

LONDON LEGACY

After all the Olympic glory, and the rain, in 2012, the temporary structures sector is more creative and more adaptive than ever. **Mike White** talks past, present and future with representatives from the top of the market.

Last year brought mixed blessings to the temporary structures sector. Multinational De Boer is reporting the busiest and most profitable year the firm has ever had, boosted by providing 50,000sq m of infrastructure to LOCOG, including a catering area within the Athletes' Village for more than 15,000 competitors.

The company fulfilled contracts with the European Football Championships in Poland and the Ukraine, Farnborough International, Southampton Boat Show and the Chelsea Flower Show, with several of these builds running simultaneously with their Olympic commitments.

"Our human resources were definitely stretched," event sales director, John Cochrane, says. "Everybody had to work twice as hard as usual. But we got through it and we didn't let anybody down."

De Boer maintained momentum into 2013, supplying 5,000sq m of structures to the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters in January, for a seventh consecutive year. Major contracts include the RBS Six Nations, AEG's concert series in Hyde Park and multi-site provision for Jaguar Land Rover.

"Their business is booming, which is having a knock-on effect for us," Cochrane says.

Repeat/multi-year contracts are a vital part of the portfolio. De Boer is supplying the main floral marquee at the RHS

Hampton Court Palace Flower Show as part of a three-year contract, as well as 12,000sq m of exhibition space, hospitality and catering units at Kensington Palace Gardens for the recently relocated Decorex design and interiors show, another project the company has been involved with for several years.

"Our clients are finding life tricky in the current economic climate, but they still have to satisfy their clients, so they're looking for ideas," Cochrane continues. To this end, De Boer is launching a new curved roof aluminium structure, the Anova, with horizontal vista window panels, improved insulation and cantilevered overhangs which can function as canopies or service corridors and lobbies.

"It's flexible, it's lightweight and we can put more of it on one truck, so environmentally it helps, too."

Floodland

With 95 per cent of its business in the UK, Gloucester-based Attwoolls had an unremitting battle with Britain's wettest summer for a century.

MEGASTORE: A Neptunus Evolution structure at Olympic Park in 2012



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TOP: An Attwoolls 30m clearspan structure at Shrewsbury Flower Show in 2012

LEFT: De Boer facilities provide more than 90,000sq m of floorspace at Farnborough International

The Badminton Horse Trials, in May, was cancelled after all the structures had gone up and it was a similar story at the CLA Game Fair two months later. The firm is currently building a new equipment-cleaning plant as a result.

"At least 35 per cent of our events were either called off or cancelled after we'd built them," sales director, Nigel Attwooll, tells Access. "It was a summer of mud."

The Olympics brought better fortunes. It supplied structures at several sites across London and Attwooll remains optimistic. "Bookings are as good as last year. As long as we get a good run on the weather, it should be fine." The company's contract highlights include the Shrewsbury Flower Show and work at the South of England Showground and the Royal Welsh Showground. And Attwooll believes its bespoke service is the key to attracting business.

"We design and manufacture everything in-house, meaning we can offer a service tailored to each client. We run our own transport fleet and we never subcontract labour. When we send a team out it's a team that's been trained by us."

The Arena Group was another company with a wealth of canvas on site for London 2012. "It was testing in terms of delivering the Olympics and ensuring that our regular client base was satisfied," Grahame Muir, managing director of the company's UK business, says. "But, with a few grey hairs, we managed to satisfy everyone. We doubled our turnover in one year and were able to invest in

more than £6.5m worth of new product, which is a fantastic legacy for us.

"We were the only Olympic supply partner trusted with a full design and build contract too, for the beach volleyball arena at Horse Guards Parade," Muir continues. "It wasn't just the supply of commodities, structures and seats, we took responsibility for absolutely everything, from the sand to the lighting to the signage, you name it. It will be a great reference project for us going forward."

The Open Golf Championship at Royal and Ancient at St Andrews, another major project, saw Arena successfully unveil a high-end two-storey structure, the Arcus. "We have invested in more [kit] on the back of that, in addition to the new product brought in for the Olympics, which is now available in our standard rental inventory," Muir says.

Although quiet in comparison to 2012, this year has started well for Arena, with a new four-year Jockey Club contract to provide kit to Aintree for the Grand National, to Cheltenham for the Festival, and to Newmarket. "That was a great early win for the year," Muir says. "We've also been lucky enough to secure a three-year contract with the European Tour, to have our on-going involvement with Ryder Cup confirmed and to win a big job for the Volvo World Match Play Championship in Bulgaria."

"WE DESIGN AND MANUFACTURE EVERYTHING IN-HOUSE, MEANING WE CAN OFFER A SERVICE TAILORED TO EACH CLIENT." NIGEL ATTWOOLL

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"The big brands that support big events travel," Muir adds. "Arena has had a strong UK business for a number of years, we have a wholly-owned business in the Middle East, we acquired a huge business in America a few weeks ago and we're just about to sign up for a new business in Kuala Lumpur. So we're able to offer Arena Group quality and service across continents, giving a consistent approach to the [names] we work with."

And although event organisers are under pricing pressure, Muir sees a silver lining in the cloud of intense competition. "In order to keep up, businesses have to remain close to their client base and one of the great ways of doing that is by being at sporting and hospitality events," he nods. "So any opportunity to do that is being grasped."

Neptunus Group managing director April Trasler describes 2012 as a milestone year for the business. "We moved into new premises in Northampton, having purchased a three-and-a-half acre site, and built exactly what we wanted on it," she says. "Our warehouse buildings are from our own semi-permanent range."

