Amendments agreed in July 2019 are shown in red italics

NATIONAL GROUND GRADING - CATEGORY F

(Appropriate to NLS Step 5)

When considering any developments of the ground to comply with the requirements of this grade, clubs are recommended to bear in mind the criteria for higher gradings which might be achieved for minimal additional expense.

NB The suitability of all installations shall be at the sole discretion of the FA Ground Grading Technical Panel

1. GROUND

The ground must give an overall appearance and impression of being a football ground suitable for the National League System.

It must be possible for spectators to view the match, either standing or seated, for the full length of at least 3 sides of the playing area but see also para 2.1. Where any side is designated as spectator-free, measures must be in place to ensure there is no unauthorised access.

The location of the ground, in so far as its relation to the conurbation whose name the club bears, or is traditionally associated with, must meet with the approval of both The Football Association and the Board of Directors or Management Committee of the league of which it is in membership.

The club must disclose plans and details of any proposed future move to a new stadium or of any significant alteration to the existing ground to both the league of which it is in membership and The Football Association.

1.1 Security of Tenure

The club must demonstrate security of tenure as required by The Football Association and the league of which it is a member. (Standardised rule 2.3.2)

1.2 Ground Share

Ground sharing is permitted in accordance with the provisions of individual league rules and the Regulations for the Establishment and Operation of the National League System.

1.3 Capacity

There is no minimum capacity at this level but a club should be mindful that the minimum requirement for Grade D is 1300.

1.4 Boundary of Ground

The ground must be enclosed by a permanent boundary. As a general rule, the minimum height, when measured from outside the ground, must be 1.83 metres. It should be noted that at higher grades the boundary fence should be of a construction to prevent viewing from outside the ground.

Where any side of the ground is bounded by private land/property, the fixed boundary of that private land / property may be acceptable as the boundary of the ground

1.5 Clubhouse

There must be a clubhouse facility either on or adjacent to the ground, which should be open on match days to provide refreshments to spectators.

1.6 Car Parking

There should be adequate car parking facilities on or adjacent to the ground. Car parking within the ground may not be acceptable

1.7 Pitch Perimeter Barrier

Subject to the provisions detailed below, there must be a permanent fixed barrier ideally 1.1 m high as measured from the spectator side, of sound construction (eg concrete and steel) and free from all sharp edges, surrounding the pitch on all sides that may be occupied by spectators. Existing barriers/rails not at 1.1m high may be acceptable, provided they meet the requirements set out in 1.7 of the Appendix. *Any barriers installed at new grounds should be purposed designed, with integrated infill panels as required and be made from UPVC or coated metal.*

The barrier, if other than solid wall type of construction may be infilled. Plastic multi-purpose hi-vis fencing is not considered suitable for infill.

There must be a minimum of 1.83 metres, ideally 2 metres, between the touchline, goal line and the pitch perimeter barrier. In the case of new stadium, the minimum must be 3 metres.

Immediately in front of an area of seated accommodation the boundary of the playing area may be indicated by means other than a permanent fixed barrier, provided the Club is able to provide assurances that no spectator be allowed to stand in this area to watch the match.

Where there is a walkway in front of a standing terrace which is itself fronted by a crush barrier that has itself been subject to an annual risk assessment and, if necessary, tested, an alternative to a fixed barrier (e.g. A-frames) may be used, provided no spectators are allowed to stand in this area to watch the match. The Club must implement a safety management system to ensure this and also to protect the integrity of the playing area.

NB where A-frames are utilised instead of a fixed barrier, they must be continuous.

(See also Appendix)

1.8 Pitch Standards

The playing surface must be grass, unless otherwise authorised by the Competition's Board of Directors, and must be of the highest possible standard. It must be level and free from surface depressions and excessive undulations.

The maximum slope allowable shall not exceed an even gradient of vertical to horizontal 1: 41 in any direction. NB When a new pitch is being developed or significant improvements made to a pitch, the gradient of 1:41 would not be acceptable and the pitch must be constructed with reference to the FA Performance Quality Standard.

The playing surface must be maintained to a standard acceptable to the competition in which the club is playing or seeks to play.

3G football turf

3G football turf may only be used provided conditions (i) to (v) below have been met (the "Performance Standard"):

(i) The pitch must be surfaced with 3G football turf that has laboratory type approval according to the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf (2012 & 2015 editions) – FIFA Recommended One Star/Quality level.

