

Kew to have its visitors walking in the tree-tops

THE architects behind the London Eye have unveiled plans to build a 60ft-high tree-top walkway at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew.

Bosses hired Marks Barfield after the success of a temporary wooden structure at the gardens two years ago.

The new £3million, 656ft-long steel walkway will snake its way through the tops of chestnut trees.

It will be designed to resemble prehistoric trees while the handrails will be made from sweet chestnuts and red oaks that fell in storms in February.

Visitors will pass through an underground exhibition before climbing stairs, or taking a lift, to a platform and 5ft-wide walkway.

The exhibition — called the rhizotron — will use hi-tech animatronic robots to show the developments of tree roots and reveal the diversity of insects and fungi that thrive underground and on the forest floor.

Once visitors climb to the walkway, they will have the chance to see close up the birds that nest in the trees and the variety of insects living in the bark. Assistant

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project manager Jill Kowal said: “We want people to walk away with the awesome feeling of going on a rollercoaster.

“But this isn’t about making Kew into a theme park. It is our attempt to bring people closer to the wonders of the trees in a very subtle way.

“It will be very tranquil and contemplative.”

Construction work is due to begin in June and it is hoped that the walkway will be open to the public in May next year.

The development is the latest phase of a multi-million-pound spending spree by Kew that has proved to be very popular with more than 1.9 million people visiting the gardens each year.

The chestnuts at Kew, which covers 300 acres, were planted in the 18th century by Lancelot “Capability” Brown and the whole range of English oaks, chestnuts and walnuts are home to woodpeckers, tawny owls and bats as well as hundreds of species of insects.