



*Ballyshunnock
Mixed Coarse
and Trout
Fishery*

Access
Audit

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Background

Ballyshunock is an 80 acre freshwater reservoir situated centrally in county Waterford. Although in existence for over half a century it is fair to say that there has been little or no development of this facility in terms of accessibility or recreational usage to date.

The Southern Regional Fisheries Board managed the water as a fishery for nearly all of the 50 or so years of its existence, maintaining a mix of rainbow and brown trout but doing little in the way of bank side maintenance or development of pathways and gateways. Access to the water was by stile and rough sometimes waterlogged and often muddy narrow paths through the overgrown scrub.

When Waterford City and County Trout Anglers took over the day to day management of the facility in 2003 they continued to focus exclusively on the quality of the angling, through the maintenance of trout stocks. In fairness to this Association their involvement lasted only a year and poor permit sales meant that a voluntary organisation had little or no resources to undertake any meaningful development work.

It was during 2003 that the Waterford and District Coarse Angling Club was first given the opportunity to fish Ballyshunock. A year later the Southern Regional Fisheries Board invited this club to share in the day to day management of the facility.

This Audit is undertaken by Waterford and District Coarse Angling Club using guidelines published by the British Disabled Anglers Association. The purpose of the audit is to provide a framework for the development of a fully accessible and socially inclusive mixed fishery, offering affordable trout and coarse angling to all.

Although focusing mainly on the physical infrastructure of the reservoir in this audit the club recognises the need to audit its own programmes of activities and it's structures, to ensure that its aspirations and aims of social inclusivity are achieved.

The Fishery

Currently only two species of fish are present in the water in sufficient numbers to make the fishery viable, Rudd and Brown Trout. Eel have also been caught, but only occasionally. This has implications for the use of the reservoir. The coarse fishing begins in May and is all but finished by early October, while trout fishing runs from March to September.

During this season the water levels in the reservoir fluctuate widely, leaving freshly exposed shoreline almost daily during the summer. This is often treacherous under foot. It also means that any development of the shore line for accessibility is futile as this shore line is constantly moving. This situation is set to improve however with developments in the water supply to the reservoir.

Nearly 100 adult permits were sold in 2006 together with as many day tickets. Close to 200 juvenile permits were issued in the same period, indicating strong interest in the community in this fishery. An examination of the permit records showed close to 15% of the adult users are non national and sales staffs in the various outlets confirm that most of these have little or no English.

The high level of juvenile interest is related to the programme of organised training and competition run by WDCAC during the summer months. This programme comprises 20 days of training and competition, 18 of which are organised in cooperation with various youth groups in Waterford city. The other two days are open to any young person in the community.

Consultations with the youth groups using the facility indicate a wide range of disabilities and problems with social inclusion among the young anglers. Asbergers and ADHD as well as less severe learning disorders are not uncommon, while the Probation service and the Garda youth diversion project both make use of the facility. The club hosted a day for sight impaired and blind children from the Tramore Chernobyl Project.

The age profile of club membership ranges from 5years to 76 years, a fact that must be reflected in any future development of the fishery. Consultations with both young and older members have helped to formulate the proposals in this audit.

Consultative Process

In undertaking this audit the committee of WDCAC consulted extensively, in the first instance with the club membership and afterward with representatives of voluntary groups working in the area of social disadvantage of working with disability

Club Members: Views of all members were sought in respect of access and pathways to the water side. Members were also asked to consider the quality of angling available to 'dry foot' anglers, i.e. those who for one reason or another cannot wade into the water. Members with special needs, the elderly, ambulant disabled and those with sight or hearing loss were asked to consider any special arrangements or developments that might assist them to compete fellow club members on a 'level playing field'.

Youth Workers: PACT, the local Garda Siochana Youth Diversion Project, Waterford Inner City Youth Project, Waterford School Completion Project and St. Paul's Fishing Club Coordinators were all consulted as to the special requirements of their clients. These organisations all have workers who regularly visit the reservoir with young people and so had a very clear and practical understanding on how the physical environment of Ballyshunnock impacted on the young people's use of the fishery. Of particular concern in these discussions were matters of health and safety.

Waterford County Council: The Disability Officer of Waterford County Council met with club representatives at the Ballyshunnock. The Council's position on a number of issues associated with accessibility and social inclusion, as well as specific issues relating to Ballyshunnock was discussed. A Further meeting with local engineers lead to agreement with the Council's Water Dept. on procedures for the implementation of the proposals included in this audit.

British Disabled Angling Association: This organisation has much experience in auditing Fisheries in the U.K., including Northern Ireland, for accessibility. Their guidelines on auditing particularly in respect of the technical details for paths and stands informed many of the proposals in this audit.

