NATIONAL GROUND GRADING - CATEGORY D

(Appropriate to NLS Step 4)

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. Where one 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 either:

1.1.1 own the freehold of the ground, or

1.1.2 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

1.1.3 possess an agreement for the use of the ground which is acceptable to The Football Association and the league of which it is a member.

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 safe capacity of 1,300 calculated by a competent person in accordance with the guidance given in the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds. There must also be potential to increase the capacity to 1950 in the future.

1.4 Boundary of Ground

The ground must be enclosed by a permanent boundary, which will prevent individuals from viewing the game from outside the ground. The boundary must be of sound construction, such as cast concrete, brick, breeze block 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 which should be 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 Car Parking

There must be adequate car parking facilities at or adjacent to the ground. Car parking within the boundary of 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, 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.**

There must be a minimum of 1.83 metres between the touchline, goal line and the pitch perimeter barrier. NB for Grade A (The Football Conference National) a minimum of 2.25 metres is required.

A barrier need not be erected on any side not open to the public.

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 that the Club is able to provide assurances that no spectator will 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 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 respective Board of Directors or Management Committee, 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 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.

Each box must be able to accommodate 8 persons under cover on fixed seats or benches. Where bench seating is provided, a minimum of 0.5m must be allowed for each person (i.e. 8 persons require a minimum of 4 metres.). NB for Grade B there must be seating for 11 persons.

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.

NB When new boxes are being constructed or installed, they must be able to accommodate a minimum of 11 persons, must be on each side of the half way line, equidistant from it and a minimum of 3 metres apart.

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 spectators and players/officials is recommended.

(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.

Reading**s** 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 must be provided.

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 should be at least 2 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 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 must 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

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

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 300, of which at least 150 must be seated. These 150 seats, in not more than 2 stands, may be inclusive of Directors/Committee and press seating. No stand may have less than 50 seats.

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

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

There must be a minimum of 24 seats provided for Directors/Committee and guests with a minimum of 12 seats provided for the visiting club. These seats must be clearly marked “Home” and “Away Directors” and should enjoy a prime position in the main stand.

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 no spectators are 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 all 4 sides of the ground, unless a different configuration exists (see paragraph 1).). The surface must be **tarmac, concrete, concrete paving or other approved materials which create a bound material.**

2.2 Press Seating

A minimum of 2 seats must be provided with lighting and writing facilities for use by the press and other media. The press seating must have a clear view of the field of play.

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, provided the width between the hard standing (when measured from the edge farther away from the perimeter barrier) and the boundary fence does not exceed 20 metres.

Spectator access must be denied to any grass banking so that it cannot be used for viewing the match.

2.4 Toilets

Toilets must be located within the ground and must be accessible both to male and to female spectators. Such toilets need not be in a dedicated toilet block **but must be in addition to those used by people using the clubhouse.**

The following minimum toilet facilities must be provided in total, excluding those located in any clubhouse:

Male:	2 urinals or equivalent and 1 WC
Female:	2 WCs

In addition, wash hand basins with running water, warm air hand driers and/or paper towel dispenser with towels and waste paper bins must be provided 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 a high level of cleanliness.

These facilities may be of the temporary or mobile type but must be connected to the mains supply. They must be fully accessible with permanent access.

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 must be made available in which refreshments for Directors/Committee and guests can be served. This area must be able to accommodate a minimum of 24 persons with nearby toilet facilities.

2.5.2 Ground Refreshment Facilities

Refreshment facilities must be provided in each separate area of the ground. 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. However clubs wishing to progress should be aware of the need to increase to a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas, for a B Grade.
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 of the above must have hot and cold running water)

At least 1 WC in a cubicle

NB The Football League criteria require 6 showerheads and 2 urinals.

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

3.2 Match Officials

The size of the match officials' 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 shower and 1 wash hand basin (both with hot and cold running water).

At least 1 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 and which is linked to the players' dressing rooms.

Clubs should be aware that discussions are ongoing to increase the minimum capacity of players' dressing rooms to 18 square metres and match officials' dressing rooms to 6 square metres.

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

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

The designated room must contain a bed and/or comfortable seating, with cold and, ideally, hot water, together with paper towels. Reusable individual towels are not permitted**.**

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

(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

2.6 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 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 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

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.