

<b>Committee(s):</b> Port Health and Environmental Services	<b>Date(s):</b> 21 July 2020
<b>Subject:</b> City Water Refill Points	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of the Built Environment	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Elisabeth Hannah	

### Summary

This report has been prepared to advise Members of this Committee details of current water refill points in the City and their success. Members are asked to note that water refill points were turned off in March due to the Covid-19 pandemic, switching them back on is being considered in line with Government advice.

The City's refill culture forms part of the Plastic Free City (PFC) initiative which looked to reduce the reliance of local organisations, workers and residents on unnecessary single-use plastics. To encourage re-usable containers and raise awareness of the damage caused by plastic litter in and around the City of London and along the Thames riverfront and bridges. Reducing single use plastic is also a key element of the draft City Plan 2036 in the delivery of a healthy and inclusive City.

Since September 2018 a programme to deliver 10 new refill points in the City was agreed in addition to seven existing points. This report focusses solely on refill opportunities in the City, to update on the delivery and use of refill points, complemented by many retail establishments and a Local Plan ambition to encourage publicly accessible facilities within other commercial buildings.

There is no programme to deliver further refill points (other than those described in this report, yet to be completed). However, this report describes how it is intended to monitor usage and costs in future.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

## Main Report

### Background

1. The Plastic Free City initiative was launched in June 2018 and consisted of a number of different elements, including the Plastic Free City pledge for both individuals and businesses, a website with resources and guides for reducing single-use plastic consumption as well as proposals to expand the City's network of water refill points.
2. The draft City of London Local Plan aims to deliver a healthy and inclusive City in line with Corporate Plan ambitions. The draft Local Plan encourages the provision of publicly accessible water refill points in new commercial development and promotes Circular Economy principles including a reduction in single use plastics.
3. As part of Plastic Free City, the City of London Corporation identified sites and funding to install ten water refill points, in addition to seven pre-existing points, with the aim of reducing the number of single-use plastic water bottles being used and disposed of in the City daily.
4. Research released in March 2020 indicated that over 75% of consumers were looking to reduce their plastic packaging use.
5. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak the decision was taken to switch off all water refill points, along with all other fountains, in line with Government advice. These will remain switched off until restrictions are lifted or when Government advice allows. The fountains continue to be cleaned daily and flushed through fortnightly.

### Current Position

#### Refill Points

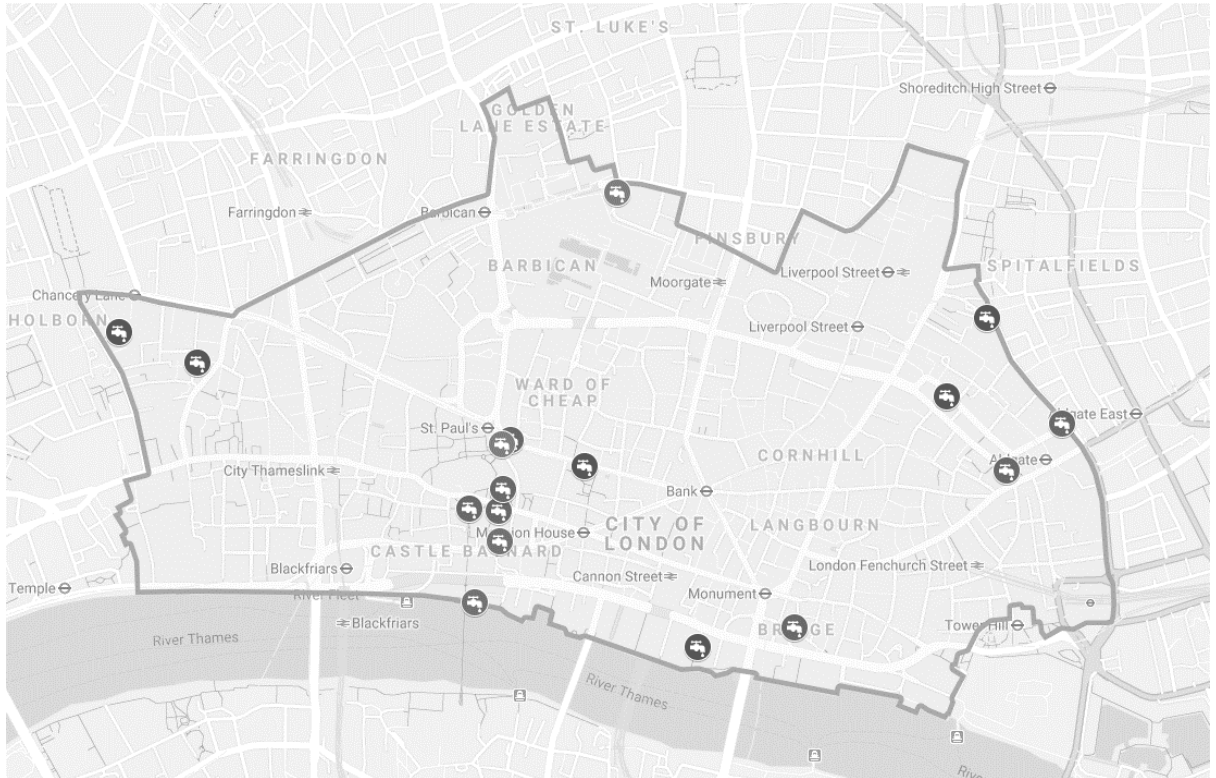
6. There are seventeen water refill points in the City, a full map is available at Appendix 1. Seven refill points were existing, and ten have been installed as part of the Plastic Free City initiative. Of these seventeen water refill points, thirteen of them are operational, although currently switched off due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Four are still under construction or have a minor issue, therefore completion is expected in late 2020 or early 2021 once current Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

