

P-05-847 Public Water Fountains

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 27 Tachwedd 2018
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Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-847

Petition title: Create water fountains in the centre of cities and towns in South Wales to eliminate plastic waste

Text of petition: Call on the National Assembly for Wales to consider creating and providing water fountains in the centre of cities and towns in South Wales. The main purpose of this action would be to eliminate plastic waste. The number of single-use plastic bottles has dramatically risen in recent years and due to the slow recycling process, it is causing pollution of the environment, especially harming sea life.

Many people try to have a healthy lifestyle that includes drinking at least 2 litres of water every day. Therefore, reusable water bottles have become very popular and useful for keeping a human body hydrated all day. Installing water fountains in the city centres or other parts of cities and towns (Shopping centres, sports centres, colleges, cultural centres etc) in South Wales would help with access to drinking water throughout the day. These water fountains would also create access to drinking water for homeless people. To support the local economy in Wales, the water fountains could be sourced by Welsh mineral water companies.

Background

The revival of historical water fountains, installing new ones and improved awareness of publicly available water is gaining momentum as part of the push to reduce plastic waste from drinks related litter.

Research into drinks related litter from [Keep Wales Tidy](#) in 2015 showed:

- 18 billion plastic bottles are consumed in the UK every year; and
- 38 million plastic bottles end up in landfill every day in the UK.

[Keep Britain Tidy](#), in partnership with [BRITA](#), produced a research report in April 2017, [Understanding provision, usage and perceptions of free drinking water to the public in the UK](#). Key findings from the report show:

- Licensed premises are legally required to provide free drinking water to customers on request (but can charge for the use of a glass or for their service when providing the water) in Wales, England and Scotland (there is no such legislation in Northern Ireland); and
- There currently exists three ‘community water schemes’ aimed at providing increased access to free drinking water to the public with a view to reducing bottled water consumption. In these schemes, free water is predominately provided by local food and/or drink businesses, particularly smaller independent businesses. The community water schemes identified are:
 - the [Refill](#) campaign, managed by environmental charity [City to Sea](#);
 - [Tapwater.org](#); and
 - [GiveMeTap!](#) and the associated [#MindTheTap](#) campaign.

Keep Britain Tidy published a further report in April 2018, [Water, Water, Everywhere: Moving from awareness to action on single-use plastic bottles](#) (PDF 570KB). A key finding from the report is:

- Around eight in 10 (78%) people think that there should be greater availability of free tap water, such as more water fountains and buildings offering free tap water.

The report made a number of recommendations for increasing the uptake of reusable water bottles. These included:

- Consideration should be given to how new provision can be created and existing provisions made more visible through greater promotion. Schemes like Refill and GiveMeTap!... present an opportunity to use existing premises and infrastructure to offer free drinking water without the need for installation and maintenance of new water fountains or taps; and
- ...raising awareness of any water fountains or dispensers provided.

In the [press release](#) accompanying the report, Keep Britain Tidy Chief Executive Allison Ogden–Newton said:

Too many people still find it challenging to fill up on the go, while many more are still embarrassed to ask for tap, worried about the safety of water fountains, or just unwilling to go the extra mile and carry around a reusable bottle. We’ve simply got to get to a situation where topping up in glass or refillable bottle is the norm.

London Action

On 13 August 2018 the Mayor of London [published](#) a draft new London plan. The plan calls for local authorities to identify ‘appropriate locations’ for water fountains during the planning process. It states:

The provision of accessible free drinking water fountains helps improve public health, reduces waste from single-use plastic bottles and supports the circular economy through the use of reusable water

bottles. Free drinking water fountains that can refill water bottles as well as be drunk from should be provided in appropriate locations in new or redeveloped public realm.

The [BBC reported](#) that “the plans are part of a £750,000 scheme to cut plastic waste” and “part of the mayor's ambition to send no biodegradable or recyclable waste to landfill by 2026”.

Recent [reports](#) indicate that the water fountains installed so far as part of the plans are proving successful:

According to the team behind the installations, more than 8,000 litres of water have been dispensed in under a month from two drinking fountains installed at Liverpool Street Station – equal to 16,000 standard bottles of water – while another fountain, installed off Carnaby Street in March, has been used more than 10,000 times a month since tracking began in early June.

Welsh Government action

On 7 May 2018, Environment Minister Hannah Blythyn AM, [announced](#) plans to work with [City to Sea](#) on developing a [refill scheme for Wales](#) to become the UK's first ‘Refill Nation’. She said:

... work will get underway to improve access to drinking water in public places across Wales. The Welsh Government will work with City to Sea on developing the Refill campaign for Wales, as well as working closely with water companies in Wales and more widely with our businesses, charities and major events. The work will also include a behavioural change campaign to help people see the value of water and make tap water their first choice for hydration.

On 4 June 2018 at the Volvo Ocean Race the Minister [announced](#) the 870 mile Wales Coast Path as the first location for the roll out of the refill scheme:

The Welsh Government will work with towns, villages and food and drink businesses to sign up to become refill points.

Those signed up to this drive to decrease use of single use plastics in Wales will be visible to walkers through window stickers and be listed in a bi-lingual refill app.

The app will provide the public with a list of locations where free drinking water is available making it easier for people to refill their water bottles without needing to purchase further single use beverages.

National Assembly for Wales action

In response to the refill scheme announcement in [Plenary](#) on 8 May 2018, David Melding AM said:

... on the drinking water initiative and the Refill initiative... this sort of scheme, or encouraging people to use reusable bottles and having points where they can go into places around town where they can be refilled, I think that's excellent and that's definitely part of the solution.

The Petitions Committee is currently considering the following petitions, all concerned with reducing or eliminating plastic waste:

[P-05-750 For single use items: introduce a Deposit Return System for drink containers and make fast food containers and utensils compostable](#)

[P-05-803 Our natural world is being poisoned by single use plastics...it's time to introduce a tax!](#)

[P-05-822 Ban plastic straws \(when drinking milk\) in our schools](#)

[P-05-829 Ban single use plastic items in wales](#)

The [Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee](#) is currently undertaking an [inquiry](#) into microplastic pollution in Welsh rivers.

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