NATIONAL GROUND GRADING - CATEGORY A

(Appropriate to NLS Step 1 - The Football Conference Premier Division)

1. GROUND

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

The ground must have the potential of being upgraded to meet the criteria for membership of The Football League.

It must be possible for spectators to view the match, either standing or seated, for the full length of at least three sides of the playing area, provided that the capacity requirements detailed under 1.3 are met. Where one side is designated as spectator free, measures must be in place to ensure there is no unauthorised access.

If there are any extraneous objects, or buildings within the boundary of the ground or the ground has an irregular configuration of seating, standing and covered areas that do not conform to the recognised standard design of a football stadium, the club may not be awarded a category “A” Grading.

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 The Football Association and the Board of Directors of The Football Conference.

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 Football Association and the Board of Directors of the Football Conference.

1.1 Security of Tenure

The club must either:

(a) own the freehold of the ground

(b) As at 31 March in any year, have a lease for the ground that extends for a minimum of the next full playing season, or

(c) possess an agreement for the use of the ground that is acceptable to The Football Association and The Football Conference or the league of which it is a member.

NB To be eligible for promotion to the The Football League a ground lease must be for a minimum unexpired term of 10 years, from the time of a club’s entry into The Football League.

In addition, the club must disclose:

(a) Whether any Director or material shareholder of the club or any connected person or company has a financial interest in the ground.

(b) Whether the club’s occupation of the ground is subject to any third party option.

(c) If any applicable planning consent are subject to restrictions, and

(d) Whether the ground is charged by way of security.

(e) Any break clauses in the lease exercisable either by landlord or tenant.

The club must provide copies of any documents so disclosed and The Football Association and The Football Conference reserve the right to call for further information.

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

The stadium must have a minimum capacity of 4,000 spectators, including the seated spectators, as certified by the local authority or calculated by a competent person, in accordance with the “Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds”, (Green Guide) current edition at the time of inspection, with the potential to achieve a capacity of 5,000 in the future. The Football Association and the Football Conference reserve the right to appoint a suitably qualified person to review and, if found necessary, amend the capacity figure.

The club must have the ability to segregate home and visiting supporters. Any segregated area must have exclusive entrances, exits, ladies and gentlemens toilet facilities and catering facilities. The latter may be of the mobile type.

NOTE: All Football Conference fixtures come under the Football Spectators Act 1989 (Football banning order legislation), and the Football (Offences) Act 1991.

1.4 Boundary of the Ground

The ground must be enclosed with an external boundary wall of sound construction, secure on all sides of the ground and sufficient to deter would be climbers. The boundary must be of sound construction of pre cast concrete, brick, breezeblock or metal cladding with steel or concrete posts and be of a minimum height of 1.83 metres as measured from outside the ground.

Lapped timber, latch panel wood fences and wire mesh fences with wooden posts may be acceptable. Hedges, shrubs and/or trees will not normally be accepted

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

Where a side or an end of the ground is designated spectator free because of an adjoining sports field or amenity there must be a fence along the entire length or width of the ground to separate the two facilities. The fence, which may be demountable, must be a minimum height of 1.83 metres and it must not be possible to view the match from outside.

1.5 Clubhouse

There must be a clubhouse facility either on or adjacent to the ground and that should open on match days to provide refreshments to spectators and visiting Players, Officials and Match Officials, unless provided for elsewhere in the Ground.

1.6 Parking Facilities

Parking facilities must be provided for directors, with a minimum number of 4 places for visiting directors.

There must be safe parking arrangements for the visiting team's coach.

Unmarked parking facilities must also be provided for the match officials.

Car parking within the boundary of the ground on match days 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, must be infilled so that the ball cannot pass through or under it. **Plastic multi-purpose hi-vis fencing is not considered suitable for infill.**

Ideally there should be 2.75 metres, but no less than 2.25 metres between the touchline, goal line and the pitch perimeter barrier.

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

Where there is a walkway in front of a standing terrace that itself is fronted by a crush barrier that has 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 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 must be of professional manufacture and conform to the relevant safety requirements and the requirements of the Laws of the Game.

The Club must be responsible for the up keep of the playing area. The details of any other person/company/organisation responsible for the up keep of the playing area, on behalf of the club, must be disclosed to The Football Association and The Football Conference Board.

(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 of the seating areas must be able to accommodate a minimum of 11 adults on fixed seats or benches. Where bench seating is provided, a minimum of 0.5m must be allowed for each person. (i.e. 11 persons require a minimum of 5.5 metres)

Portable trainers' boxes are permitted but must be securely fixed while 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 retractable tunnels or permanent structures to separate players and spectators is recommended.

