

Water Refill Scheme

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm John Edwards, Street Scene Operations Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street and Shepway North Wards

Executive Summary

The report outlines the proposal to install three water refill stations at a total cost of £15k, to enable residents and visitors to fill reusable bottles with free tap water. The intention is to promote waste reduction and reuse, encouraging people to purchase less single-use plastic bottles which end up being disposed of or littered.

This initiative would also support the existing national Refill scheme which already has 18 businesses signed up in the Town Centre to provide free refills of tap water. The report outlines the benefits of this scheme and the opportunity for the Council to promote it as part of its waste strategy alongside the new public refill stations.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The Committee agrees the investment of £15k allocated from the Capital Programme for the installation of three water refill stations, two in the Town Centre and one at Mote Park; and
2. The Committee agrees that the Council should sign up to and promote the existing Refill Scheme to offer free tap water to visitors.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 11 February 2020

Water Refill Scheme

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place <p>Accepting the recommendations will support the Council's ability to achieve a 'Safe, Clean and Green' environment through the reduction in single use plastics being used and promotion of waste reduction. We set out the reasons other choices will be less effective in section 2 [available alternatives].</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report recommendation(s) supports the achievement(s) of the Environmental Sustainability cross cutting objective by promoting reuse and waste reduction initiatives .</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	<p>The risks are considered in the risk section and are within the risk appetite for the Council.</p>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	<p>Capital funding of £15k has already been sought to support this initiative and is available should the Committee support the installation of three refill stations.</p>	Finance Team

Staffing	<i>We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.</i>	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	No legal implications have been identified.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no privacy or data protection issues related to this recommendation as no data or personal information is required.	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	The three water refill stations will be DDA compliant and will offer free water to everyone. Therefore, there are no concerns that the new provision will have an equality impact.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendation will offer a positive impact on population health or that of individuals as it will encourage the drinking of free water rather than sugary drinks	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	No impact on Crime and Disorder have been identified	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises for the purchase of the three water refill stations, maintenance and installation. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	Head of Environment and Public Realm

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2018, the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee adopted a new 5-year waste strategy with a focus on implementing waste reduction initiatives whilst maintaining recycling levels at 50%.
- 1.2 Waste reduction sits at the top of the waste hierarchy because it means energy is not required to firstly produce the item and then reprocess or dispose of it. Ultimately without the waste produced in the first place, there can be no impact on the environment.

- 1.3 The Strategy recognised the growing momentum that reducing unnecessary plastic waste was gaining nationally, particularly following Sir David Attenborough's Blue Planet documentary highlighting the plight on our oceans. Evidence suggests that plastic bottles now make up a third of all plastic pollution in the sea resulting in 100,000 marine mammals and 1 million sea birds dying every year as a direct result of plastic pollution. Whilst this spurred outrage with viewers, it has not necessarily materialised into actual change in how most people live their lives.
- 1.4 Dealing with plastics has become a primary focus for many environmental organisations and in turn has driven government action on the subject including legislation to ban single-use plastics such as straws and consideration of deposit return schemes to drive up recycling levels.

The Problem with Plastic

- 1.5 Firstly, it is important to clarify that plastic bottles recycled in Maidstone's green recycling bins pose very little risk to the environment as it is reprocessed into plastic pellets which are then used to make new plastic bottles or other goods.
- 1.6 Unfortunately, the reality is that less than half of the plastic bottles used in the UK are recycled and with the average person using 150 plastic water bottles every year, this is generating a lot of waste. Plastic bottles placed in residents' rubbish bins or littered are sent to the energy from waste facility in Allington. Although this enables energy recovery and the generation of electricity, the materials used to make the bottle are wasted, increasing the need for virgin materials to be used in future production.
- 1.7 Whilst plastic bottles in Maidstone do not end up in our oceans and seas, regardless of whether they are recycled correctly, they still have an impact on our environment. For example, the production of just a one litre single-use plastic bottle takes over 8 litres of water to produce. It is expected that over £1.2 million plastic bottles will be bought every minute by 2021.
- 1.8 In addition, 700,000 plastic bottles are littered in the UK every day. This not only blights the appearance of our environment but poses a risk to wildlife and a financial burden on local authorities to clean up.