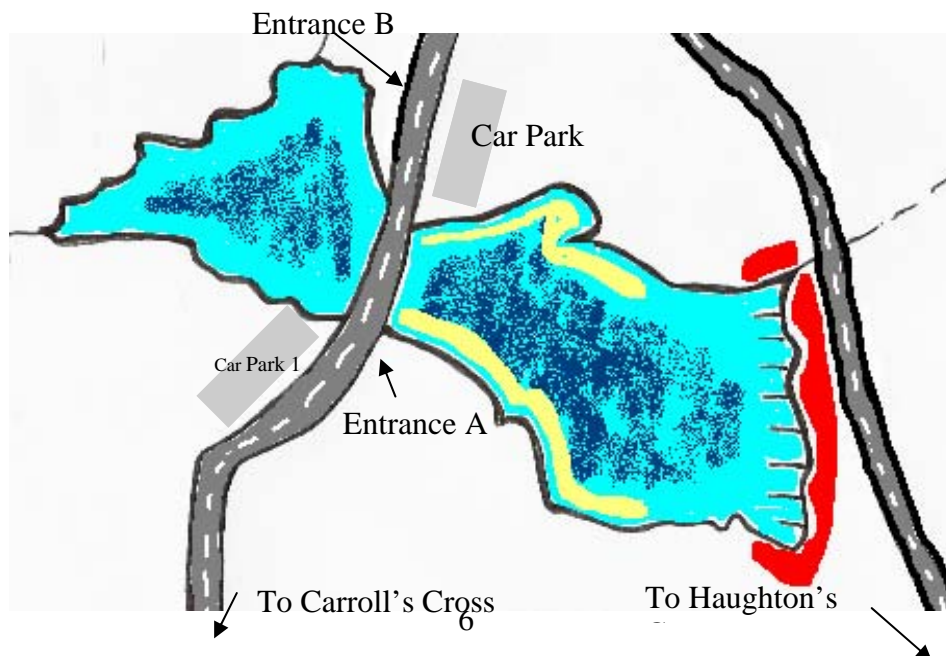
Consultative Process

Irish Wheelchair Association: Representatives of local branches of this organisation were contacted to discuss the specific needs of their members. Arising from these contacts arrangements are in place for the provision of a day of coaching and fishing at Oaklands in New Ross. This fishery is wheelchair friendly and is the only fishery locally capable of accommodating more than a couple of wheelchair users.

Oaklands Fishery: The Management and staff of this Fishery have been extremely helpful and informative in sharing details of their design for accessibility and of their experience in attempting to implement it.

Southern Regional Fishery Board: A number of meetings with development officers of SRFB were held. Many of the proposals made here were first made in those meetings. Both Declan Cullagh and Alan Cullagh have been proactive on this project, showing a willingness to share their considerable experience in fishery development in general and offering practical solutions to many of the issues around accessibility. The club is indebted to both men, their enthusiasm and encouragement for the work has seen this project through many difficulties.

Ballyshunnock



Ballyshunnock Now

It is clear from the map above that the lake is divided into East and West by the causeway carrying the road. The areas marked in yellow are the shore lines used by WDCAC and are also the areas most commonly used by trout anglers. The dam wall is marked in red and currently angling is banned in this area.

Car parks:

- Parking for approximately 10 cars is available at two sites as shown .
- Car park 2 is adjacent to a stile and path entrance to the reservoir and leads onto the North shore stretch.
- The entrance adjacent to car park 1 offers access to the western section of the water but is unsuitable for disabled anglers.
- Car park 1 offers access to entrance A but this involves crossing the main road.
- Entrance B has no convenient parking nearby

Entrances:

- Of the four entrances to the fishery only the two offering access to the eastern sides of the water are in any way acceptable for any but the most agile of anglers.
- At car park 1 the entrance to the western side of the lake consists of a broken down gate offering access to a steep climb down a litter strewn and badly overgrown path.
- Across the road at entrance A the footpath, formed of aggregate, is effectively a hard shoulder from the road as it is at road level.
- Entrance A consists of a stile over a low stone wall giving access to a rough stone path which falls away steeply from the road over the first 30m then gently slopes to the waters edge over the next 90m.
- Entrance B consists of an opening of less than a metre, in the roadside wall. There is no discernable path though the thick undergrowth.. There is no footpath at this entrance, nor is there any parking adjacent.

Ballyshunnock Now

- At car park 2 the entrance is once again a stile giving access to a wide earthen path capable of allowing vehicular access to the water's edge. Although 130 metres long this pathway is by far the most user friendly. A locked swing gate currently prevents public vehicular access to this path

Shore line:

- The area marked in red in the map represents the lakeside currently prohibited to anglers, the rest of the shore is public access with the areas marked in yellow being the most used by anglers in particular these are the areas used for organised events by WDCAC.
- It is fair to say that little or no development has damaged the virgin nature of these banks. Some scrub removal on the Southern shore in the last two years being the only exception to this statement.
- This work has left 84 metres of lakeside available for summer camps and for club matches.
- Beyond this stretch an outcrop of trees block access to the rest of the Southern shore..
- The Northern shore is almost completely overgrown with sally and gorse.
- Much of this growth extends to the shore line and into the shallows allowing no more than three fishing stands when the water is at winter levels.
- The usefulness of this shoreline for angling is further limited by the extensive and uneven shallows along its length.

