NATIONAL GROUND GRADING - CATEGORY H

(appropriate to entry to NLS Step 6)

NB 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.

1. GROUND

It must be possible for spectators to view the match, either standing or seated, for the full length of at least 2 sides of the playing area. Where a 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.

1.1 Security of Tenure

Where a club does not own the freehold of their ground, evidence of adequate security of tenure must be provided.

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.
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1.3 Capacity

There is no minimum safe capacity at this level but a club should be mindful that the minimum requirement for Grade E is 1,000.

1.4 Boundary of Ground

The ground must be enclosed by a boundary, not necessarily of a permanent nature. As a general rule, the minimum height, when measured from outside the ground, should be 1.83 metres. It should be noted that at higher grades (E and above) the boundary fence should be of a construction to prevent viewing from outside the ground.

1.5 Clubhouse

There must be a clubhouse facility either on the ground or in the near vicinity and which must be open on match days to provide refreshments to spectators. NB for Grade G and above, the clubhouse, if not on the ground, must be immediately adjacent to it.

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.

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.

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 or Management Committee, 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 in accordance with and with reference to the FIFA Performance Quality Standard.

The playing surface must be maintained to the highest possible standards.

Where 3G Football Turf Pitches are installed they must meet the FIFA 1 Star/IATS performance standards and be listed on the FA's Register of Football Turf Pitches. To meet the criteria a Football Turf Pitch must pass a test annually for FA Competitions as defined in the FIFA Quality Concept for Football Turf. The performance test must be completed by no later than 28th February each year and the result and details submitted to the FA and League by 31st March. Any remedial work must be carried out once the season ends and the pass Performance Test Certificate submitted to The FA and League by 31st May.

On receipt of the pass certificate, The FA will add the pitch to the register.

1.9 Playing Area

The playing area must 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 should 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 should 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 Secure Walkway

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

(See also Appendix)

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 falling on the pitch boundary line. 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.

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 Organisation/British Standard) or is a member of the Electrical Contractors' Association.

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, an average lux reading of at least 180 should be provided.

1.13 Public Address System

A public address system is not compulsory for this grade but clubs must be mindful that it may be necessary to convey information to spectators in the event of an emergency.

1.14 Entrances

There should 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 adequate protection and security for the turnstile operator must be incorporated.

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

The minimum covered accommodation must be 50.

Covered accommodation 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.

Any seating must afford a good view of the pitch and be clean, functional and in good condition.
Bench seating will be permitted provided that it is in good repair and that individual spaces (min 500mm) are clearly marked.

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.

Hard standing to a minimum width of 0.9 metre, measured from the spectator side of the pitch perimeter barrier, must be provided on at least 2 sides of the ground.). 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.

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.

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.

A minimum of 2 WCs must be provided.

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.

These facilities may be of the temporary or mobile kind but should be connected to the mains supply or alternative drainage system and be fully accessible with permanent access.

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

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

2.5 Refreshment Facilities

2.5.1 Directors/Committee/Guests

Refreshments must be made available for visiting officials and guests.

2.5.2 Ground Refreshment Facilities

Refreshment facilities must be provided at the ground or the clubhouse. 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.

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 unless there is a separate medical room available for the use of both teams.

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.

Each match officials' dressing room must have the following:

at least 1 showerhead

1 wash hand basin

at least 1 WC in a cubicle. This must be for the exclusive use of the match officials but need not necessarily be en suite

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

Where new dressing rooms are being constructed or existing are being re-designed, separate purpose built facilities for 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.

(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.

1.11 Safe Walkway

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.

1.16 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.