of a footpath from Keep Hill Road into Holywell Mead and The Rye was also raised.

Through developing solutions to the issues above, improvements to visitor facilities could be addressed in the following two ways:

- The creation of a new Rye Visitor Centre, including an improved Sense of

Arrival and orientation / link to the town centre and town centre car parks;

- A minor refurbishment of the Boathouse.

## 1. A new Rye Visitor Centre and Sense of Arrival

A new Rye Visitor Centre would provide the opportunity to define and create a real sense of arrival for The Rye Public Open Space. A number of potential locations were explored, but it was felt that the new visitor centre should occupy a clearly visible and prominent location at the threshold of The Rye. The location of the new visitor centre should also be strategically placed to provide much needed public toilet facilities to the Western side of The Rye, close to the two main playground spaces. The new visitor centre should be able to provide more visitor interpretation for The Rye, including information about the Public Open Space, the range of activities hosted there and to enable visitors to make the most of their visits.

The new Rye Visitor Centre should include the following facilities; a small exhibition space, accessible public toilets, a café.

It was clear from the public consultation that the majority of visitors to The Rye travel by car. However, lack of awareness about nearby town centre car parking facilities means that the Lido car park often becomes over-subscribed, while car parks closer to activities at the Western side of The Rye have far more capacity. An improved Sense of Arrival combined with a consistent strategy for way-finding should be located near to the new Rye Visitor Centre. The new way-finding would provide opportunities for demonstrating the close proximity and

walking distances to nearby car parks, links to the town centre and facilities within The Rye itself.

## 2. Minor refurbishment of the Boathouse

The existing boathouse building dates back to the 1930's and has been adapted and re-clad on an adhoc basis since. The construction of the building is fairly agricultural in nature with limited thermal performance. The boathouse has electricity, running water, but no rainwater or foul water drainage. The current boathouse is located in very close proximity to a tree, which could also lead to problems with the boathouse, the tree, or both in the future.

A minor refurbishment could be carried out in order to resolve immediate repairs and maintenance issues. This would not aim to expand the current offering as a new visitor centre would provide enhanced visitor facilities.

A refurbished boat house could include drainage connections, an improved thermal envelope and renewed internal finishes including a saff toilet to provide a facility fit for purpose. These aims can be achieved in two ways:

- Refurbishment of existing building
- New prefabricated building

The following concepts identify possible solutions for the improvement of the visitor experience to The Rye.

In developing these options we have explored and reviewed numerous approaches.



# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## Location Plan

The plan shows the proposed location of a new Rye Visitor Centre and Sense of Arrival location, adjacent to the Pann Mill bridge on the north side of The Rye.

The location is a key point on the edge of The Rye next to Pann Mill and the River Wye. It is arguably the main clearly visible entrance to The Rye from the town and next to the A40 (London Road), and the centre would be viewed by a high number of drivers every day.

The location is also next to the pedestrian crossing linking the north and south sides of the A40, which connects The Rye with the town centre car parks.

The Pann Mill entrance to The Rye is also situated equidistantly between the Under 8's playground to the east and the 'Ropes on The Rye' playground and Boathouse to the west. In addition, this location is ideally suited to providing a clear orientation point within The Rye and will significantly reduce travel distance to the public conveniences for the park's users.

The location also provides significant improvements for disabled visitors in reducing travel distances between the dedicated disabled car parking bays and the proposed new public toilets at the new Rye Visitor Centre.



Right: Location Plan of The Rye



# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## New Rye Visitor Centre

A new Rye visitor Centre could be located by the main entrance on the north side of The Rye opposite Pann Mill. The new visitor centre would be strategically located between the A40 London Road to the north, the River Wye to the south, Pann Mill and the Pann Mill entrance to the west and the War Memorial to the east. This is the most prominent location for The Rye in terms of visibility from the A40 and its location next to the existing pedestrian crossing, linking The Rye with the town centre and the town centre car parks.

The location here of the new Rye Visitor Centre also provides a convenient location for the much needed public toilets at the west side of The Rye. These facilities will be ideally situated between the two main playgrounds on The Rye. The facilities within the new Rye Visitor Centre will include:

- A small exhibition and interpretation area and store
- Publicly accessible toilets
- A daytime café

Access to the new Rye Visitor Centre is via the main entrance by Pann Mill Bridge and will give an ideal location for orientating the visitor. The café will have views over the Rye and river. It will enjoy the sun throughout the day on the south facing terrace while being protected from the noise of the road.

This option arranges the service accommodation towards the centre of the plan to make best use of the views across The Rye.