(ii) The 3G football turf pitch must be listed on The Association's register of 3G football turf pitches by no later than 31 ~~July~~ *May* and tested annually at the Club's expense.

(iii) Where a 3G football turf pitch is not yet listed on The Association's register (for example if it is a newly installed pitch), a Club must obtain a *Laboratory* Performance Test ~~Certificate or Laboratory~~ *R*eport and submit it to The Association by no later than 31 July.

(iv) The Association reserves the right to instruct a Club to have its pitch tested at any time in order to ensure that it meets the Performance Standard. All such tests shall be at the Club's expense.

(v)The 3G football turf, including run-offs, shall be one continuous playing surface and shall be green in colour at least one metre from the outer edge of the touchline and goal line. All line markings shall be in accordance with the Laws of Association Football.

1.9 Playing Area

The playing area to be a minimum of 100 metres x 64 metres and must conform to the requirements of the Laws of the Game.

Goalposts and goal net supports must be of professional manufacture and conform to the relevant safety requirements and to the requirements of the Laws of the Game.

(See also Appendix)

1.10 Technical Area

Two covered trainers' boxes clearly marked "Home" and "Away or Visitors" must be provided unless adequate provision is made in a seated stand. They must be on the same side of the pitch ideally either side of the halfway line, ideally both equidistant from it and ideally a minimum of 3 metres apart and provide an unobstructed view of the playing area.

NB When new boxes are being constructed or installed, they must be on each side of the half way line, equidistant from it and a minimum of 3 metres apart.

Each box must accommodate at least 8 persons on fixed seats or benches. Where bench seating is provided, a minimum of 0.5 m must be allowed for each person (i.e. 8 persons require a minimum of 4 metres.).

Portable trainers' boxes are permitted but must be securely fixed when in use.

A technical area must be marked out, in accordance with the guidance contained in the 'Laws of the Game' booklet.

1.11 Safe Walkway

There must be a safe, unimpeded passage for players and match officials between the dressing rooms and the pitch.

The use of protection designed products such as permanent structures or retractable tunnels to separate players and spectators is recommended.

The design of the safe walkway will inevitably differ from ground to ground and it will rarely guarantee the safe passage of players and match officials unless supplemented by stewards. A club should implement procedures appropriate to the particular structure and be ready to respond to on the field situations which might affect spectator behaviour.

1.12 Floodlighting

Floodlights must be provided to an average lux reading of at least 120. No single reading can be less than one quarter of the highest reading so as to ensure an even spread of light. NB When installing a new system, clubs are advised to check any planning restrictions for its use.

Reading shall be on a grid of 88 markings (8 across, 11 down) evenly spaced with the outside readings taken 2.5 metres inside from the touchline. The average of all the readings is taken to be the average illumination level in lux of the floodlighting installation.

The lux values must be tested every two years in accordance with current guidelines by an approved independent contractor. Floodlights must be retested after any significant alterations. Existing certification will be accepted provided that the test was carried out within the last two years unless work has been carried out at the ground which may have affected previous readings.

It is also recommended that at the same time as testing the lights clubs also test the electrical supply within the ground to ensure that the system complies with current electrical standards and request a visual inspection of the columns for signs of corrosion, fatigue and overloading.

An example of an “approved” contractor is one which is in possession of the NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting) Approved Contractors Award or ISO 9000/BS 5750 (International Standards/British Standards) or is a member of the Electrical Contractors' Association. Alternatively, it can be a contractor deemed acceptable by the league.

The contractor must, when detailing the lux values, give confirmation in writing of the date when the illumination test equipment used was last calibrated.

When new or improved installations are being planned, the lighting procured must meet BS 12193 Class 2 and have an average lux reading of at least 200.

1.13 Public Address System

A public address system must be provided which is clearly audible in all those areas of the ground which can be occupied by spectators.

1.14 Entrances

There must be at least 1 fully operational turnstile (which must be of the revolving type) or a pay box where a charge for entry to the ground can be taken. In both cases a grille or similar for the payment window and a lock that can be operated from inside must be incorporated.

Electronic turnstiles with bar code readers are also acceptable but an emergency procedure must be in place in the event of a power failure. Adequate protection and security must be incorporated for the turnstile operator or, where tickets are sold from a box office, the cashier.

It must be possible to gain access to the spectator viewing areas from the turnstiles via a bound surface to a minimum width of 0.9 metre.

1.15 Exits

All exits must be clearly signed, ideally with "running man" signs, and are to be kept clear and free from obstructions. (For further information, reference should be made to the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds.)

