



Alconbury Recreation Field Charity (ARFC)

Pitch Inspection Guidance Policy

Purpose

To ensure the safety of players, officials and spectators; protect the long-term condition of ARFC's pitches; and support clear, timely and professional decisions regarding match playability.

ARFC has a legal duty of care to all pitch users and will take all reasonable steps to mitigate foreseeable risk and follow best practice in line with FA guidance.

1. Responsibility and Decision-Making Authority

1.1 Pitch Inspector

- A nominated ARFC Trustee will act as the Pitch Inspector on or before match days.
- The Pitch Inspector is responsible for assessing the pitches and determining whether it is safe and playable.

1.2 Youth Safeguarding

- For youth fixtures, additional caution must be applied. Conditions that may be acceptable for adults may still be unsafe for children due to reduced weight, strength and stability.
- Where doubt exists regarding safety for youth fixtures, the default position must be to postpone.

2. Core Principles (Non-Negotiable)

- Player safety comes first. If the surface is dangerous (frozen, rutted, icy, waterlogged, debris present) the match must not be played.
 - Protect the pitch. Matches should not be played if doing so risks long-term damage or will render the pitch unusable for future fixtures.
 - Do not start a match that cannot realistically finish. Consider forecast deterioration, light levels, temperature drops and drainage capacity when making this assessment.
 - Be professional, timely and decisive. Thoroughly inspect, document findings, and communicate the decision promptly.
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- An email with details of the inspection must be sent to the user groups, to include:
 - Date and time of inspection
 - Weather conditions
 - Key findings
 - Decision made
 - Photographs where appropriate
- Email records should be retained for a minimum of 12 months.

3. Preparation (Before Match Day)

Monitor the weather forecast in the days leading up to the match (daily checks recommended).

Use reliable weather sources and note expected conditions at kick-off and final whistle.

Flag any concerns early to team managers. In cases of uncertainty, the Pitch Inspector may consult the Chair or another Trustee. However, consultation must not delay timely communication of a decision.

4. When to Inspect

Inspections should take place as early as possible before the match to give teams time to react and avoid unnecessary travel.

In extreme or prolonged adverse weather conditions, inspections may take place the day before the match. This may result in fixtures being postponed in advance for safety reasons and to protect the long term condition of ARFC's pitches.

Each pitch must be inspected individually, as conditions may vary.

If weather worsens on match day, a follow-up inspection may be required.

If conditions deteriorate during a match (fog, storms, heavy snow/rain), the referee will reassess and may suspend or abandon play. Team managers must support and help communicate the decision.

Where reasonably practicable, decisions should be communicated no later than 3 hours before kick-off.

5. What to Inspect

- Walk the full pitch, including:
 - o Both penalty areas
 - o Centre circle
 - o Corners and goalmouths
 - o Touchlines and surrounding run-off areas
- Use a ball to test roll and bounce across multiple areas
- Check for surface hazards, including:
 - Frost, ice, frozen ground
 - Deep ruts or broken/uneven areas
 - Standing water / puddles preventing ball movement
 - Debris (glass, stones, sticks, exposed pipework, metal)
 - Snow covering or obscuring pitch markings
- Assess visibility:
 - Can the inspector see both goals clearly from the centre circle?
 - Can the inspector see across the pitch to judge offside?
 - If not, the match should not proceed.
- Consider the away team's travel:
 - If conditions are clearly unsafe early, make the decision promptly to prevent unnecessary trips.
- Decide:
 - SAFE & PLAYABLE, or
 - UNSAFE & UNPLAYABLE
- **The decision must be based entirely on safety and pitch protection.**

6. Quick Checklist

- Frost / icy surface
- Hard frozen ground
- Deep ruts, cracks or broken areas
- Waterlogging (ball remains stuck in puddles)
- Snow obscuring lines or impairing play
- Fog reducing visibility
- Unsafe run-off areas
- Any other hazard (glass, wildlife, holes, rocks, equipment)

If any of the above create danger to players or officials, the match must not proceed.

7. Special Scenarios

Fog

- If either goal cannot be seen from the centre circle, or the inspector cannot see across the pitch to judge offside, the match must not be played.
- Consider spectator safety.

Frost / Ice

- Consider temperature at end of match as well as kick-off.
- Surfaces may thaw or freeze further during the match.
- If the pitch is firm but playable and expected to improve, proceed with caution; if dangerous, cancel.

Heavy Rain / Waterlogging

- If water is not dispersing, or ball movement is significantly affected, postpone.

Snow

- If snow covers or obscures pitch markings, affects player footing, or makes the game unsafe, do not play.

Extreme Weather

- Matches must not proceed during lightning or thunder in the immediate vicinity of the ground.
- In high temperatures, consideration should be given to player welfare, hydration breaks and safeguarding guidance.
- Severe wind that risks goal stability or falling debris must result in postponement.

In-Game Deterioration

- The referee may suspend or abandon the match.
- Team managers and match delegates must support the referee and communicate decisions clearly.

Maintenance Hazards

- Any serious hazard (broken goal, deep holes, glass) must be reported immediately.
- The area must be made safe or cordoned off.
- Matches must not proceed until the hazard is fully rectified.

8. Communication

- The Pitch Inspector must inform team managers/coaches immediately, by email, of any decision to postpone or proceed.
- Team managers/secretaries must inform the league, competition authority or County FA as required.
- Communication should be clear, concise and recorded via email for audit purposes.

9. Final Note to Trustees

Trustees acting as Pitch Inspectors carry responsibility for the safety of all participants and for the stewardship of ARFC's playing surfaces. Decisions must be made impartially, professionally, and with the long-term health of the facility in mind.

Decisions must always prioritise safety and long-term pitch condition over fixture fulfilment.

Approval and Version Control

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:

Name: C. Bodley

Role: Chair

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Signed (Chair): C. Bodley