

Site manager (Ben) and Kate Goodwin (KG) in conversation

Ben: Yeah, it was better than I thought it would be...I was a bit sceptical about the whole thing 'cos I'm not into art in particular but it's interesting.. it's better than I expected it to be anyway

KG: Why were you sceptical?

Ben: Well, when somebody told me what it was originally.. they described it to me as a pile of sticks..... I think it's a bit more than that.. and I've seen the actual work involved in putting it up.. there's a lot more than I thought, I thought .. it was going to be someone piling some sticks up and it would be easy.. no, there's a lot more involved... Interesting.. I think I'll probably try and save some of the sticks and try and do something myself (laughs)

KG: Were you interested in how he did it technically?

Ben: He explained to me that he just used a protractor and an angle.. once he's set the angle and the base one out.. after that, although he took a lot of care in placing them,you just build up from there. It was reasonably straightforward, I think, like you said, a lot of it's in the preparation. If all the materials are sound or planed and square, it's a lot easier, it all goes together well. It was explained to me that one he that did the other day [which fell down within 2 days was because] the wood wasn't quite as good, what he was wedging it between wasn't very solid.. I think here, everything's gone right so.....

KG: Amongst the building site, it's crazy.....

Ben: As long as it lasts for a little bit

KG: Do you think it will last for a little bit?

Ben: Yeah, I'm still dubious that someone will come along and give it a good prod.. no, I think it will be up for 2-3 weeks

KG: have the guys been talking about it?

Ben: A little bit, I've told them about it, they all asked what was going on there.. and what I was doing putting the plates up and the scaffolding.. it's in the pictures so they all know what it is.. I mean, I described it to them as a pile of sticks (laughter) .. I've asked a couple of them since we took the props and everything down and they seem to think it's quite interesting, but no-one's really said because of course they are really busy doing their jobs... I'm sure tomorrow once it's still there.. and in a few days' time if it's still there, I think they'll have more of an opinion on it

KG: they'll start looking at it.....

Ben: start working around it

KG: You've got to weld up above it, don't you?

Ben: We've got a few bits and pieces that will go in above it... all the ceiling.. I don't know whether it will still be up when we do all the dry lining and everything, so, yeah. I mean I'm sure the longer it's been there, people will get more used to it, and someone might end up, you know, putting something.. putting a tool down on top of it .. or leaning something against it.. they'll forget it's what it is .. a piece of art, and just accept it as it's there.....

KG: and part of the building

Ben: Yeah, part of the building

KG: It's a similar sort of thing to the site under construction although the timber now looks really fresh and planed

Ben: But it will get dusty .. cobwebs... pigeons..... we have a squirrel that lives inside the building hopefully he won't get caught inside it

KG: Does it look prettier or nicer than you thought?

Ben: Yeah, I dunno... I like timber as a material anyway but yeah.... it's interesting.... I wouldn't say it was pretty but interesting

KG: It almost looks like a beam that might have been built as part of the structure... you could imagine that someone could walk past it and not know it was an artwork..

Ben: I think if I had thought about it more before he did it, I think I would possibly have suggested doing it using in different types of wood so they are all different colours.. I said the other day it would have been nice you know to have some in a dark wood, almost like a stripe and that would have been quite interesting

KG: Is your main interest in the fact that it might fall.... Its precariousness?

Ben: I think it's a lot less precarious than I thought it would be ... I thought it would be a lot more .. I've given it a reasonable poke already , and it doesn't move (laughter) so I think it would take a fair amount of force to knock it down ... I think.. the advantage you've got is the building is still reasonably damp , so of course wood swells when it's damp. As soon as we start to get the windows and everything in and it dries out, the wood might contract, but whether it will contract enough for it to have an effect I don't know... cos it was already kiln-dry timber ...so... yeah it's a lot stronger than I thought

KG: what did you think when you were watching him set up the hexagon and then create the rest of it, it seemed to be pretty much by feel

Ben: yeah, he's done it a few times.... practice makes perfect

KG: He's not sitting there like an engineer would... probably more like your approach?

Ben: If we were doing it we'd have put a template so we would have made a hexagon out of ply, and build it up around something so that there's no errors ... but I think he's more into the feel of it and doing it by eye ; all he had was his little guide as to the angle , because actually if you look at it, we've already held a straight edge against the bottom to see how much it was sagging , but they are all very very slightly out .. so it's not 100% if you were doing it with a template of course it would all be .. because all the bits of timber are exactly the same size so you wouldn't get that

KG: So how's this project going...

Ben: I hate refurb - it's the unknown and it's also .. there's never a clear sequence .. when you are building anew, you start in the ground and you work your way up .. and then you work your way down again in this you've got to try and get on where you..... this job is quite small, there's nowhere to store materials , nowhere to put a skip, you got no outside space, everybody's working on top of each other, there's the unknown ..

KG.. And the artwork?

Ben: It's been a lot easier than I thought, actually, I was dreading it, only because it's one other thing to think about

KG: More people on site

Ben: it's over and done with now