There must be access via a bound surface to all exits from the nearest spectator viewing areas.

1.16 Lighting

(See Appendix)

1.17 Adjoining Pitches

Where deemed that they are likely to interfere with the playing of a match, ball games will not be played on adjoining pitches whilst a match is in progress.

1.18 Emergency Access

Access must be provided for the emergency services and maintained free from obstruction.

2. SPECTATOR FACILITIES

2.1 Spectator Accommodation

Covered accommodation, which should preferably be on 2 sides of the ground, must be of sound construction of timber/steel/brick/concrete or any combination of these materials. Existing timber stands are only acceptable subject to a fire risk assessment conducted by a competent person.

The minimum covered accommodation must be 200, of which at least 100 must be seated. These 100 seats, in not more than 2 stands, may be inclusive of Directors/Committee and press seating. No stand may have less than 50 seats

Whilst individual seats are preferred, bench seating may be permitted provided that it is in good repair and that individual spaces (min 500mm) are clearly marked.

These 100 seats must afford a good view of the pitch and be clean, functional and in good condition.

There must be a minimum of 16 seats provided for Directors/Committee and guests with a minimum of 8 seats provided for the visiting club. These seats must be clearly marked "Home" and "Away Directors".

Additional seating may be provided in other areas of the ground. However, these seats are not to be classed as being "in lieu" of the number shown above.

Standing spectators are not allowed in or near a seated spectator stand where they can obstruct views.

Areas where spectators are not permitted to stand must be clearly marked with yellow hatched markings. Alternatively, appropriate signage may be acceptable.

Hard standing to a minimum width of 0.9 metre, measured from the spectator side of the pitch perimeter barrier, must be provided on 3 sides of the ground. Existing athletics stadia may be exempt from this requirement.). The surface must be tarmac, concrete, concrete paving or other approved materials which create a bound material.

Where a club shares its ground with a cricket club which limits the amount of permanent hard standing which can be installed, a maximum of one side or end of temporary flooring made of a polypropylene material or such like may be acceptable. Precise details of the specification must be supplied to the league and The Football Association before its installation.

Spectators must not be permitted to access any end/side without hard standing.

NB Where the facility is shared with cricket, hard standing on a minimum of two and a half sides may be acceptable.

2.2 Press Seating

There is no requirement for dedicated press seating.

2.3 Terracing

Where terracing is provided, it must comply with the requirements of the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds. All terracing must be in a sound condition. Terracing that is crumbling, has grass/weeds growing through it or has broken or loose concrete will not be accepted.

Any level surface within the ground should ideally be hard standing, such as tarmac, concrete, concrete paving or other approved materials which create a bound surface. However, flat and well maintained grassed areas may be accepted.

The use of tree bark instead of grass may be acceptable, subject to prior permission being obtained from the league and The Football Association.

2.4 Toilets

Toilets must be located within the ground and must be accessible both to male and to female spectators. NB Where it is necessary to exit the ground to gain access to toilets located in an adjacent clubhouse, these may be deemed acceptable, provided no great distance is involved.

The following minimum toilet facilities must be provided:

Male:	2 urinals or equivalent and 1 WC
Female:	2 WC's

In addition, wash hand basins, with running water, warm air hand driers and/or paper towels, together with a supply of toilet paper, must be provided in each toilet area. Whilst replaceable linen roller towels in a cabinet are acceptable, individual hand towels are not permitted.

The provision of toilet facilities within a clubhouse will be acceptable if these are accessible and available at all times on match days.

All toilet areas must be in working order, with a roof and operational lighting, supplied with toilet paper and maintained to a high level of cleanliness.

These facilities may be of a temporary or mobile kind but must be connected to the mains supply (ie water and power) and main drainage or an acceptable alternative drainage system.

They must be fully accessible with permanent access

Individual toilet units often known as 'portaloos' are permissible on a temporary basis but may not be included in the minimum toilet requirements.

The location of all toilet facilities must be indicated with appropriate signage

2.5 Refreshment Facilities

2.5.1 Directors/Committee/Guests

A separate room or reserved area must be made available in which refreshments for Directors/Committee and guests can be served.

2.5.2 Ground Refreshment Facilities

Refreshment facilities must be provided at the ground or in an adjacent clubhouse (See 2.4 Toilets). These facilities may be of a temporary or mobile type.

