

SFN Team · Feb 28

The Saffrons story: “We’ve built a new business model around padel”

The Saffrons in Eastbourne has revitalised its 139-year-old sports club by introducing four padel courts, breathing new life into the facility and boosting finances. Now open to the community rather than just members, this modern approach shows how padel can be a true game-changer.

Read the full article from the [The Padel Paper](#) to find out how The Saffrons built a thriving new business model around padel—and what’s coming next!



Padel has been hailed as a key ingredient in saving The Saffrons – a venerable 139-year-old multi-sports club in the heart of Eastbourne, East Sussex.

Four padel courts (three canopied and one open-air) were opened at The Saffrons in January and the impact of the new facilities has already been labelled “a game-changer” for the club, which had been in gradual decline.

Five years ago, The Saffrons’ committee held an emergency meeting to discuss the club’s future. The traditional on-site team sports alone weren’t sufficient to sustain the longer-term club finances, given spiralling costs and the need for ongoing contributions to its sinking fund.

With football, hockey and cricket pitches, croquet lawns and an outdoor gym, The Saffrons had been a staple of Eastbourne’s sporting scene for many generations. However, Chair Roger Myall says the traditional ‘sports club’ business model that had just about kept the club afloat for so

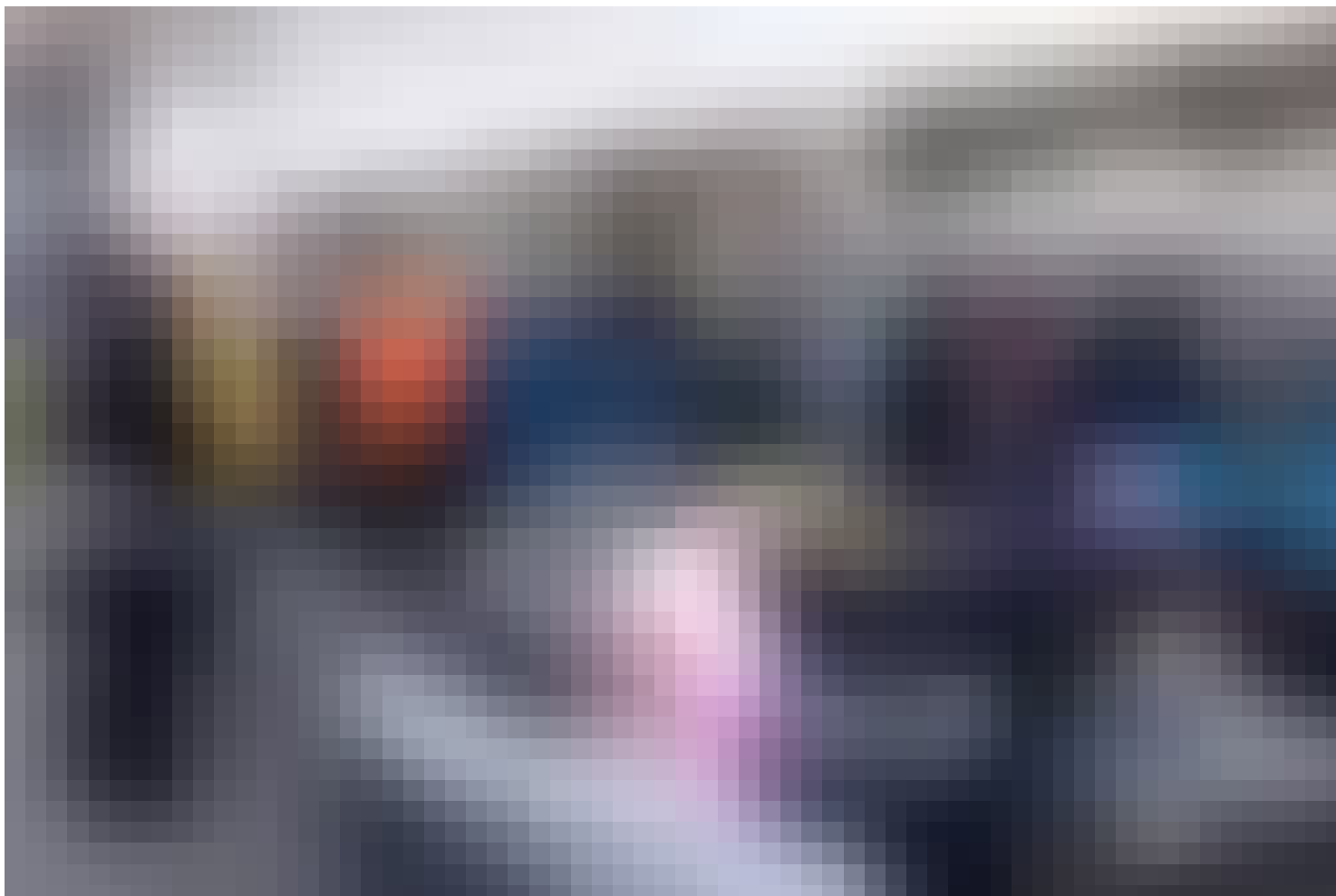
many decades was finally "broken."