The proposal will require the removal of two trees.



# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options



View of a new Rye Visitor Centre looking west along London Road



View of a new Rye Visitor Centre looking east along London Road

## Examples of Centres



Sister Cities park Visitor Center, Philadelphia. Designed by DIGSAU



Sister Cities park Visitor Center, Philadelphia. Designed by DIGSAU



The Green, Community Centre, Nunhead, London. Designed by AOC



Community Centre in Urberach. Designed by Netzwerk Architekten



Moorsel Community Centre, Belgium. Designed by De Kort Van-Schaik Van-Noten



Trail Centre, Sweden. Designed by Kotten Tengbom

# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## Example of Centres and Different Construction Material Options



Metal cladding



Thames Barrier Park Visitor Centre and Cafe, London. Designed by Patel Taylor



Community Center Sardine. Designed by Gayet Roger Architects



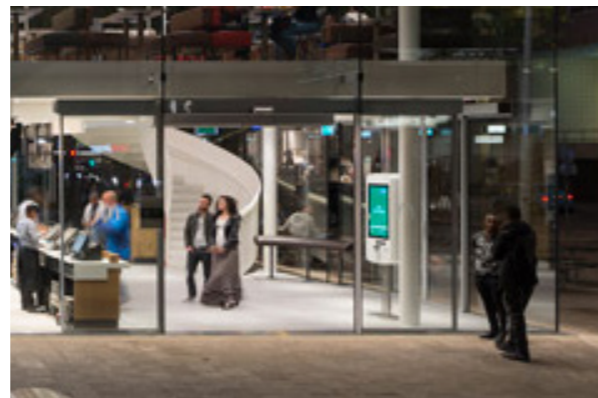
Brickwork



Centre Sociocultural. Designed by Guillaume Ramillien Architecture



Orandajima House. Designed by Vander Architects



Glazed curtain walling



Festival Hall Neckarallee. Designed by Ackermann and Raff



Visitors Centres Quebec, Canada. Designed by Anne Carrier Architecture

# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## **Sense of Arrival – Existing Signage**

The Rye currently utilises a combination of vertical information boards, finger signs, and angled visual information signs. The main vertical information boards are located at each of the main entrances, sometimes accompanied by an additional information board which has the capacity for changing information. Elsewhere, there are additional signs for specific activities in the park or to inform visitors about what is not permitted.

Whilst the maps and signs show information about the Open Space they show little or no information about the urban context that The Rye sits within. The introvert nature of the sign therefore fails to make wider connections with the town and its facilities, which could potentially enhance the visitor's experience of The Rye.

## **Strategic Aims**

It is clear from the consultations that there is a need to address car parking for visitors to The Rye. Currently there is a tendency for the majority of visitors to park in the Lido Car Park, which is accessed from the East via Keep Hill Road. Parking provision at the Lido is limited and only really sufficient for visitors to the leisure facilities located there and cannot cope with all the visitors to the Rye. In addition, many of the facilities on The Rye, such as the playgrounds, boathouse and playing fields, are located on the Western side of the open space.

It is neither advisable nor necessary to create additional car parking on The Rye. There is actually a lot of parking provision to the West of The Rye, in the area between the Wye river and the

town centre and railway. This existing parking provision is able to provide the parking required for The Rye and potentially encourage more visitors to use the Open Space. New way-finding and signage should address this issue of context and highlight the existing provision of car parking and the wider facilities of the town centre.

A coherent approach to the display of information about The Rye will enable visitors to make the most of their visit to the location.

## **Potential solutions**

We have discussed a number of possible solutions, from traditional signage methods to more experimental methods to assist visitors with navigation and way-finding to create a more significant Sense of Arrival.

Understanding what information the way-finding or signage needs to communicate is the key to identifying the correct solution for delivery. The signage needs to identify and convey the following information:

- The facilities within The Rye itself (Pann Mill, visitor centre, toilets, café, the river, playgrounds, walks & runs, the Dyke and the Lido)
- The location of The Rye in relation to the Town Centre and its facilities (car parking, town centre, railway station, university)
- Information about the relative distances between objects in time and or in measured distance.

During the public consultation we received feed-back that it was often difficult to find out about up-coming events on The Rye and some regular visitors only discovered specific events, such as fairs by chance. It may be difficult to keep information up to date on all the signage, all the time, however the proposed new visitor centre may provide a more appropriate venue for the display of this information.

## **Proposed Method of Way-finding**

There are currently three maps located on the Rye and this method may be the ideal way of conveying the information required. Currently these maps only show information relating to The Rye itself. However, if the area of the map was increased to include the town centre and car parks, this would help to graphically convey their location and proximity.