(See also Appendix)

1.12 Floodlighting

Floodlights must be provided to an average lux reading of at least 250. No single reading can be less than 100 lux nor less than one quarter of the highest reading so as to ensure an even spread of light.

Readings shall be on a grid of 88 markings (8 across and 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 the previous readings.

When applying for a higher grading, the certificate should have been issued no more than six months prior to application.

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 Contractor's Association.

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

Further information: -
The Football League minimum average lux value for League Division Two is 350 Lux. A new club entering League Division Two must comply with the minimum floodlighting requirements by 1st May in the first season from the date of its admission.

1.13 Public Address System

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

1.14 Entrances

There must be at least 8 spectator entrances to control the ingress of spectators. These must be controlled by fully operational turnstiles of the revolving type and must be suitably housed and lit. Adequate protection and security for the turnstile operator must be incorporated. These entrances should be placed in appropriate positions around the boundary of the ground and take into account the requirements of segregation.

It must be possible to gain access to the spectator viewing areas from the turnstiles via a bound surface 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

There must be an emergency lighting system for all spectator areas and concourses as required by the local Safety Authority or approved by a competent person.

(See also Appendix)

1.17 Adjoining Pitches

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

1.18 Emergency Access

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

2. SPECTATOR FACILITIES

2.1 Spectator Accommodation

Development, in addition to hard standing, must be on more than one side of the ground.

Covered accommodation, which should preferably be on at least 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 seated accommodation must be 500. These may be located in two stands of which at least 250 shall be seats located in one stand, with no stand having less than 100 seats. These seats may be inclusive of Directors/Committee and press seating.

A minimum of FOUR rows is required to the dimensions recommended in the Green Guide. In order to meet the sight line requirements it is recommended that the first line of seating is located above pitch level. There must be an unobstructed view from the lowest level of the seated area.

All seating should afford a good and full view of the pitch and be clean, functional and in good condition.

Seats should ideally be tip-up type with back rests. Alternatively, other then the Directors Box, the seats can be of the plastic moulded type complete with backrests or other types of seats provided that they have backrests.

Existing bench seating may be permitted provided that it is in good repair and that individual spaces (min 500mm) are clearly marked but will NOT be included in any calculation for the required minimum covered seating accommodation of 500.

Temporary structures will not be accepted.

The Directors Box must be clearly defined and should enjoy a prime position in the main stand. There must be individual seats and the Home and Away areas clearly marked.

Home - minimum number of seats 24
Away - minimum number of seats 16

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

Areas where no spectators are permitted to stand must be clearly marked with hatched yellow markings.

Clubs must be able to demonstrate that visiting supporters can be segregated when necessary.

NOTE: Clubs may retain membership of The Football Conference Premier Division provided they have achieved a Category "A" Grading by 31st March in the year following promotion.

To qualify for promotion to The Football League by winning the Championship and for the club to participate in the promotion play off matches, the ground must achieve a Category "A" Grading together with 500 seats under cover by 31st March in each season.

2.2 Press Seating

A minimum of 12 seats must be provided with lighting and writing facilities for the use by the press and other media. The press seating must have a clear view of the field of play.

2.3 Terracing

All terracing must be in sound condition and must comply with the requirements of the Green Guide. Terracing that is crumbling, has grass/weeds growing through it or has broken or loose concrete will not be accepted.

Any level surfaces within the ground must be hard standing. i.e. tarmac, concrete, concrete paving or other approved materials. Spectator standing areas behind the goals must be terraced unless the overall ground capacity is achieved with the exclusion of one or both of these areas. The number of terrace steps to be commensurate in achieving the overall ground capacity.

Grass banking may not be acceptable within the ground. Grass banking within the ground must not be accessible for spectators to view the match. The installation of permanent barriers will be required. All visible grassed areas must be well maintained.

2.4 Toilets

There must be adequate toilet facilities for men and women in each area of the ground commensurate with the capacity of that area in accordance with the Green Guide.

A minimum of two units of toilet facilities must be provided located in two separate areas within the ground, excluding those located in the clubhouse, or accessible only from within the main stand. Each unit to contain the minimum of:

Male: 4 - urinals or equivalent and two WC's

Female: 2 - WCs

In addition, there must be hand wash basins with running water, warm air hand driers and/or paper towel dispenser and waste bins in each toilet area. Whilst replaceable linen roller towels in a cabinet are acceptable, individual hand towels are not permitted

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

These facilities may be of the temporary or mobile type but must be connected directly to main water and drainage supplies. They must be fully accessable with permanent access.

Clubs are recommended to refer to the guidelines in respect of new toilet installations as set out in the Football Stadia Advisory Design Council publication.