Roger told *The Padel Paper*: "Other than evenings and weekends, there was nothing going on at the club. The bar and facilities were pretty poor. So we put a feasibility study together and devised a development plan and we viewed padel as very much the 'glue' within that plan. We essentially built a new business model around padel."

With a prime 18-acre site in the middle of town with 100+ parking spaces, the potential of The Saffrons as a viable business had always been there. But the Victorian flint wall surrounding the perimeter had given the denizens of Eastbourne the impression that it was an exclusive members' club. "We'd essentially spent 135 years keeping people out!" admitted Roger.

Padel was the vehicle to make the club more attractive and inclusive. Padel4all made a sizeable investment on the site and are running four courts offering an array of courses and sessions designed to attract all standards and ages of players, just as they have so successfully at their other clubs in Bristol, Southend and Swindon.

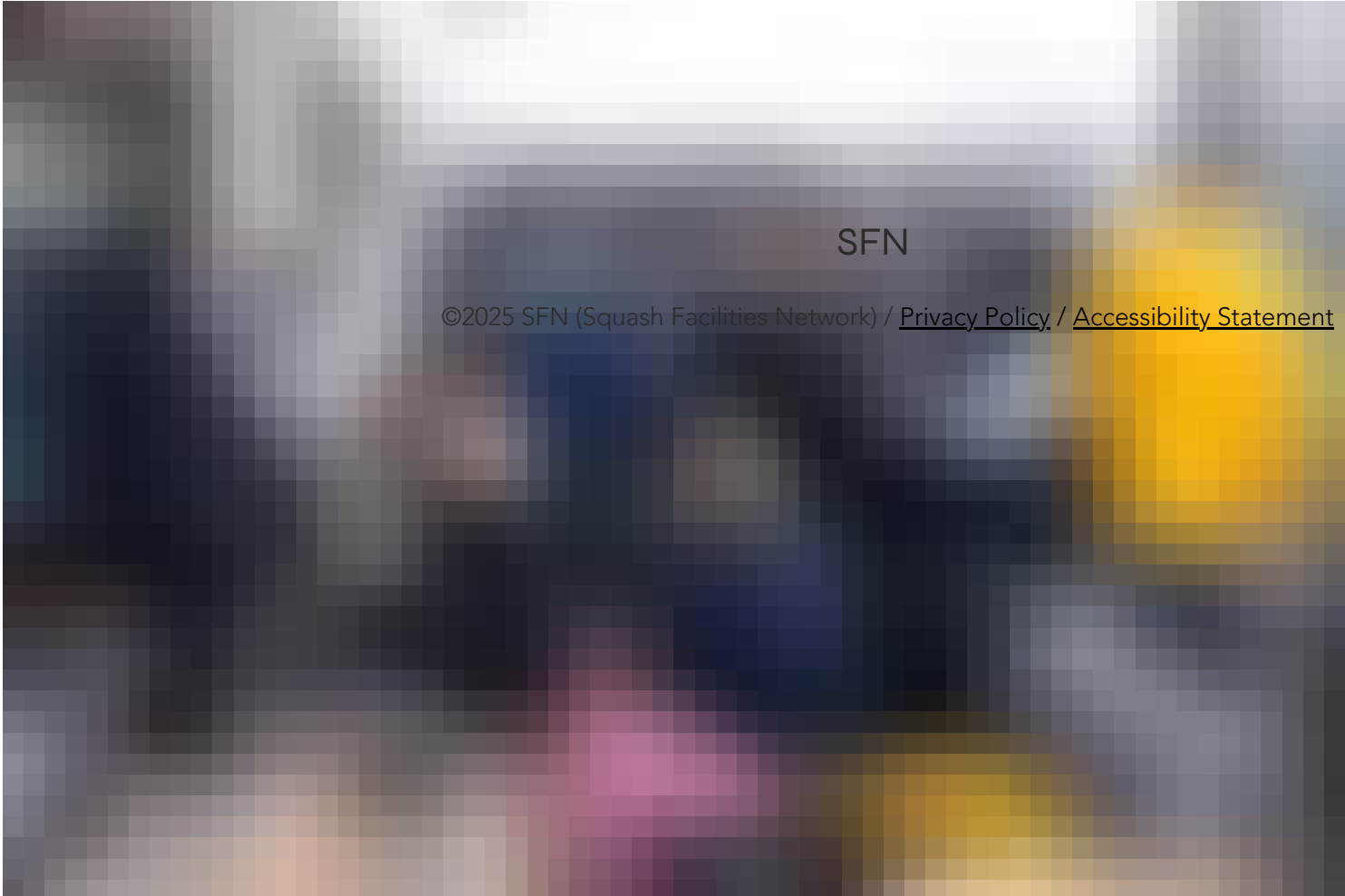


"Even having been open for just a month or so, we're already starting to create critical mass," explained Roger. "Four courts potentially means 16 people playing, 16 people waiting to play and 16 people who have just finished. We're getting footfall into the club and they are using the new cafe."

Using the impetus provided by padel and its impact on the cafe, the club is planning to create a wider hospitality destination on the site, partnering with a local brewery to create an event space and tap room in April.

Roger added: "It has given the whole place a lift. Considering our location, we were so under-utilised you just wouldn't believe it. But now it feels a lot nicer and more professional and will hopefully form the basis of our financial stability going forward with the advent of the bar and coffee shop."