	<b>Location</b>	<b>Smart Meter</b>	<b>Date Last Tested</b>
●	Silk Street	Yes	4 March 2020
●	Distaff Lane (Garden)	No	Not yet installed
●	Cheapside (Western Footway)	No	Not yet completed
●	Paul's Walk	No	Not yet installed
●	Cheapside/Bow Churchyard	Yes	4 March 2020
●	Angel Lane	Yes	4 March 2020
●	Middlesex Street	Yes	24 January 2020
●	St. Mary Axe	No	24 January 2020
●	Plough Place	Yes	24 January 2020
●	Southampton Buildings	Yes	31 January 2020

●	St. Lawrence Jewry Memorial	No	24 January 2020
●	Carter Lane Gardens	No	24 January 2020
●	St. Paul's Churchyard	No	24 January 2020
●	Cheapside North (Foster Lane)	No	24 January 2020
●	Monument	No	24 January 2020
●	Aldgate Square	Yes	24 January 2020
●	Middlesex Street/Aldgate	Yes	24 January 2020

7. With regard to the four non-operational locations:

- SILK STREET – the water refill point was completed, installed and tested (passed) however there was a Thames Water Utilities (TWU) issue with their connection when it came for the official switch-on, which was due to be addressed a matter of days before the Covid-19 lockdown came into force. Its anticipated completion has now been delayed until Autumn 2020.
- DISTAFF LANE – the installation of the point has been delayed as it was part of a wider public realm enhancement project, which was postponed when lockdown came into force. It is anticipated for completion by the end of Autumn 2020.
- CHEAPSIDE (WESTERN FOOTWAY) – the water refill point was installed as part of a public realm enhancement project however its final connection was delayed due to lockdown. Again, this is anticipated for completion in the Autumn of 2020.
- PAUL'S WALK – this refill point has a longer-term target; its originally intended position was considered a problem by TWU as there was no readily available water main. However, COL have provided a solution in principle, serving the intended refill point by utilising a smaller supply in the nearby pipe subway. Due to the current situation, and given the amount of work and costs involved, this is not likely to come to fruition until January 2021 at the earliest.



*Small map showing all 17 refill points (Appendix 1)*

8. Locations of the City refill points can be found on the Plastic Free City website and also the free of charge app REFILL. This is a nationwide scheme providing a network of points offering the public free tap water in the UK. The network comprises high street retailers (including Starbucks and Costa Coffee), cafes, restaurants, other businesses, museums, and local authorities (including the City of London). Established in 2015, the scheme aims to prevent waste created by single-use plastic water bottles. (Appendix 2)
9. As of March 2020, there are 201 City establishments identified on the REFILL app.

### **Usage**

10. Out of the ten recently installed refill points in the City eight use smart meters which allow for accurate measurement of usage, along with more accurate fault reporting. Where smart meters are not installed, manual water readings are taken and regularly recorded. The other two were due to have smart meters installed when lockdown came into force hence their fittings will take place later in the year.
11. For the seven long-term existing points, smart meters will be retrospectively fitted by Thames Water Utilities, however the Covid-19 situation has caused the delay of this process until late 2020/21.

