

CLIMATE CHANGE CASE STUDY

REMOVING DISPOSABLE CUPS FROM OUR CAFE



Circular
Economy



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA



INTRODUCTION

At Historic Environment Scotland (HES) we are committed to reducing the amount of waste we produce in order to reduce our environmental impact. As part of this commitment, we have been taking action to reduce disposable cup use in our head office cafe.

Our HES head office cafe is located in Edinburgh and is run by a contracted caterer. It is used by our staff and invited visitors. We have around 380 staff based in our head office, and from 2015-2020 the cafe sold around 26,000 hot drinks annually.

In 2015, a waste audit revealed that disposable coffee cups were making up a high percentage of the general waste in our head office. Since then, we have run several campaigns and trials to try and reduce this number and encourage customers to use reusable cups. These have included communications campaigns, subsidising reusable cups, and implementing a charge for disposable cups.

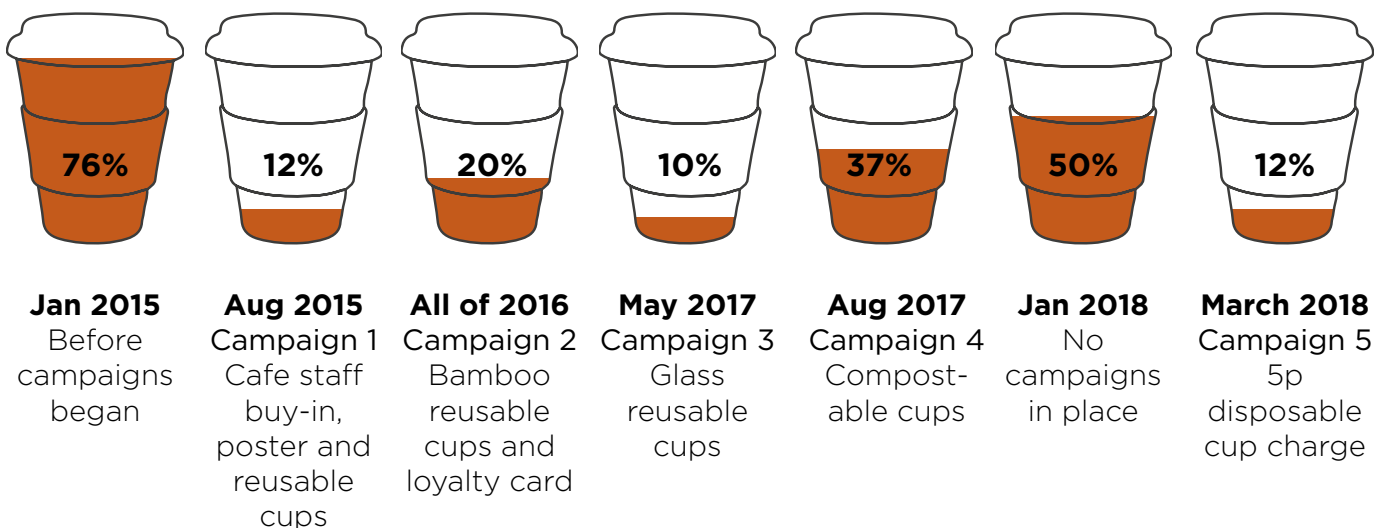
This case study looks at some of the key successes and failures from five of the campaigns and trials we ran. It provides an insight into how we reduced disposable cup use by over 80% and how we then moved to remove the cups from our cafe entirely.

Key findings

The key findings of this case study show:

- Simple communications campaigns with customers are incredibly effective in reducing disposable cup use.
- The most effective campaigns are those which inform customers so that they can make conscious decisions based on their personal values.
- Engagement with and buy-in from caterers and cafe staff is integral to success.
- Campaigns need to be constantly ongoing, stay fresh and be updated regularly to remain effective.
- When removing disposable cups entirely, notifying customers at least a month in advance helps to build support.

Percentage of disposable cups used during each campaign



THE CAMPAIGNS

Campaign 1: Customer communications and cafe staff engagement

In 2015 we started to engage with our cafe caterer and cafe staff in devising a strategy to reduce disposable cups. At this time, 76% of the drinks sold in the cafe were in disposable cups.

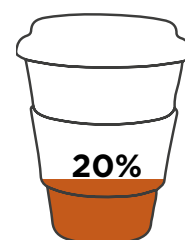


To reduce this, cafe staff started to serve drinks in reusable ceramic mugs rather than disposable as the default. Organisational branded mugs were sourced to make the sit-in option seem more attractive, and branded reusable travel cups were sold at a discounted price. We also issued our Green Champions with their own free travel cup. Alongside this we ran a poster campaign which tracked disposable cup use each month to show our cafe customers the impact of their support.

