

## **GRADING CATEGORY – F**

**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**

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 to both the league of which it is in membership and The Football Association.

The placement of any club which is the result of a merger of two or more clubs will be dealt with on its merits.

#### **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, but not in order to gain promotion or to avoid relegation. A ground sharing agreement should ideally have been in place for at least one full season prior to the grading inspection.

Where there is a ground share between two football clubs, priority of fixtures will be given to the club playing at the higher level within the National League System unless otherwise approved by the respective leagues.

Where a ground share is in place with another sport i.e. Athletics, Cricket, Rugby Union, Rugby League etc, the club must have full use of all facilities on match days.

#### **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 1000.

#### **1.4 Boundary of Ground**

The ground must be enclosed by a permanent boundary, which will prevent spectators from viewing the game from outside the ground. As a general rule, the minimum height, when measured from outside the ground, should be 1.83 metres.

In certain circumstances one side of the ground, which adjoins private land/property, may be exempt from the need for a permanent boundary.

## **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.

## **1.7 Pitch Perimeter Barrier**

There must be a permanent fixed barrier of sound construction (e.g. concrete and steel) and free from all sharp edges surrounding the pitch on all sides which may be occupied by spectators. Ideally, the height should not exceed 1.1 metres.

The barrier, if other than solid wall type of construction may be infilled. Advertising boards are acceptable as a means of 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.

(See also Appendix)

## **1.8 Pitch Standards**

The playing surface will be grass, unless otherwise authorised by the respective Board of Directors or Management Committee, and must be of a high 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.

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

Set out below is the view of the International FA Board and FIFA with regard to artificial surfaces:

*“The Board recognised the advances in artificial surface technology and the major benefits of using artificial surfaces in areas of climatic problems. It also recognised that artificial surfaces allowed multiple and extended use of facilities in urban environments. The Board mandated FIFA to create clear procedures for the use of artificial surfaces, to unify the quality system and apply it worldwide, taking into consideration the best resources and knowledge available.”*

The matter is therefore under review.

## **1.9 Playing Area**

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

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

(See also Appendix)

#### **1.10 Technical Area**

Two covered trainers benches clearly marked "Home" and "Away or Visitors" are to be provided. They should be equal distance either side of the halfway line a minimum of at least 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 and must be securely fixed when in use.

A Technical Area, as defined within the Laws of the Game, must be marked out.

#### **1.11 Secure Walkway**

Clubs must provide for safe unimpeded passage for players and match officials between their dressing rooms and the pitch. The use of protection designed products such as retractable tunnels or permanent structures to separate spectators and players/officials is recommended.

(See also Appendix).

#### **1.12 Floodlighting**

Floodlights must be provided to an average lux reading of 120. No single reading can be 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.

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 180 should be provided.

#### **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 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.

### **1.15 Exits**

The location and number of ground exits must be approved by a competent person and comply with the requirements of the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds.

All exits must be clearly signed, ideally with "running man" signs, and are to be kept clear and free from obstructions.

### **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 league or cup matches are 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, may all be on 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 fire assessment.

The minimum covered accommodation must be 200, of which at least 100 must be seated. There should be a minimum of 100 seats located in one stand which may be inclusive of Directors/Committee seating. 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 should 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. 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.

Hard standing to a minimum width of 1 metre, measured from the spectator side of the pitch perimeter barrier, must be provided on 4 sides of the ground, unless a different configuration exists (see paragraph 1). The surface must be of bound material.

## **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.

## **2.4 Toilets**

Toilets must be located within the ground and must be accessible to both male and female spectators.

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.

The provision of toilet facilities within a clubhouse will be acceptable if these are accessible and available at all times on match days. Otherwise, these facilities may be of the temporary or mobile kind but should be connected to the mains supply and be fully accessible with permanent access.

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

## **2.5 Refreshment Facilities**

### **2.5.1 Directors/Committee/Guests**

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

### **2.5.2 Ground Refreshment Facilities**

Refreshment facilities shall be provided at the ground. These facilities may be of a temporary or mobile type.

## **2.6 Disabled Facilities**

(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 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. 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

1 wash hand basin

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

At least 1 WC

There must be a treatment table 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 shower

At least 1 WC 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 level of cleanliness and be 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**

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 will be prohibited from season 2007/08 when they may constitute a reason for a match to be postponed.

### **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. t

## **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 (minimum FA Emergency Aid Course) 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.