12. Once the implementation is complete and smart meters are fitted to all refill points officers will report usage as part of a quarterly performance report to this Committee.

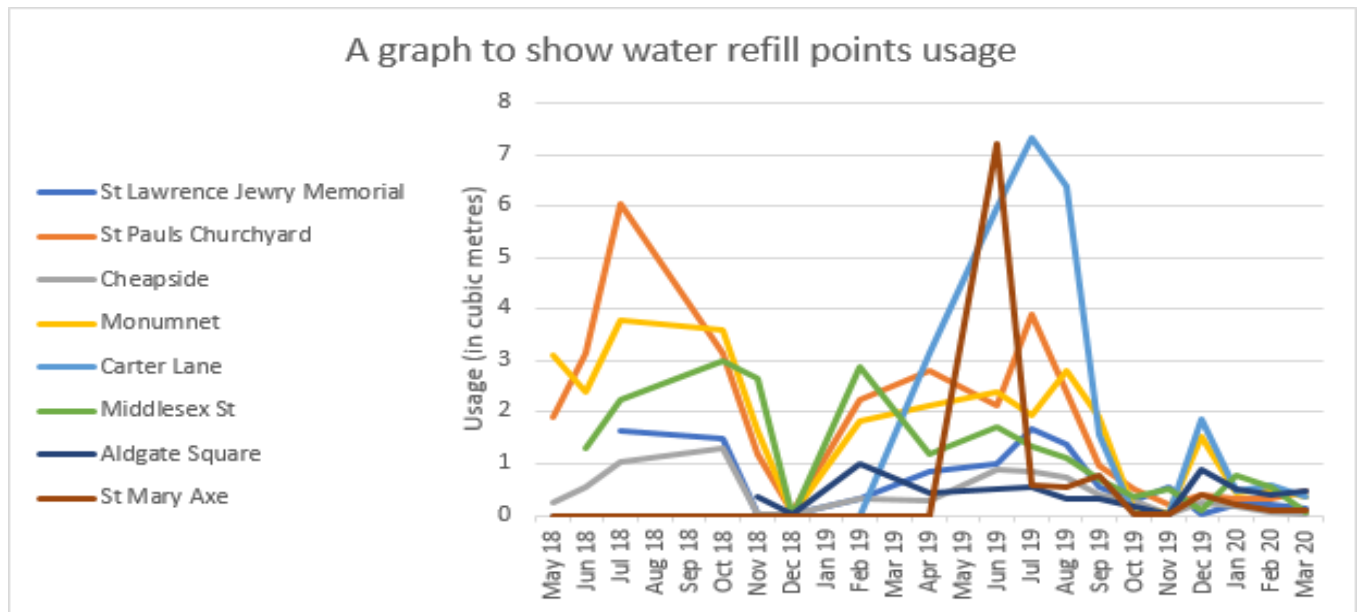


Image showing volume of use per refill point (manual readings)

### ***Ongoing Maintenance and Hygiene Inspections***

13. Maintenance is provided by the Highways team in the Department of the Built Environment, in addition the Cleansing team provide regular cleansing of the refill points, and bacteriological testing is carried out by colleagues in the Markets & Consumer Protection Department.

14. The maintenance regime for existing water bottle refill points includes the following:

- A daily inspection and clean
- A monthly meter reading for those refill points without smart meters
- In winter, typically between November and March, in line with good practice when the weather is colder, the water bottle refill points are turned off to protect pipework and reduce likelihood of a slip hazard.
- When the temperature increases, water bottle refill points are turned on temporarily for another inspection and check for waterborne pests. Once Thames Water Utilities are satisfied, the water bottle refill points are turned on for public consumption.

15. All refill points are tested quarterly by colleagues in Markets & Consumer Protection. This includes sterilised samples being collected and sent to an approved laboratory for testing. Sampling is in line with the Water Industry Act 1991, section 77(1). The Authority has a duty to take steps to ensure the wholesomeness of the water supply in their area. Testing undertaken via M&CP includes: microbiological parameters

- Enterococci
- Escherichia coli (e-coli)
- Coliform bacteria

16. Legionella is not tested and not required in this instance as the City's mains water is from Thames Water, Coppermills water treatment works, meaning the risk of legionella is low because the water refill points are mains water feed (like all residential properties) and is not stored in tanks etc.