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

2.5 Refreshment Facilities

2.5.1 Directors/Committee/Guests

A separate Directors room, ideally near to or adjacent to the Directors seating, must be made available in which refreshments for Directors and guests can be served. The room must be able to accommodate a minimum of 24 persons with nearby toilet facilities.

2.5.2 Ground Refreshment Facilities

Refreshment facilities must be available to spectators in each separate area of the ground. These may be of the mobile type.

2.6 Disabled Facilities

(See Appendix)

3. DRESSING ROOM FACILITIES

3.1 Players

Separate dressing rooms must be provided for the teams within the enclosed area of the ground. The dressing rooms must be of sound construction of a permanent nature. The minimum size for each changing area is 18 sq. metres excluding the shower and toilets areas. Clubs should be aware of the need to increase to a minimum of 30 square metres for membership of the Football League, as from season 2014/15.

Each dressing room must have:-

(a) A shower area comprising at least 4 shower heads
Note: 6 shower heads are required to meet the Football League criteria.

(b) **At least** one hand wash basin located outside the shower area.

All of the above must have hot and cold running water

(c) Two urinals

(d) One 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 officials' dressing room must be a minimum of 6 square metres excluding the toilet and shower areas.

The match officials' dressing room must have:-

At least one shower, one wash basin (both with hot and cold running water)

(NB On promotion to The Football League an additional shower will be required.)

At least one WC in a cubicle

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

Where new dressing rooms are being constructed or existing ones 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 linked to both players' dressing rooms.

NOTE: ALL DRESSING ROOM AREAS MUST BE MAINTAINED TO A HIGH STANDARD OF CLEANLINESS AND TO BE HEATED, WELL VENTILATED AND SECURE ON MATCH DAYS.

4. MEDICAL

There must be a suitably equipped medical treatment room for players located in the vicinity of the players' dressing rooms. Access to this room must not be via the home or away dressing rooms.

There must be a suitably equipped and designated First Aid Room for spectators within the boundary of the ground fitted out with services in accordance with Health & Safety requirements. The designated room must contain a bed or comfortable seating, with cold and, ideally, hot water, together with paper towels. Reusable individual towels are not permitted**.**

The first aid room and the location of the room must be suitably sign posted.

At least one stretcher for the removal of injured players from the field of play must be provided.

(See also Appendix)

5. APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP OF THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

VOLUNTARY SELF – ASSESSMENT

Before the start of each season all clubs in membership of the National Division of The Football Conference will be sent instructions on how to carry out a self-assessment of its facilities having regard to The Football League's Membership Criteria. Clubs will be able to submit (on a purely voluntary basis) a completed Self-Assessment Form at any time BEFORE 30th November in the current season and The Football League will review the information submitted and provide feedback. The Football Conference requests that any such application is also copied to them for information.

If a club wishes to be visited by The Football League in order to perform an advisory ground visit it should request such a visit in writing. The advisory ground visit does not form part of the formal application process for membership of The Football League. The League cannot guarantee to have the resource to make such a visit but will use reasonable endeavours to perform such a visit within three months of any request. A £1,000 (plus VAT) visit fee will be payable in respect of each club visited by The Football League. If a club pays £1,000 (plus VAT) for an advisory visit, there will be no additional charge for any subsequent visit or inspection (including that payable on promotion).
The advisory ground visit does not form part of the formal application process for membership of The Football League.

FORMAL APPLICATION

Where a Football Conference Club believes that it will be in a position to qualify for promotion from The Football Conference to The Football League at the end of the season, that CLUB MUST, BY 1ST MARCH in that season, lodge with the Football League such documentation and other evidence as may be required to satisfy The League that it can comply with the Qualification Criteria. All applications must be accompanied with the League's Self-Assessment Form and all the appropriate supporting evidence.

SPORTS GROUNDS SAFETY AUTHORITY

Those clubs who are in contention for promotion to The Football League at 31st March each season must seek advice of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority for guidance in the following areas in respect of ground safety to meet The Football League criteria for admission to membership. Application for such guidance must in the first instance be to the General Manager of The Football Conference.
The Football League will require before the start of the club's first full .season:

Confirmation of tenure
Confirmation of the ground capacity, with Safety Certificate
Emergency Lighting system serving spectator areas
Ground Control Room
Turnstiles of the automatic revolving type with counting facilities and a computerised turnstile monitoring system
CCTV surveillance system as required by the Local Authority
The qualifications of the Club Chief Safety Officer and the club stewards.
A crowd Doctor as distinct from a players Doctor.

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 in accordance with 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 1.5metres 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 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

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

2.6 Disabled Facilities

A club must take account of the needs of disabled spectators and be mindful of its obligations under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Reference may 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 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

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.