

# Canvas in popularity



How you could benefit from a good erection, by Phil Dixon CMBII

**Erections are great for our industry. By erections I am obviously talking about tents, otherwise known to members in the South of England as marquees. With the smoking ban I believe retailers should think about how marquees could help widen their offer.**

It was while discussing the business model of a number of successful licensees, which included two winners of the ultimate title (Bill Licensee of the Year), that I spotted a trend in the use of marquees.

Let's look at the positives: How much does it cost to add one letting bedroom to your premises? £27,500, according to the Pub Cos. How much to add an area where up to 70 people can wine and dine? Answer around £6,300 (+ VAT) - see costs, right.

If you have the space then suddenly you can offer to accommodate a whole new range of functions; weddings, funerals, sports-person's dinners, christenings and birthdays.

I spoke to the publicans concerned all of whom said how great their marquees were and that they had paid for themselves within a short time, typically 12 months.

However when I queried the issue of the local authority and planning I was underwhelmed by the roar of total silence. One lady (Wessex Region) licensee was adamant that the super marquee blazoned across her website had all the necessary permission - but then insisted on 'no publicity'!

Typical BII members comments were: 'You know me, Phil, I don't do planning' and 'If anyone asks, I tell them I frequently take it down and only use it occasionally'. One FBII in Somerset said his local councillor had said that 'technically' if it was up after 28 days he would need planning approval but the councillor stressed that he loved attending functions in it.

'Did you get planning?' I queried.

'Err... no,' came the reply.

'Has it been up more than 28 days?'

'Err.....yes.'

'Much more than 28 days?'

'Five and a half years, to be precise!'

It appears that in the great scheme of providing services to the community, unless someone highlights it, the 'tent' it is hardly on the list of priorities for local government personnel. Bit like serving after time prior to 2005, but this is BII BUSINESS so proper protocol must be observed (or the Editor will refuse to take me for a curry next week). There are undoubtedly three



Top photo: You need not get something this big but to pay around £6,000 for extra area that seats 70 people seems a bargain.  
Bottom: well, it's just a bit of fun for marquee supplier Bond Fabrications!

planning, and obtaining the necessary PubCo's permission if you're a tenant or lessee. For additional guidance see Jeremy Allen's column (page 34). There is the obvious issue of siting and neighbours. An AC/DC tribute band's rendition of 'Highway to Hell' is unlikely to go unnoticed within a square mile. Again, this magazine's been stressing the business case for raising your social responsibility in your locality, and obviously if you're viewed by all as a good egg, then you'll find this business-winning idea easier to implement.

If you are a tenant/lessee then you do need a discussion and correspondence with your landlord. They may hold the Premises Licence in any case. You will also need to ensure that if you invest in a marquee then the profits from the operation are not rentalised and it is agreed that this is your improvement (watch out for the four regions rent review seminar June 6 at the National Motorcycle Museum - see page 12). It would be a very strange Pub Co./brewery that did not want you selling more drinks to earn them extra revenue and then decide to exploit the situation by renting you on the proceeds, though, frankly, it hasn't stopped some of them in the past.

So what are the costs? After chatting with a couple of BII members, I paid a visit to Stroud where Nick and

Sophia run Bond Fabrications - back in February they received loads of publicity after gift packaging a house. (See picture left) [www.bondfabrications.co.uk](http://www.bondfabrications.co.uk) or phone 01453 767171

Costs of Bond Fabrications (NB these are just a guide) new marquees are as follows.

Size in feet	no. of people seated at tables	Average price (installed including windows)
40 x 20	60-70	£6,300 +VAT
30 x 20	40-50	£5,100 +VAT
20 x 20	20-30	£3,900 +VAT

Fred Davies FBII of the Queens Head in the west country told me that his marquee had paid for itself within 17 months. Mathew Beard, Manager at Colwick Hall see [www.colwick-hall.co.uk](http://www.colwick-hall.co.uk) simply stated 'without ours we would not be able to trade profitably'. It is essential for conferences, exhibitions, weddings and other celebrations. The installation of the marquee was though not without its issues. The local authority objected to the original size as it affected the 'vista' of the elegant listed building.

"We had to lose 10 metres and introduce tight controls on noise in respect of neighbours after 11 pm but it is still worth it," says Matthew.

Other BII members such as Paul Clerehugh MBII (a superb finalist in this year's BII Licensee of the Year Award) feel they can assist wonderful events but prefer to hire.

"I am not really comfortable dealing with such a large erection by myself," confirmed Paul (*Readers, I must stress that Paul, an excellent businessman, didn't actually use those exact words, I'm merely paraphrasing him in a desperate bid to end this month's column on a high*). Paul adds: "I prefer to hire as and when I need to."

If all the 'experts' and the odd 'guru' are right estimating that in the post-smoking ban era 90% of pubs need to improve their standards and their offer then a marquee creating an extra function/dining/conference room is surely worthy of consideration.

**Phildixoncmbii@aol.com**

PS For those members with bowling greens frequented by players, who have a small lemonade and then moan about the price, please feel free to show them this article and remind them that they have a choice!