### **Covid-19 Impact**

17. Members are advised that Planning and Transportation Committee have given instruction that in the current time of social distancing as far as possible, that highways should be free from queues and street clutter. Highway usage will be monitored, and water refill points will be turned on only when safe to do so.

18. Measures to support on-street social distancing, including wider footways, will be delivered through phase 1 and 2 street changes as agreed by the Planning and Transportation Committee. City Transportation are working with the Cleansing and Licensing teams to establish how to effectively remove obstructions to support social distancing without negatively impacting City occupiers.

19. With some of the City's footways already narrow there is a risk of individuals queuing to use the water refill point(s) leading to passing pedestrians (wanting to social distance) entering into a live carriageway, therefore increasing the risk of personal injury.

20. Before the refill points are returned to public use, a full programme of risk assessments will be undertaken in line with guidance from Public Health England and when it is considered safe to do so.

### **Historic Drinking Fountains**

21. In addition to the existing network of 17 water refill points There are a total of 13 historic drinking fountains and one water pump listed on the City's register of heritage assets which have in the past dispensed drinking water.

22. The condition of the majority of the historic fountains is generally poor. Significant resources would be required to refurbish each fountain and make it compliant. Some of the works involved would have to be individually bespoke due to the nature of each fountain and any retrospective works, such as pipe works, spouts and mechanisms, are likely to be costly.

23. Nine of the 13 fountains are Grade II listed, requiring Listed Building Consent (LBC) if they were to be refurbished and brought back into use. Where some of those fountains appear within the curtilage of churches, faculty approval/burial licences would also be required. All the heritage drinking fountains pre-date the introduction of the Water Regulations Advisory Scheme (WRAS) which was introduced in 1999. WRAS ensures that any water connection does not cause waste, misuse, undue consumption or contamination of the water supply, and importantly that the water is of an appropriate quality and standard. Any historic fountain brought back into use would need to comply with these regulations.

24. The majority of the 13 fountains retain their original lead pipework and other original features which are no longer compliant with water regulations are not suitable to be brought back to use. There are no plans to bring any of the disused fountains into use, due to prohibitive costs and lack of demand.

### **Next Steps**

25. Officers have undertaken preliminary work to identify premises in the City which are offering free bottled water as part of meal deals in order to target these organisations and discourage them from offering this and steer people towards reusable bottles and the many refill points throughout the City.

26. It is anticipated that usage of refill points once restrictions are lifted will be considerably lower than before, due to health & safety concerns along with anxiety about contact contamination.

27. All water refill points will remain turned off in line with national and regional best practice on health and safety grounds during the present Covid-19 crisis. Officers are consulting with Thames Water and neighbouring authorities to inform the timing of reopening the refill points. The main priority remains to ensure the safety of all users and minimise the risk of spreading Covid-19. This position will be reviewed on a fortnightly basis and the decision to turn units back on will be based on risk assessments and hygiene testing, with any units having appropriate signage installed upon reopening.

28. Operation co-ordination for the refill fountains in the City has been allocated to the remit of Cleansing team of the Department of the Built Environment who will be responsible for the ongoing reporting of usage to this committee.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

29. The refill points support the City's strategic aim to have clean air, land and water and a thriving and sustainable natural environment and a healthy and inclusive City.

30. In addition, provision of water refill points supports the City's strategic aim to provide modern, efficient and high-quality local services. It also supports our Key Policy Priority of developing and improving the physical environment around our key cultural attractions.

### **Financial Implications**

31. Cleaning of the existing network of water refill points is approximately £14,000 pa, this is however a notional cost as it is fully integrated into the work of several operatives and part of the wider street cleansing operation. Budgets are in place to complete the four remaining water refill points being installed as part of the Plastic Free City initiative. No further resources are currently available for the installation of any additional refill points.

32. Maintenance of the existing network of water refill points is approximately £5,000 pa, this is however a notional cost as it is fully integrated into the work of several operatives and part of the wider highways' operation. No further resources are currently available for the installation of any additional refill points.

## **Conclusion**

33. The refill points in the City provide free drinking water, which in turn reduces plastic waste. Between February 2019 and March 2020, 98.524 cubic litres of water have been dispensed saving approx. 197,048 plastic bottles<sup>1</sup>.