The orientation of the map should also be considered. If the map is re-orientated so that it is laid out in the direction the viewer is facing, it can help their understanding and perception of the location. The method has been tried with some success with the 'Legible London' signage, which also allows for the integration and layering of many levels of information.

The advantage of this approach is that the changes can be enacted very quickly and easily, by utilising the existing sign boards on the Rye. At least the existing signboards could be used to trial and test new signs, before rolling out a new signage design.

The new signage would be located at the entrance bridge adjacent to Pann Mill and the new visitor centre.

In addition to the main sign board, a finger post located at the same entrance, is proposed, showing the walking times and directions to the nearest car parks and town centre facilities from The Rye.

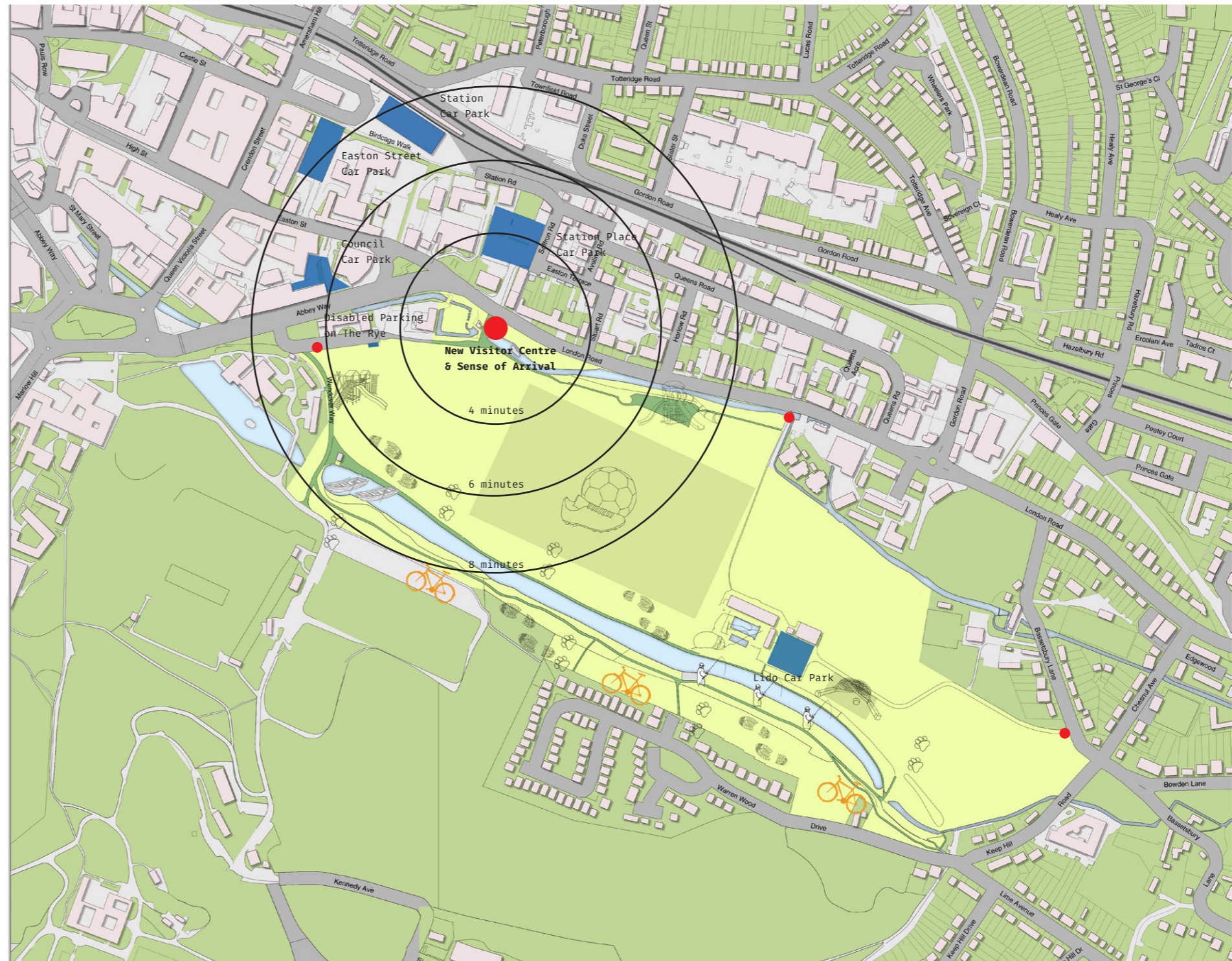
## **Inclusivity**

Consideration should be given to inclusiveness in terms of how information is displayed. There is little statute governing this other than the Equality Act 2010, but there are numerous good practice guidelines, which should be considered when developing solutions.



# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

Map of The Rye showing the proximity of the open space to the town centre car parks



# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

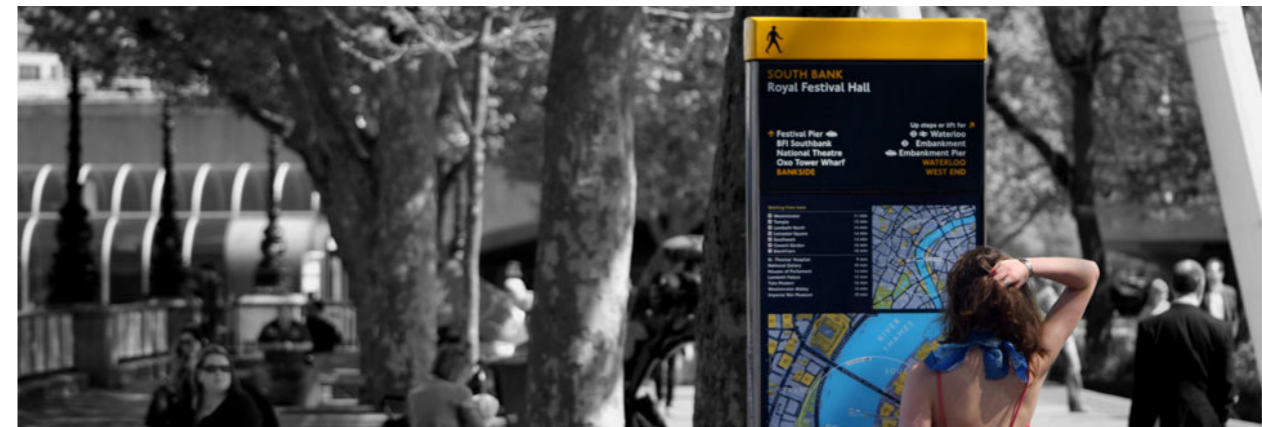
The options below show how wayfinding options could be introduced at the Rye



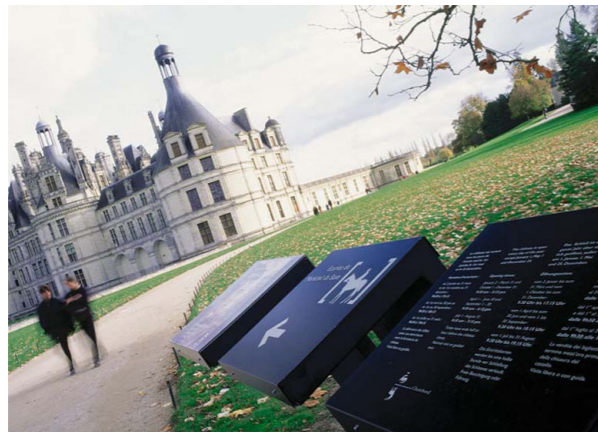
A consistent and recognisable approach to way-finding at Chambord, France. Designed by Integral Reudi Baur.



A sign showing a simple hierarchy of information.



A photograph of the Legible London signage. The maps show multi-layered information with simple directional signage above for quick reference.



Way-finding and signage is designed with a specific purpose in mind and avoids cluttering important views and vistas.



This signage is designed to be read obliquely, which could provide an interesting opportunity to appeal to passers by.



An easily recognisable family of signs will provide a consistent approach to way-finding for visitors.



Finger posts can help with simple directional tasks.



Sketch showing how a new sign could display information and re-orientate the map.