Ballyshunnock Now

Quality of Angling:

- The main fish stocks of the lake consist of a large shoal of wild Brown Trout and an impressive shoal of Rudd. The only other species reported in the water is the freshwater eel.
- The legal season for Trout coincides with the effective season for Rudd. This means that the water is largely unused throughout the autumn and winter months.

Safety:

- The approach to the four entrances is unmarked; traffic on the road is reasonably heavy and fast moving. This poses problems at entrance A, where users are required to cross the road from the car park, a particular difficulty with young children.
- Over 200 children bought permits in 2006.
- Entrance A is the most used of the four entrances because of the development of this side of the lake. The path leading to the water's edge is formed of coarse stone, loose underfoot, sloping steeply from the entrance. This presents a safety issue for all but especially for the young and for the infirm.
- This path gives way to a cleared area along 84 metres of shoreline. This area is now overgrown with low shrub and high grass, is uneven underfoot and slopes toward the water.
- In summer the water recedes to uncover a weed and mud bank, offering poor walking conditions along the length of this stretch.
- On the Northern shore conditions in summer are similar while at winter levels as already mentioned the shoreline is effectively inaccessible.

Ballyshunnock Now

Safety: (continued)

- The access path on this side is formed of compacted earth and becomes unsafe after heavy rain.
- The western side of the reservoir, currently unused, has similar shoreline in summer.
- The entrance to this side from car park 1 is so poor that it was blocked off completely with a steel structure. This has now, however been knocked, leaving exposed the dangerous access down to the water level. The access consists of large rock filthy with litter and badly overgrown with scrub.
- Signs prohibiting access to the dam wall and warning of algal blooms are in English only. These are the only signs concerned with safety!
- The only other signs present concerning angling permits are multilingual.
- Signs concerned with water safety, signs warning traffic of the presence of children and signs prohibiting access at car park 1 are all noticeable by their absence.
- Neither are there any flotation aids along the angling stretches

club Organisation

Formal structures:

- Waterford and District Coarse Angling Club (WDCAC) is a voluntary organisation of some thirty or so adult members and twenty five juvenile members
- WDCAC is affiliated to National Coarse Angling Association which is in turn affiliated to the National Sports Council.
- The club has adopted a comprehensive child care policy and has an elected Juvenile Development Officer with special responsibilities for issues around child welfare in addition to the usual responsibilities for training and competition.
- While the club adopted a rule against any form of unfair discrimination, no disability officer has been elected with responsibility for issues around social inclusion.

Networking:

- The club contact with Youth groups and schools in Waterford city has had a significant bearing in the development of its youth programmes ,much of which are run in conjunction with youth groups.
- A full series of competition and training sessions is currently delivered with PACT, the Garda Youth Diversion Project.
- Students of St. Paul's Community College benefit from a Master Angler Seies of competitions
- A series of Winter and Summer Camps is organised with the Waterford School Completion Programme
- The club is currently arranging to extend these programmes to other groups in the city area.

club Organisation

Networking: (continued)

- Although some contact has been arranged with the Irish Wheelchair Association, it is fair to say that the club's networking with adult groups has been poor.
- Contact with youth groups has been and continues to be largely confined to organisations based in the city
- The exception to the above statement has been the work done with the Tramore Chernobyl Children's Project..

Organised events:

- As with many similar voluntary groups no special arrangements are made around disability and social inclusion when organising club matches for adults .
- Transport is arranged between individuals on a word of mouth basis. This has proven satisfactory here to fore.
- Where requested the draw for pegs at matches is arranged to offer convenient fishing locations near car parks.
- At Juvenile level transport, bait and tackle is supplied at a nominal charge to all participants.
- The rules for juvenile limit participants to the tackle and bait provided, ensuring a 'level pitch' for all. The rules also ensure that prizes are distributed among the members by limiting the number of prizes an individual can win in a year.
- In club matches club officers are available to ensure a ratio of Child to Adult of not more than 5 to 1.
- Summer and winter camps are arranged with youth workers to ensure a ratio 3 to 1.
- In the case of the Chernobyl group this year the supervision was on a one to one basis. This was necessary because all of the young participants were partially sighted.

Proposals

The following proposals are predicated on the following assumptions.

1. Future water levels being fixed at current winter levels.
2. Waterford and District Coarse Angling Club and the Southern Regional Fishery Board will enter into a Management Agreement to last a minimum of five years.

