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Festival venue takes bold step towards greener Fringe Sustainable souvenir scheme tackles single-use cup waste

FRINGE-GOERS picking up a drink at one of the capital's busiest venues are being asked to make a small change with a big impact - as part of a bold new drive to reduce waste and support charitable causes.

In a new initiative [Surgeons Quarter](#), the commercial arm of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, has introduced a £2 reusable cup policy, replacing throwaway plastic with souvenir-style cups that support good causes. Customers pay a one-time £2 charge for a reusable cup, which is theirs to keep. When returning for another drink, they'll receive a fresh, clean replacement cup at no extra cost.

Surgeons Quarter has a longstanding reputation for leading with innovation through environmental initiatives and investing heavily in the wellbeing of its staff.

Ten Hill Place Hotel, part of the Surgeons Quarter portfolio, was first awarded a Green Tourism Gold Award in 2008 and has proudly retained this accolade for 17 consecutive years.

One of the hotel's many sustainable efforts has been the removal of single-use plastic bottles from guest bedrooms. It's a change which has saved over 100,000 bottles to date. In their place, guests are gifted Scottish wildflower seed packets to take home, encouraging biodiversity in their own gardens and extending memories of their stay at the hotel.

Other green initiatives have included a £20,000 investment for installation of EV charging stations at the hotel, as well as a £60,000 investment in new staff members uniforms made from recycled plastic bottles with each uniform preventing 45 bottles from reaching landfills or oceans.

But sustainability is only part of the picture. Surgeons Quarter also goes above and beyond for its team.

Recognised by the Living Wage Foundation (LWF), it ensures all staff, regardless of age, are paid above the LWF Living Wage. In addition, all employees contribute at least 12% of their salary toward their pension, with 7.5% of that contributed by the employer, more than double the required minimum.

Surgeons Quarters Managing Director Scott Mitchell said:

"We're always looking at how we can help improve the planet, improve the guest experience and also improve the working environment for our team. That's why we continually invest in initiatives prioritising long-term sustainability and staff wellbeing. We believe these aspects go hand in hand."

The reusable cup policy reflects this commitment. Surgeons Quarter invested over £20,000 in the upfront cost of the cups, making the £2 charge fair and necessary, so it can continue running

operations that pay staff fairly, reduce environmental impact and maintain the support for its local charity partners.

Scott Added:

“This step is a part of a wider commitment to doing what’s right, even when it costs more. That’s why we’re asking the public to support the reusable cup change as it helps us improve standards across the board.”

Some of the reusable and dishwasher safe cups feature the striking silhouette of the iconic Playfair Hall, while others are branded with the logos of theSpaceUK, which hosts the largest and most diverse programme at the Festival Fringe, and Surgeons Quarter itself.

The variety of designs provides visitors with eye-catching tangible reminders of their Festival experience as well as supporting the drive to reduce single-use waste.

Scott Mitchell said: " After testing the concept in 2024, we've streamlined the system and are excited to launch the full initiative. We're trying to shift the mindset. Rather than something disposable, we want people to see these as souvenirs that do good.

“We know some will be resistant to change but when it’s a minimal cost for an item that supports local and global causes, we hope people will get on board.”

A portion of proceeds from cup sales will support three key causes: carbon offsetting initiatives through Ecologi; a special Supper Soirée hosted by Surgeons Quarter in support of Cyrenians, the homelessness charity tackling isolation and homelessness; and the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh’s global efforts to improve patient outcomes around the world.

Under the new guidelines, festivalgoers are welcome to bring their own clean reusable cups for wine, spirits, bottled beer and soft drinks only — provided the cup is visibly clean. However, if the cup is not SQ-branded, it is your responsibility to ensure it is hygienic, as staff are unable to wash or handle personal cups. Single-use plastic cups, including supermarket-style cups, will not be accepted.

Scott added: “This isn’t about jumping on a trend. It’s a long-term commitment to reducing our footprint and boosting our social impact.

“A single-use plastic cup has an impact of 0.07kg CO₂e, and a reusable equivalent has an impact of 0.0084kg CO₂e per use. Every cup that isn’t thrown away is a small win for the environment and every cup that helps someone in need makes that win even sweeter.”

Surgeons Quarter promotes, sells, and manages all commercial activities held within the RCSEd campus.

These include facilities for conferences, meetings, private events, parties, and weddings, as well as its own four-star hotel, Ten Hill Place, Café 1505, and SQ Travel.

To find out more about Surgeons Quarter, visit: <https://www.surgeonsquarter.com/festival-fringe-2025/>

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