34. Once the implementation is complete and smart meters are fitted to all refill points, we will report usage as part of our regular performance reports to the Committee.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Map of City refill points
- Appendix 2 – Map of establishments offering free water refill service

### **Elisabeth Hannah**

Business Manager

T: 07795 290 028

E: Elisabeth.hannah@cityoflondon.gov.uk

### **Joe Kingston**

Business Development and Strategy Group Manager

T: 020 7332 3117

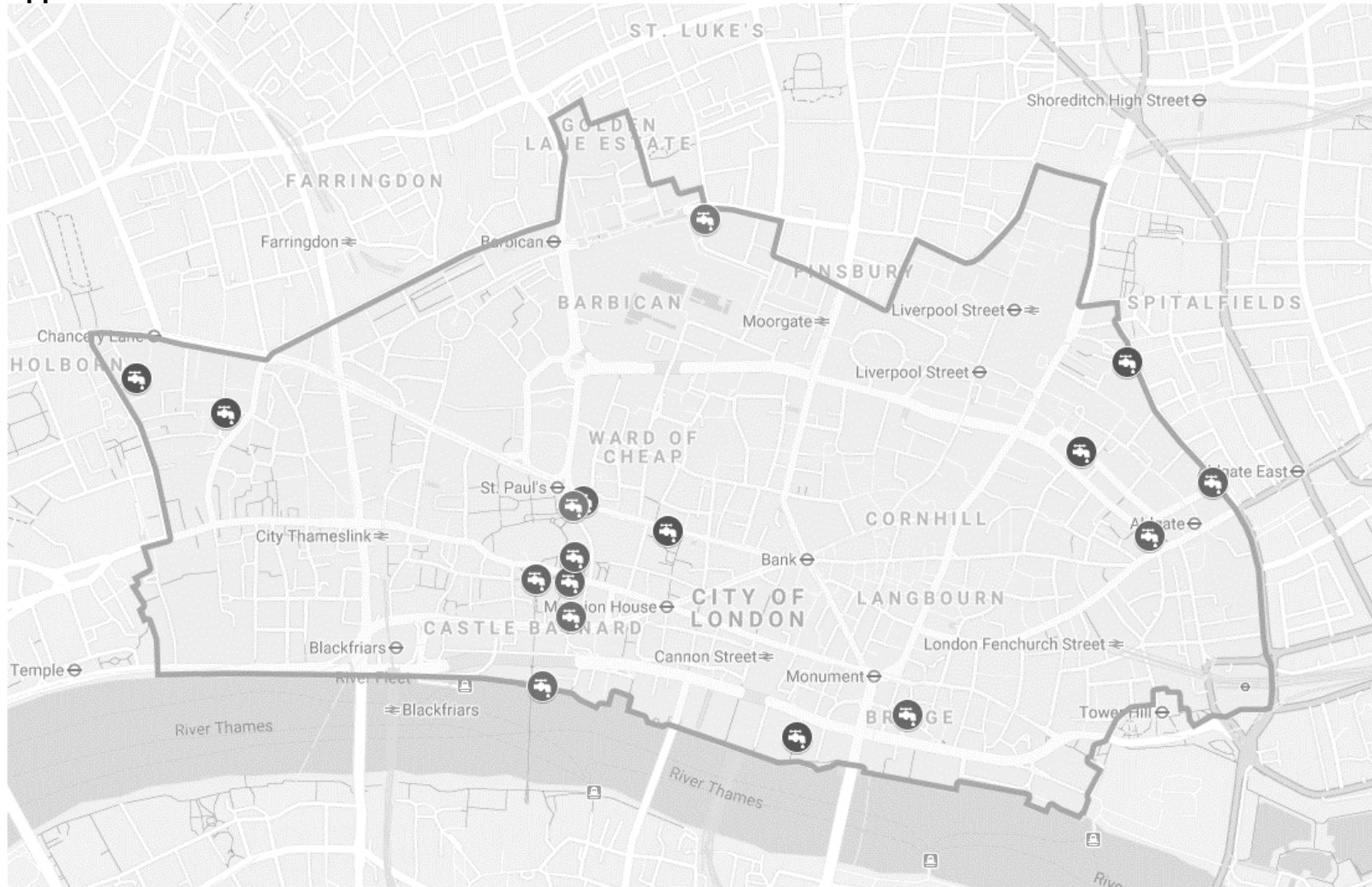
E: Joe.Kingston@cityoflondon.gov.uk

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<sup>1</sup> 500ml bottles

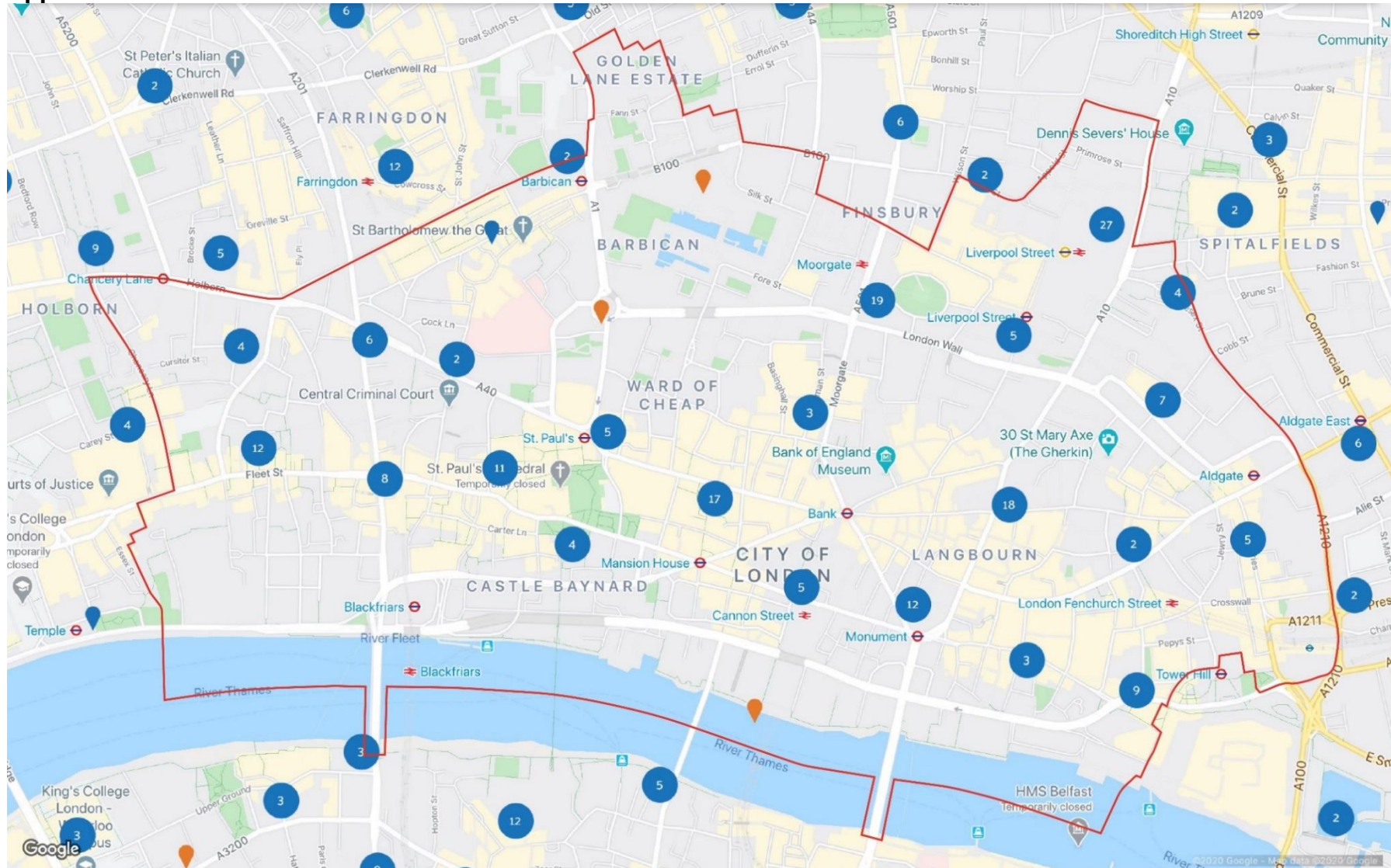


## Appendix 1



Water Refill Points  
Map location: [shorturl.at/pswPQ](https://shorturl.at/pswPQ)

## Appendix 2



Map of establishments offering free water refill service