For immediate implementation:

The following are recommended for immediate implementation as they are relatively low cost, can have a significant effect on Safety, Social inclusion or Disability access.

- Both Entrances to the Western end of the lake should be sealed off and notices erected closing this section to the public and advising of the dangerous condition of the pathways.
- Water safety signage to be erected at both North and South Shores and along the Western shoreline. Appropriate life buoys placed at hundred metre intervals or less along shoreline.
- With due consideration to the size of the organisation, its voluntary nature and the limitations of manpower, the club should consider the possibility of electing a disability officer to its committee. This person would take responsibility for the development and implementation of a detailed policy around issues of social inclusion as well as disability.
- The clubs network of contacts is considerable and its openness to working with outside groups is laudable, its work in this area can be made even more effective by developing contacts outside the city. In particular it is recommended that organisations in the immediate area be contacted and made aware of the facility and that local schools be offered access and training similar to that offered to groups from Waterford City.

Southern Shore:

- The path leading to the south shore is in need of regarding to a slope of not more than one in twenty and the surface should be upgraded to tarmac or tar and chip. In the event of this being prohibitively expensive the surface can be blinded off with aggregate. If the surface has some loose stone no bigger than 10mm wheelchair access will still be possible.
- Along the shore itself the area needs levelling and clearing down to the trees. A path similar to the access path not less than 1000mm wide can then be laid, giving disabled access along the entire length.
- A deepening of the lake along this shore is necessary to give the disabled angler and the younger angler an opportunity to compete with colleagues capable of wading out to deeper water. The issue here concerns speed fishing in a competitive environment where 'whip fishing to hand' techniques afford an advantage to the angler wading to deeper water. This problem is resolved by offering deeper water near to shore.
- The deepening process offers an opportunity to build a bank at path level around the outcrop of conifers on this shore. This will offer both children and ambulant disabled access to the rest of the fishable shoreline..
- The diagram on the next page offers a template for cheap wheelchair friendly fishing pegs. Up to fifteen of these can be installed on this shore offering real angling choices to the disabled. This approach is in keeping with the recommendations of the British Disabled Anglers Association, who are spearheading a move away from the traditional approach to disability in fisheries. Up to recently the provision of one or two wheelchair friendly pegs adjacent to a car park was the standard response to access issues. This not only limits disabled anglers choice, it often isolates the angler from the better fishing and excludes him or her from the company of fellow anglers.
- The provision of seating and shelter has in recent years become a feature of many fisheries. With over two hundred children using this facility most of whom require supervision some form of seating would bring welcome relief to long suffering parents. Such seating would also have value for ambulant disabled anglers who could explore the shoreline with more confidence. Presently such anglers have to carry a seat with them.

- To facilitate this path and peg structure the stream entering the lake midway along this shore will need to be piped and bridged with the path.
- Deepening the lake on this shore is absolutely vital as the shallows extend far out into the lake, when it is at winter levels. A chair bound angler would find it difficult to cast to fishable water, making participation in competition futile.

Western Side of Reservoir:

- Neither of the two accesses are safe and both will require significant investment to upgrade.
- The entrance at car park 1 will require the construction of steps with hand rails, while at entrance B a path of some 250metres will have to be laid after the pathway is cleared of scrub.
- A car park can then be constructed at this entrance to complete its development
- Shore clearance similar to that required on the North shore and a deepening of the shallows are needed here also.
- A path and peg structure around the shore would then offer full access to this side of the facility

Entrances:

The drawings on the next page show access gates to be installed to replace stiles at entrance A and at car park 2. These gates fully comply with building regulations for disabled access and prevent animals accessing the facility.

This gate design is also suitable for both entrances to the Western side of the lake although it is not envisaged that this side will be fully accessible to all.

Toilets:

- A survey of service users among youth groups give the absence of toilet facilities as the greatest single concern for youth leaders and community workers when planning trips including Ballyshunnock.
- Permit records show a fairly even breakdown between boys and girls on organised events. Despite angling success, girls are seldom seen to use the facility outside of these organised events. This is at odds with the experience in Oaklands, New Ross where toilet facilities are available.

- While County Engineers have expressed opposition to toilet facilities based on the experience of such facilities in Tramore, the stark truth remains that Ballyshunnock's potential as Public Amenity will remain unrealised unless toilets are available to the public using it.
- Two disabled toilets could be provided and locked, with a key available from permit outlets to blue card holders. One on the North Shore and the other on the South shore. This would seriously reduce the risk of vandalism, while making the toilet available also for organised events.
- A small lock up for cleaning materials would facilitate the maintenance of these toilets.
- Further investigation of 'always open' facilities would certainly be worthwhile as the locked toilet model suggested here is an incomplete solution to the problem.

PROPOSED GATE FOR DISABLED ACCESS AT BALLYSHUNNOCK RESERVOIR