This campaign was very successful and saw a reduction in disposable cup use from 76% to 12%.

Campaign 2: Bamboo reusable cups and loyalty scheme

Over the years we have offered various types of reusable cups for sale at discounted prices. These have all been popular with our customers and whenever a new style of reusable cup was released it would create a buzz around the office. It became clear that each time the reusable cups sold out, disposable cup use would increase. To remedy this, we kept introducing new cups to keep the offering fresh.



We also introduced a reusable cup loyalty scheme at this time. Stamps were given each time a reusable cup was used, with a free drink issued after 8 stamps were collected. During 2016 these campaigns kept disposable cup use low, averaging 20% for the whole year.

Campaign 3: Glass reusable cups released

When the campaigns came to an end in early 2017, the numbers of disposable cups used increased. We therefore decided to refresh our reusable cup offering and launch a highly discounted HES branded glass KeepCup. These cups were very popular and disposable cup use decreased to an all-time low of 10%.



‘Just making the reusable cups available and at a good price made me embrace them and changed my behaviour outside of work’

HES staff member

Campaign 4: Trialling compostables

In summer 2017, we trialled compostable disposable cups in our cafe. At the same time, we ran a communications campaign which reminded customers to bring a reusable cup and showed how many disposable cups were being used each day.

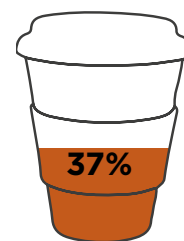


Fig. 1: Sign displayed during the compostable cup trial.

Despite the accompanying communications campaign, disposable cup usage shot up to 37%. Conversations with cafe customers at this time showed that the rise in use was partially due to people thinking compostables were more environmentally friendly and it was therefore okay for them not to use a reusable cup. The conflicting messaging of this campaign created some confusion and frustration for customers, which worked against it being effective.

Campaign 5: Disposable cups sold separately

In February 2018, we teamed up with Zero Waste Scotland to undertake a five-week behaviour change trial at our cafe, testing the effectiveness of charging for disposable cups separately to the coffee. During this time, a hot drink cost the same as before, but the pre-existing loyalty card discount was replaced with a 'cost neutral' 5p disposable cup charge. The switch from a discount to a charge was communicated to customers at the till by the cafe staff and a poster.



This trial was very effective in quickly reducing disposal cup use from 50% to 12%. However, as with other campaigns, disposable cup use quickly increased back to previous levels after the campaign ended.

The full results of this trial can be found in Zero Waste Scotland's [Cups Sold Separately](#) report.

Number of coffees sold per month

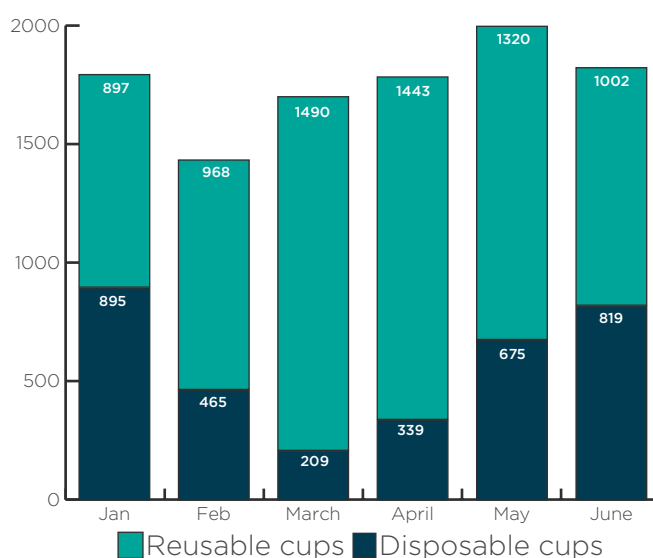


Fig. 2: Graph showing disposable cup use dropping during the 'disposable cups sold separately' trial in February and March and rising up again following the campaign end.

REMOVING DISPOSABLES

Over the years, it had become clear that most of our customers were using reusable cups for their hot drinks. However, when there were no communications reminding people to bring their reusable cups, disposable use would increase.

We first trialled removing disposable cups for Climate Week in September 2017. This removal was not well received by all and hot drinks sales dropped. Customers felt like they were being dictated to and it alienated some people. However, following the broadcast of *Blue Planet 2* just a month later, which raised awareness of ocean waste, and with the move by Scottish Government to remove disposable cups from their own offices in early 2018, we felt like the time was right to try again.

In November 2018 we removed disposable cups, containers and cutlery from the cafe with the support of our senior leadership and caterers. At the same time, we also rolled this out at our newest public cafe at the Engine Shed in Stirling. At both cafes we gave customers a month's notice to prepare for the switch, which was announced in an email to all HES staff from the Chief Executive Officer. Customers feedback gathered in the months following showed overwhelming support for this move.



