NATIONAL GROUND GRADING - CATEGORY B

(Appropriate to NLS Step 2 – Football Conference North and South)

1. GROUND

The ground must give an overall appearance and impression of being a football ground suitable for the highest level of 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, 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.

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 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, or

(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 which is acceptable to The Football Association and The Football Conference or 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 operational capacity of 3,000 calculated by a competent person in accordance with the guidance given in the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds (Green Guide). There must also be potential to increase the capacity to 4,000 in the future and a Club must, by the 31st March following the date of inspection, demonstrate how this capacity can be achieved.

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 pre 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.

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 should be adequate car parking facilities at or adjacent to the ground. 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.

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.

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 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 in accordance with and with reference to the **FIFA** Performance Quality Standard.

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

Where an artificial surface is installed, the **FIFA** Performance Test must be completed by no later than 28th February each year and the result and details submitted to the league by 31st March. Any remedial work must be carried out once the season ends and the pass Performance Test Certificate submitted to the League by 31st May.

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 must be able to accommodate a minimum of 11 persons under cover on fixed seats or benches. Where bench seating is provided, a minimum 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 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.

(See also Appendix)

1.12 Floodlighting

Floodlights must be provided to an average lux reading of at least 180. 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.

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.

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

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 6 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 form 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 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 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 accommodation must be 500, of which at least 250 shall be seats located in one stand. These seats may be inclusive of Directors/Committee and press seating.

A minimum of FOUR **rows** is required to the dimensions recommended in “The Guide to the Safety at Sports Grounds” (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.
Note: Clubs may retain membership of Football Conference NORTH/SOUTH provided that they achieve a Category “B” grading and have 250 seats under cover in one stand.

Temporary structures will not be accepted.
All should ideally be of the tip-up type with back rests. Alternatively, other than in the Directors’ Box, the seats may be of the plastic moulded type complete with back rests or other types of seats, provided that they have back rests.

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 250 (or 500 to be eligible for promotion (see also below)).

All seating should afford a good and full 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.

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 of a bound material.

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

Promotion and promotion play-offs: To qualify for promotion to the Football Conference Premier Division by winning the respective NORTH/SOUTH Championship and for the club to participate in the promotion play off matches, the ground must achieve a Category “B” Grading together with 500 seats under cover by 31st March in each season. These seats may be in two stands, with no stand having less than 100 seats.

2.2 Press Seating

A minimum of 6 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.

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.
Note: In Category A stepped terracing is required behind both goals unless the overall ground capacity is achieved with the exclusion of one or both of these areas.

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, provided access from the ground is immediate and they cannot be accessed for the duration of the match by persons using the clubhouse or any adjacent facility. (On no account may access be through licensed premises.)

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

Male:	4 urinals or equivalent and 2 WC’s
Female:	2 WC’s (4 WC’s in Category A)

NB For Grade A, a minimum of two units of toilet facilities must be provided in two separate areas within the ground.

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 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 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.

(See Appendix)

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, be of a permanent nature and must be of a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet 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 the following:

A shower area comprising of at least 4 showerheads

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

(In addition, Category A requires two urinals.)

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 dressing 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 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 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

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.

Clubs must designate on match days a suitable room for the treatment of spectators within the boundary of the ground. 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 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.)

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 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.