Neptunus provided structures for the Queen's Jubilee Concert and was an official supplier to several Olympic projects, including a three-storey hospitality complex for Prestige Ticketing, which accommodated 3,000 guests per day. The company also supplied two restaurant structures in Olympic Park and 400sq m for a retail megastore.

"Working in Olympic Park was a challenge for everybody," Trasler says. "It's the first time that such a proportion of the event industry has worked to CDM regulations and the site itself brought additional complications. The buildings we were installing were predominately two and three-storey and needed significant foundations, because the ground-bearing capacity was insufficient."

In common with many key London 2012 suppliers, the Games might have gone, but the order book at Neptunus has stayed busy. "If you take the Olympics out of what we did last year, we're looking at a growth of about 40 per cent," Trasler says. Having provided for the Chelsea Flower Show centenary (see cover story) Neptunus' kit will be at Hampton Court Palace, Harrogate, Frieze Art Fair and the British Touring Car Championships. Manufacturing products in-house and building bespoke packing boxes and stillages helps ensure best use of vehicle load space and thereby reduces transport costs.

"When we're dismantling one site, we prepare loading lists for equipment that can go straight on to the next job," Trasler adds. "We're always looking to work more efficiently where possible."

Joined Up Thinking

Together with the all-important retail business, Kent-based Allspan has had a number of 'extras' bolstering its order books. Last year, these included providing structures to house security for the Olympics hospitality areas, along with work at the All England equestrian centre at Hickstead and Goodwood Festival of Speed.

"Goodwood was a new contract," business development manager, Richard Trembl, tells this magazine. "A 400sq m structure for Project Bloodhound, the world's first

PERFECT PICTURE: De Boer worked with Zurich Municipal and McLaren's loss adjusters to design and build a replacement creative arts block at Lytchett Minster Upper School after fire ripped through the building. The 3,000sq m temporary structure, erected on the school's playing fields, was completed in time for A-Level and GCSE examinations.

1,000mph car. That's a multi-year deal, so we're very happy about that." Other highlights in Allspan's 2012 calendar included supplying a 500sq m sponsors' structure for Opera Holland Park and a long-term catering facility for London Ambulance Service's emergency response area during the 2012 Games.

"We've also done the Event Production Show for the last couple of years, where we actually put up a structure inside Olympia for the organisers to use. That's a great showpiece for us."

Allspan continues a long-standing agreement with Westminster Abbey and Southwark Cathedral, providing 360sq m hospitality structures with glass panelling, balcony areas and external decking, and has just completed a project to provide a 250sq m pavilion for new client, Clerkenwell Design Week. And, rather than introducing new products, the firm is "significantly increasing" its stock holding. "Obviously you don't go out and buy kit just for the sake of it, this expansion is the result of a successful couple of years of trading and an increased order book," Trembl says. "Expectations are rising, but that focus on quality and attention to detail only helps companies like Allspan. Budgets have been reduced by a number of clients, but a significant proportion of our turnover is based upon longevity. We've got a good name built on twenty years of trusted service. We're not the biggest supplier in the world but we do what we do very well."

Another business seeking to expand existing stock holdings rather than bring out new kit is Fews Marquees, which is focussing on building up its premium range.

"[that element] represents a big learning curve for us, as it's brought very different jobs and more corporate work than the traditional wedding market," sales and operations manager, Matt Porter, says. Last summer's highlights included structures at Southampton Boat Show, Cheltenham Racecourse and Silverstone, and Fews is somewhere between 20 per cent and 25 per cent up on last year, with more prestigious contracts coming in, such as the structures for a

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TOP: A six pole Kayam Valhalla structure at *Story of a Fort, Legacy of a Nation* by Franco Dragone in Abu Dhabi
LEFT: Few's Marquees at the Southampton Boat Show

temporary museum and guest area for British Athletics.

The company has been able to expand its market share, in particular when event organisers are dissatisfied with their current supplier, either in terms of product quality or service, Porter continues, "We're picking up work where they're looking for something more specialized and aesthetically pleasing, or able to offer better thermal efficiency, for example."

Although admitting that bad weather can complicate build and take-down, Few's did some analysis at the end of last year and found that the summer's record-breaking rain hadn't had a significant impact on profit. "It just makes the job more exciting," Porter says. "We're only as good as the people we employ and we're on a recruitment drive so we can continue our growth."

Tensile structure specialist Kayam is another company happy to go the extra mile for its clients. "We did a big job for the Royal Family in Abu Dhabi, and they insisted on having backstage doors that you could ride a camel through," special contracts manager, Richard Abel, says. "We rose to the challenge, using special sand-specific ground anchors to secure a 5000sq m Valhalla structure in place for three months."

"Half our business now is outside the UK. We're doing quite a bit of work in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, including the Wilsonic festival in Slovakia, which will involve building structures on an island in the Danube."

"We're not introducing any new products," Abel adds. "We're keeping with the same lines we've got and expanding the stock. In many ways a new structure or a major development is market driven, so it's going to be a matter of the feedback we get from clients and at the moment we're not getting many people saying 'Why can't you do this?' or 'Why can't you add that?' The feedback is generally very good." Although any new product launch has to be driven by client demand, Kayam remains proactive and prepared for shifts in the industry.

"Technology is changing all the time, with new techniques and materials emerging. We do have three or four designs on the drawing board so we're ready to innovate and respond quickly to changes in the market place."

