



Sep 12, 2025 11:59 BST

Country's second all-weather cricket dome opens, boosting access for state school children

The country's second all-weather cricket dome has officially opened in Darwen, Lancashire. This state-of-the-art facility marks another important step in the ECB's drive to expand access to cricket to more young people from all backgrounds, with a particular focus on revitalising the game in state schools.

The dome at Darwen Cricket Club offers the community a fully enclosed environment designed to host cricket year-round, regardless of weather

conditions. It features three full-length lanes and can also be used for match play, transforming into a flexible space for coaching, matches, and community events.

Boosting access to cricket for state school pupils is at the heart of the project. Darwen Cricket Club and Lancashire Cricket Foundation will work together to deliver cricket programmes in partnership with more than 13 state schools in the local area, with activity taking place in schools, in the cricket dome and on the cricket ground.

The project has been developed in collaboration with Sir Rod Aldridge, Founder of the Aldridge Foundation and Aldridge Education Multi Academy Trust. Four of the schools in Darwen, which are part of the Trust's family of academies, are involved in this project. Sir Rod has also supported the project financially along with other funding partners including Harris Trust, Lloyd Trust Charity, Brian Mercer Trust and UK Shared Prosperity Fund through Blackburn with Darwen Council.

England star Kate Cross was among those in attendance to officially open the dome this week.

ECB Chair Richard Thompson said: "This is a game-changer for state school cricket in the North West. We want every child, regardless of where they go to school, to have the opportunity to fall in love with cricket. This dome, and the partnership between the club, Lancashire Cricket Foundation and 13 local schools, is a powerful step towards levelling the playing field and become a real community asset.

"Domes like this are a vital part of our plan to create a lasting legacy from hosting the 2026 ICC Women's T20 World Cup and the 2030 ICC Men's T20 World Cup in England and Wales, providing top class facilities to use all-year-round right in the heart of the community. By working with a range of partners, we hope to build many more facilities like this across England and Wales in the years ahead to throw open cricket's doors and help cricket become the most inclusive team sport."

The Darwen facility is the second of its kind in England, following the successful launch of the inaugural dome in Bradford in 2023. The success of the Bradford dome has proved the concept, which the ECB will now look to roll out nationally. By providing high-quality infrastructure in underserved

areas, the ECB aims to unlock talent, foster inclusion, and ensure cricket is a sport for everyone.

A further dome in Willenhall, West Midlands, is also nearing completion, while the Government recently announced £1.5m to contribute towards a further two of the facilities in Luton and Farington, Lancashire, which are expected to open next year.

Jen Barden, Executive Director of the Lancashire Cricket Foundation, said: “We are delighted by the opening of the new cricket dome in Darwen - just the second of its kind to open in the UK.

“It is fantastic news for state schools in our local area and will provide vital year-round access to keep young cricketers - including those taking their first steps into the game - engaged for the full year, rather than just during the summer months.

“We are incredibly fortunate that Lancashire will have two cricket domes in the near future, with an additional dome set to open at Farington next year. It is testament to the work being done by Lancashire Cricket Foundation, in partnership with the club, with additional support provided from the ECB and UK Government.”

Chris Lowe, Chair, Darwen Cricket Club, said: “It’s a unique and exciting opportunity to make a difference to cricket and our community – supporting cricket in local schools, strengthening our club, growing access for all to cricket across our region, and enriching the wider community.”

Sir Rod Aldridge said: “The Aldridge Foundation believes that more young people attending state schools should have the opportunity to play cricket and benefit from the positive attributes that it brings to individuals along with the community spirit it encourages. Through the cricket programme that my Foundation has run for the past 10 years in another of our academies based in Brighton, we have seen the power of cricket play a major role in enhancing academic learning and the development in a person the personal attributes that many employers are seeking, whilst developing a life long love of the game.

“Through this partnership between Lancashire Cricket Foundation and

Darwen Cricket Club, the dome will bring enormous pleasure to so many young people in the surrounding areas for many years ahead and will have an enormous positive impact on their lives. I applaud the ECB for backing this initiative and tapping into the positive impact that a local cricket club has within a community.”



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