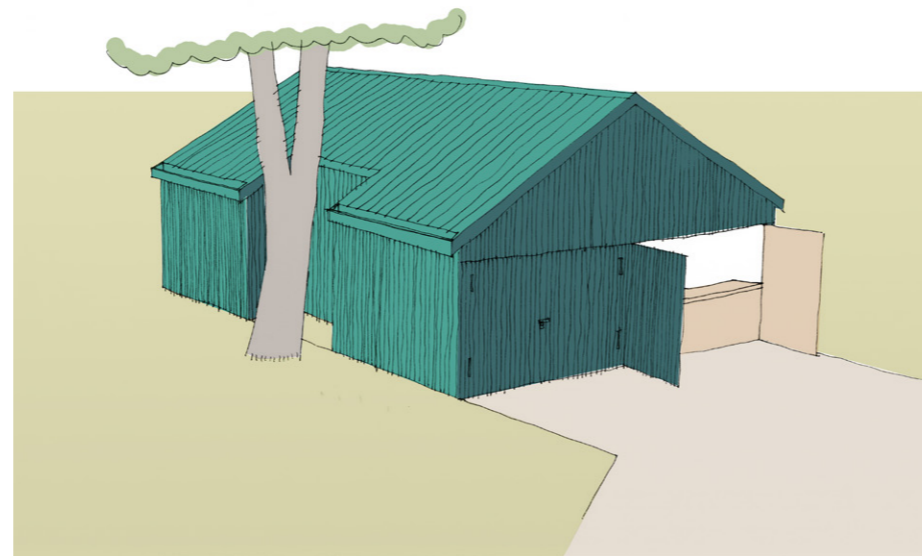
# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## Refurbished Boathouse

The option to refurbish the existing boathouse would focus on upgrading the facilities of the current building only, to carry out essential works and make it fit for purpose. It would not aim to expand the current boathouse offering as a new Visitor Centre would provide enhanced visitor facilities. This would include providing the following:

- Mains surface and foul water drainage to the building, as none exists at present;
- Upgrade of electrical systems;
- WC and welfare facilities for the staff;
- Upgrade of food storage and preparation areas;
- Re-cladding of building to comply with current standards.

Due to its location, it is felt that the boathouse is not in the prime location required for the new visitor centre. However, it is used for the rental of boats, sale of duck feed and net hire in the summer months.



This Page: Refurbished boathouse



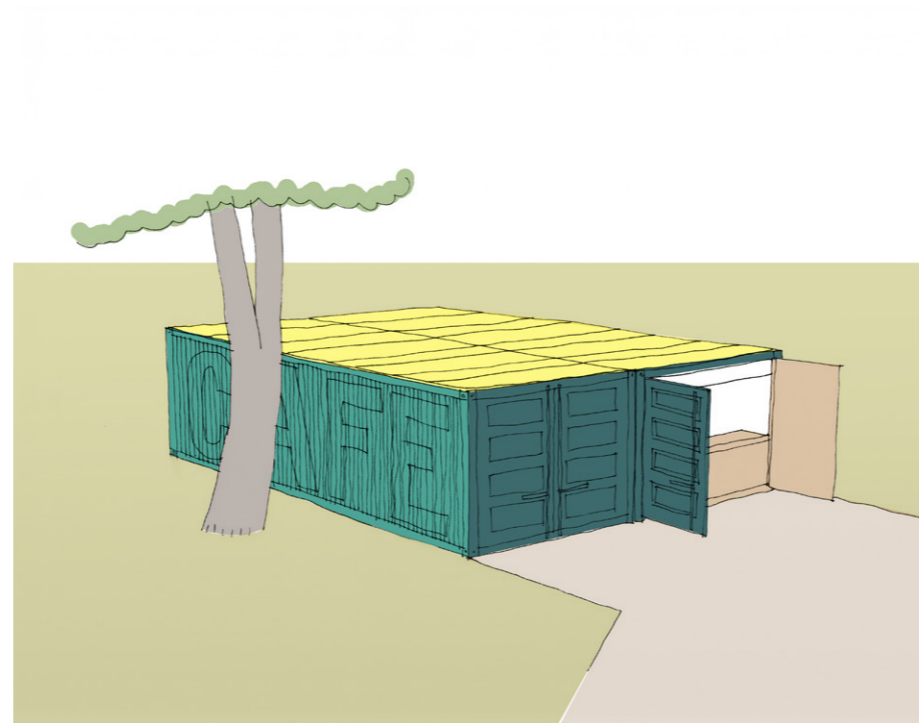
# Rye Visitor Facilities - Future Options

## New Prefabricated Boathouse

In the spirit of the original boathouse, a prefabricated solution could provide a simple solution to the provision of upgraded facilities. Recycled and adapted shipping containers could be utilised to provide both secure boathouse storage and new kiosk facilities. There are many examples in the UK and further afield of shipping containers being adapted to provide attractive and innovative cafés, bars and restaurants.

A prefabricated solution could be located to avoid the neighbouring trees and painted to minimise its impact in the park.

Due to its location, it is felt that the boathouse is not in the prime location required for the new visitor centre. However, it is important for the rental of boats, sale of duck feed and net hire in the summer months.



This page: new prefabricated boathouse

