

BETTER TOGETHER

Leicestershire chief executive Wasim Khan explains the rationale behind the merger of the professional and recreational arms of the club, the benefits of floodlights and a turnaround in commercial fortunes.

Having previously run Chance to Shine I'd been acutely aware of the slightly disjointed nature of the relationship between professional clubs and their recreational boards. It made no sense to have two separate entities, both based at our ground, essentially trying to do the same thing – which is, to get more men and women, boys and girls playing cricket in the county, and having some level of social impact across our diverse communities.

We went through the legal process of merging in 2016 and made assurances that the voice of the recreational game would continue to be heard. We created a new tier of membership called an Organisational Member, which means the recreational game can vote every three years for the person they want to represent them on



Let there be lights: the ICC-standard floodlights at the Fischer County Ground at Grace Road

the main Club board with full voting rights. It was important to make clear that this wasn't a takeover. It was a merger with the right intentions – to drive the game forward from top to bottom in Leicestershire and Rutland.

Apart from Worcestershire, we were the only First Class County without floodlights. Our research suggested that the 5.30 starts for our NatWest T20 Blast games didn't work for the majority of people coming from work but 6.30 starts made complete sense, hence the need for lights. There was a grant available from ECB that allowed us to accelerate the process and we were able to install the highest-spec ICC-standard floodlights. This year we will also have use of the lights for Specsavers County Championship matches as well when the light is bad.

There was some push back from local residents but most understood the need for us to get into the 21st century. They understood the future viability of the club was at stake. We have one of the most densely-populated areas around a county ground. When I arrived in 2015 we were struggling to engage with the local community but support for cricket is growing now.

Being a group-stage venue for the ICC Women's World Cup is a huge coup for us and shows the progress we have made over the last two years. Prior to 2015 we had made cumulative losses for three years of £550,000. In 2016 we had a net surplus of just over £8,000 – up from a net surplus of £4,500 in 2015, and we're hoping for profit this year to be close to £100,000. Last year we held an Elton John concert which brought 17,000 to the ground.

We're trying to increase our fan engagement and improve people's experience when they come to the ground. We're installing a huge replay screen and launching a Leicestershire app. This year we're introducing a multi-faith Prayer Box at the ground which will be especially useful when matches take place during Ramadan, for example. We're trying to make the ground as welcoming and accessible as possible for all supporters.