Roger, who played cricket and football at The Saffrons in his younger days, is typical of the sort of demographic in the town who can now be tempted to return to the club by padel. "I think we'll start to get multiple generations of the same family coming down," he said. "The 35-year-old couples with kids can bring their social set to the tap room brewery, their kids can get into hockey, cricket and football, and grandma and grandad can play bowls or croquet with the whole family enjoying the padel experience. I can see that happening as we get into spring and summer."



By opening up to all demographics in the local community, The Saffrons can also qualify for more local and national funding grants. They are also receiving rent from Padel4all, so it has opened up multiple sources of new revenue.

"Padel has enabled us to remodel and reposition the club as a community asset," said Roger. "There is huge potential for padel operators to find other multi-sports clubs like us, because existing sites like ours do already have a moderate critical mass and are full of potential when you add coffee shops and bars too.

"People who thought The Saffrons was a private members' club now know they are all welcome to come and play padel. Padel puts us on the map, allows us to shout about the facility, to change people's perception of us, get more people on site and make more money."

Dax Mellor, Director of Operations at Padel4all, who run the padel facility at The Saffrons, said: "It's been a real privilege to be involved in The Saffron's project at Eastbourne. Credit must go to Roger and the committee for having the courage to set out a vision which has helped to transform their club.

"When we became involved, we were very aware of the history of The Saffrons and knew the importance they placed on delivering community sport at the heart of the town. To build something which offers a new sport to a new audience is an achievement, but to be the bond which helps bring together an existing network of clubs, teams and users is incredibly rewarding and is at the core of what we do at Padel4all."