



Community cohesion through cricket

AS HIGH Sheriff in nomination in 2018, I attended a meeting of Bedfordshire Crimebeat at which the chair was insistent that it was a tradition in Bedfordshire for the High Sheriff to organise a charity cricket match. At the time I protested vehemently that I knew nothing about cricket. However, on reflection, I thought that actually a cricket match would be an ideal vehicle to support my proposed theme for my year in office – Community Cohesion.

Shrieval training sessions had emphasised the importance of preparation in order to ‘hit the ground running’ after taking office. So, in September 2018 I met the commercial manager of Luton Town Football Club (LTFC) and was delighted that he readily agreed to help me. He suggested that we approach Luton Town and Indians Cricket Club (LTICC) to hold a match between the two clubs on their excellent pitch in Wardown Park, Luton.

Over the following months we had five full meetings to review progress. Both clubs worked hard preparing the infrastructure and attracting sponsorship as well as producing a range of publicity including setting up a ‘Just Giving’ Bedfordshire Crimebeat page.

The aim was to have a family fun day to raise as much money as possible

for Bedfordshire Crimebeat. It was to be free entry event and have a range of world foods and drinks as well as plenty of activities and entertainment including music provided by the Local Radio station, Dhol Drummers, face painting, the ‘Star Wars’ Troupe and Bat Fast (a cricket simulator). Stands were also booked by organisations such as Rotary/Inner Wheel, the Food Bank and Sports Massage. As it was Armed Forces Week we were pleased to welcome the Army Stand and volunteers from the Sea Cadets as well as from Luton Borough Council and St John Ambulance.

Particular favourites on the day were the fire brigade who came not only with a fire engine but also their baby fire engine which they had made for children. The Community Police brought their police car and a range of police



Above: Chairman of Luton Town FC David Wilkinson presenting cheque to the High Sheriff
Below: Luton Town FC and LTICC cricket teams with the High Sheriff



Photo: Gareth Owen



Photo: Peter Ryan Photography

PCSO Daniel McHugh, High Sheriff, Abdus Salaam and PC Karanjit Sanghera

uniforms and hats for visitors to try on. All of this was such good fun for children and adults!

The gates opened to the public at noon on Sunday 23 June 2019, and I was escorted on to the pitch at 12.30 pm by the Dhol Drummers and tossed the coin which LTFC won. The captain decided to put the Indians’ team in first to bat. At 1.00 pm the match started featuring Monty Panesar (former England spinner) and Zaif Saib (Northampton CC) and from Luton Town Football Club Mick Harford (former manager and ex England international) and David Wilkinson (chairman). The cricket match was extremely exciting as LTICC finished with 285 runs from 40 overs before Luton Town’s commercial manager won the tournament for LTFC hitting a four with the very last ball of the game giving LTFC a finishing score of 286.

At the end of the match I presented Luton Town Football Club with the High Sheriff’s Award and in return I was given a giant cheque for £8,363.30 which has increased to over £10,000 with further donations. It was a really wonderful day, well supported by former High Sheriffs and nearly 1,000 spectators from the ‘super diverse’ communities of Luton. It was a true example of community cohesion at its best.

Meryl Dolling
High Sheriff of Bedfordshire 2019-20