2.6 Disabled Facilities

(See Appendix)

2.7 Segregation

When segregation is in operation, there must be adequate toilet facilities and refreshment facilities in each segregated area in addition to the appropriate means of egress and exit.

3. DRESSING ROOM FACILITIES

3.1 Players

Separate dressing rooms must be provided for both teams within the enclosed area of the ground. The dressing rooms must be of sound construction and be of a permanent nature. Existing dressing room dimensions will be acceptable provided they are a minimum of 12 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. Where clubs are planning to build new dressing rooms these must be a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas.

~~NB Clubs need to be aware of the increase at grade D to a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas, as from 31st March 2019.~~

Each dressing room must have the following:

A shower area comprising of at least 4 showerheads

At least 1 wash hand basin located outside the shower area

(All the above must have hot and cold running water)

At least 1 WC in a cubicle

There must be a treatment table which is clean and in good condition in each dressing room.

3.2 Match Officials

The size of the match official's dressing room must be a minimum of 4 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. When new dressing rooms are being constructed the match officials' room should be a minimum of 6 square metres in size, excluding shower and toilet areas.

~~NB Clubs need to be aware of the increase at grade D to a minimum of 6 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas, as from 31st March 2019.~~

Each match officials' dressing room must have the following:

At least 1 shower

At least 1 WC in a cubicle and 1 wash hand basin

Provision should be made for separate dressing rooms for both male and female match officials.

Where new dressing rooms are being constructed or existing are being re-designed, separate purpose built facilities for both male and female match officials must be provided.

There must be an audible electronic warning device (bell or buzzer) in working order located in the match officials' dressing room, and which is linked to the players' dressing rooms.

All dressing room areas must be maintained to a high standard of cleanliness and be heated, well ventilated, free from damp and secure on match days.

4. MEDICAL

A stretcher must be provided for the removal of injured players from the pitch.

NB For Grade D a dedicated medical room for the use of players and spectators is required.

(See also Appendix)

APPENDIX

1. GROUND

1.7 Pitch Perimeter Barrier

It is important to distinguish between a pitch perimeter barrier/rail which exists to separate spectators from the playing area and a crush barrier which has been constructed and tested according to the requirements of the Green Guide. Where the structure cannot be designated as a crush barrier, e.g. its height exceeds 1.1m, the maximum depth of standing behind it is limited to 1.5m and this must be borne in mind in any capacity calculations.

It is recognised that the above may not be an issue for normal attendances but, when a larger crowd is anticipated, the Club should be mindful of the associated management issues and, if necessary, take professional advice.

Whatever system is employed, a club should be mindful of its responsibility to ensure spectator safety and minimise the possibility of unauthorised incursions on to the playing area.

1.9 Playing Area

Reference should be made to the Goalpost Safety information published by The Football Association and, in particular, it should be noted that the use of metal cup hooks is prohibited.

1.16 Lighting

Whilst their installation is strongly recommended, neither working nor emergency lighting is any longer a grading requirement. Clubs are reminded that they have a responsibility to ensure the safety of spectators entering, leaving and moving about the ground and, if a ground is used in non-daylight hours, adequate artificial lighting should be provided. Further, consideration must be given by a club to its procedures in the event of a power failure.

2. SPECTATOR FACILITIES

2.5 Disabled Facilities

A club must take full account of the needs of disabled spectators and be mindful of its obligations under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Reference made should be made to the publications / data sheets issued by both The Football Association and the Football Foundation.

No specific requirement is currently included in the ground grading criteria but The Football Association strongly recommends that access is provided to both a covered viewing area and toilet and refreshment facilities.

4. MEDICAL

All clubs must provide first aid equipment, including a stretcher, for the use of players and spectators. Its location in the ground, if other than in a dedicated treatment room, should be clearly marked by notices placed in the dressing rooms for teams and match officials.

There must be a nominated and suitably qualified person in attendance to assist with spectator problems unless the St John Ambulance Brigade, Red Cross Society or other capable agency are in attendance. The requirements of the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds are for one first aider per 1000 anticipated spectators, with a minimum of two.

If a crowd of less than 2000 is anticipated, known and practiced arrangements should be in place to summon either a doctor or NHS ambulance alternative. For crowds of over 2000, an experienced crowd doctor should be in attendance.

NB The above in no way purports to be a comprehensive list of Health and Safety issues which it is the responsibility of a club to address. Clubs are recommended to arrange regular safety audits conducted by persons with the appropriate expertise.