

Provision of Public Drinking Water in Streets and Open Spaces

This note responds to member requests to review the practicability of providing free drinking water for public consumption across Cambridge's streets and open spaces. The Executive Councillors for Environmental Services & City Centre (Cllr Rosy Moore) and Streets & Open Spaces (Cllr Anna Smith) are supportive of this principle, and have asked officers to investigate potential options.

Public drinking water fountains have historically been expensive to install and maintain¹, and over the years have been removed from public places (particularly those with open access) because of vandalism and difficulties in keeping them clean and useable. Such fountains are potentially high risk areas of cross contamination for bacteria and germs.

There is however an alternative scheme that encourages cafes, shops, hotels and businesses to refill a water bottle presented to them by a member of the public (for free), that is now well developed and becoming more widely known. See <https://www.refill.org.uk/>

Participating cafes, bars, restaurants, banks, galleries, museums and other businesses simply display the schemes' sticker in their window(s) – alerting passers-by to the fact that they're welcome to come in and have their bottle filled up – for free. Users download the free Refill rewards app to see where they can Refill 'on the go', or add new places to Refill themselves. If the City Council were to develop a local scheme, other organisations and companies with which it works might be encouraged to become partners, with potential to share any costs involved.

Officers are continuing to explore various other potential options associated with the buildings and land it manages, which may prove practicable in addition to extending any Refill scheme to Cambridge. There are likely to be resource implications for the Council, however, with less opportunity to share with others than with Refill. Temporary free water stand pipes will continue to be made available as needed for events taking place through the year at Jesus Green, Midsummer Common, Parkers Piece and Cherry Hinton Hall.

¹ The Water Supply (Water Fittings) Regulations 1999 place a range of responsibilities relating to the supply and maintenance of water fountains.