The Council's Role

- 1.9 Whilst the Council's waste and recycling services seek to treat plastic waste responsibly through recycling and energy recovery, there is a need to encourage residents to think differently and not consider them as 'waste' in the first place.
- 1.10 As set out in the Waste Strategy, the Council is committed to investing in infrastructure that supports waste reduction and taking the lead on initiatives which generate behavioural change.
- 1.11 Over the past X months, the Council has distributed reusable coffee cups alongside local retailer incentives...

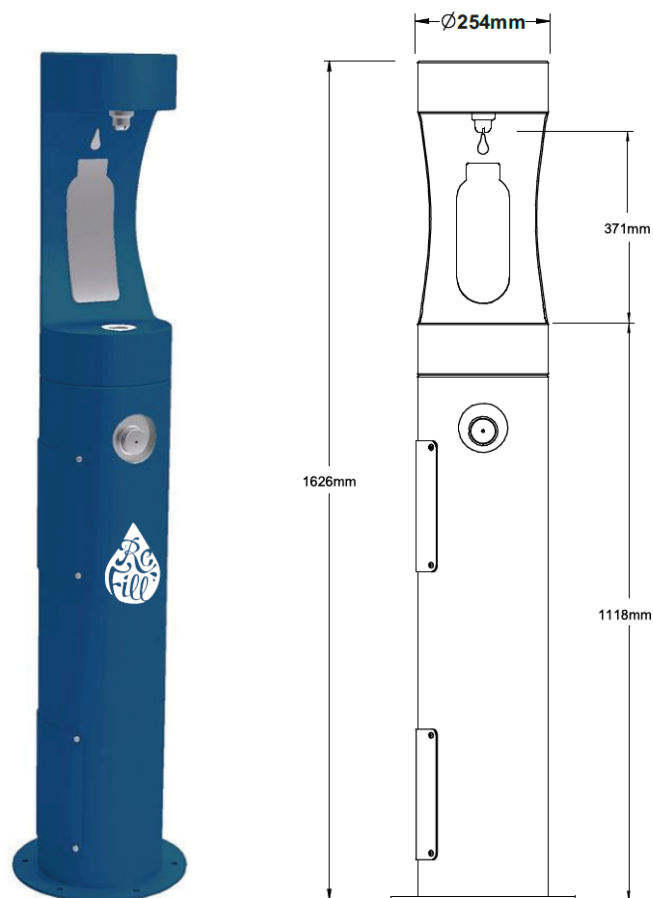
1.12 Most recently, the Council has been investigating the options for reducing plastic bottles through the provision of free tap water by businesses in the Borough. This was driven firstly by community interest, with several enquiries about the provision or reinstatement of water fountains and the national Refill scheme.

Water Refill Stations (Fountains)

1.13 Although there is already a water fountain, albeit out of commission, within the Queen's Monument at the top of Jubilee Square, there are several reasons whilst recommissioning this is not recommended:

- 1, Direct-drinking fountains pose a greater public health risk and anti-social behaviour
- 2, Considerable disruptive work would be required to fix and reconnect the water supply, including excavating the granite
- 3, Design of the fountain would not support refilling bottles
- 4, The fountain is particularly low.

1.14 The image below shows one example of a bottle refill station which could be installed. A similar station has recently been introduced in Ashford.



- 1.15 These water refill stations cost in the region of £3,000 with an annual maintenance cost.
- 1.16 Through the Capital Scheme, £15,000 funding has been sought for the provision of waste refill fountains in the Town Centre and Mote Park, pending approval from the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee. This cost will include the purchase of the units, installation, a service package and signage.

Refill

- 1.17 Refill is an *“award-winning grassroots campaign to prevent plastic pollution by making it easier to reuse and refill waste bottles with free tap water than buy a new one”*. They have a network of over 15,000 Refill stations across the UK, including 18 in Maidstone town centre, where people can refill their water bottles free of charge. Refill also provide an App which enables visitors to locate their nearest refill point.
- 1.18 They have calculated that if all the stations were used just once a day, there would be a reduction of over 5 million plastic bottles per year. This demonstrates that a small change can deliver a real impact.
- 1.19 Their mission also looks to promote healthy lifestyles by encouraging the consumption of more water as opposed to other sugary drinks.
- 1.20 Alongside the community scheme, the installation of three public waste refill stations (or fountains) offer additional benefits:
- Appeal to people who do not want to go into a business and ask for a refill
 - More visible
 - Direct usage can be monitored
 - Can be located in areas where there are no or limited businesses in the scheme
- 1.21 Refill highlight four key benefits of their scheme:
- **Strong Local Economy** – businesses experience increased footfall and build relationships with their customers
 - **Clean Streets** – fewer plastic bottles littered
 - **Health People** – making tap water freely available encourages health hydration and appeals as alternative to sugary drinks
 - **Inclusive, resilient communities** – Refill have a number of community initiatives to support groups getting involved with the scheme
- 1.22 Whilst there are clearly a number of businesses already supporting the Refill scheme, this is not widely known across the community and visitors. The Council’s involvement promoting these alongside the three new public refill stations is intended to increase awareness and therefore use of the scheme.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 The Committee could decide to use the £15,000 capital funding to install three water refill stations in the Borough and to actively promote the Refill scheme, including the App to locate free tap water.
- 3.2 Alternatively, the Committee could decide against installing the units and simply promote the existing Refill scheme using local businesses.
- 3.3 The final option is the Council could decide not to take any action to promote the refilling of water bottles and focus on other reduction and reuse initiatives as part of its 5-year waste strategy.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 It is recommended that Option 1 is agreed as this combines the promotion of the existing community scheme and the installation of refill infrastructure which is more likely to appeal to a wider number of people and generate more interest in the initiative.
- 4.2 It also re-introduces fountains into the Town Centre which previously existed in the Queen's Monument, but without the risk to public health or extensive repair and installation costs.
- 4.3 This initiative appeals to an increasing number of people who are conscious of their impact on the environment and want to make changes to reduce waste plastic waste. This option will support a more comprehensive campaign to target plastic waste and reduction initiatives as the Council will have an active role in the delivery unlike option 2.

5. RISK

- 5.1 The potential risks associated with these recommendations have been considered and due to the low impact or likelihood of any risks, they are within the Council's risk appetite.
 - 5.2 The main risks are vandalism, maintenance costs or lack of use. The first of these will be mitigated, firstly by the unit itself which is specifically designed to prevent vandalism or anti-social behaviour. Also, the locations of these have been identified so they are visible and can be monitored. Maintenance costs have been fully considered within the costings and a 3- or 5-year service package will be included in the purchase. Finally, the concern about the units not being used, evidence from else where shows this is unlikely, however the accompanying communications campaign will seek to promote the use. Usage of the units will be monitored to assess the success of the initiative in reducing plastic waste.
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6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Previously a question regarding the implementation of such a scheme was raised at the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee which generated some support for promoting reuse and waste reduction initiatives particularly around plastics.
 - 6.2 The Committee approved the adoption of a new 5 year waste strategy in 2018, which highlighted the need to invest in infrastructure as well as promote waste reduction initiatives. This report outlines one such initiative for the Committee to consider further.
 - 6.3 Following agreement by the Committee to request £15k from the Policy and Resources Committee for the installation of water refill stations, it was requested that further information be presented, which is the purpose of this report.
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7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 If agreed, the Environmental Services Team will start work with the Communications Team to devise an appropriate campaign which will support the existing community scheme and coincide with the installation of the water refill stations.
 - 7.2 Quotations will be sought for the purchase of the stations and their installation as there are a number of suppliers in the market.
 - 7.3 It is expected that the water refill stations would be installed by the beginning of the Summer 2020 in the Town Centre. The third station will be coordinated with the work on the new Visitor Centre at Mote Park.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

None

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None