Fig. 3: Poster preparing HES staff for the removal of disposables.

‘For quite a while I have been keen to be more economical in the products I use and moving towards a fully eco-friendly approach. So the campaigns in place have supported me in my own personal aims’

HES staff member

CHANGE MOTIVATORS

Following the removal of disposable cups, a random group of 75 HES staff were sent a survey in relation to the campaigns to find out what influenced them to switch to a reusable cup.

Many of the responses suggested that customers' switch to reusables had been prompted by their personal beliefs and values, rather than directly by the campaigns.

It was also clear that there was a strong preference for using a classic ceramic mug rather than a specific 'reusable cup'. When asked which reusable cup they preferred, most respondents chose the ceramic mug.

Environmental concern was a feature throughout many of the responses, with one person indicating they felt a responsibility to reduce waste. Furthermore, two respondents thought that a reusable cup has a detrimental environmental impact alongside the disposable, albeit on a reduced scale.

Key stats

- 80% reduction in disposable cup use achieved by a simple poster campaign
- 26,000 disposable cups saved from landfill each year
- Over 900 reusable cups sold in our head office and Engine Shed cafes since 2015

Author:

Katie Carter

Circular Economy Project Officer



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

This case study forms part of a series of Climate Change Case Studies. It is part of our work to reduce our environmental impact as set out in our [Climate Action Plan](#).

Our Climate Action Plan outlines how we intend to work towards making our organisation more prepared for, and resilient to, changes in our climate, while also playing a leading role in supporting the Scottish Government to meet its ambitious climate change targets.

To find out more about this and other Climate Change projects, please contact our team:

E: climatechange@hes.scot

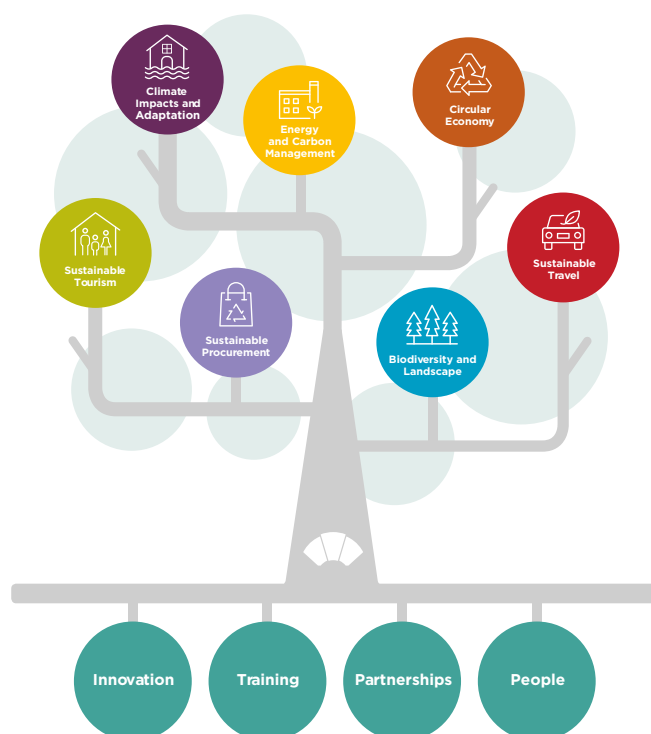


Fig. 4: HES Climate Action Plan themes.

HES RESOURCES

We have a variety of research, guidance and information covering a range of topics relating to the historic environment. These are all free to download from our website: [Historic Environment Scotland publications](#). They include the following series:

INFORM Guides

Leaflets giving a brief introduction to over 50 subject areas of historic environment conservation, maintenance and repair.

Short Guides

Our Short Guides give a more detailed overview of best practice techniques when working with historic buildings. Topics include energy efficiency, repair and maintenance, climate change adaptation and micro-renewables.

Refurbishment Case Studies

This series details the findings from our on-site work trialling and testing techniques for the repair, maintenance and upgrading of traditionally constructed buildings and components. Topics include energy efficiency works, retrofitting, and techniques and materials.

Technical Papers

These papers cover the results of technical research carried out or commissioned by HES. They include topics such as thermal performance of traditional windows, U-values and traditional buildings, keeping warm in a cool house, and slim-profile double glazing.



© Historic Environment Scotland 2024

You may re-use this information (excluding logos and images) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence v3.0 except where otherwise stated. To view this licence, visit <http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/> or write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gov.uk

Where we have identified any third party copyright information you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House

Salisbury Place

Edinburgh

EH9 1SH

T. 0131 668 8600

www.historicenvironment.scot

Scottish Charity No: SCO45925

VAT Number: GB 221 8680 15



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA