

**BLOG:**

## WHAT CUP AND WHERE!?

By Stewart Hemley



### Reusable cups at London events

Which venues are taking a stance against single use waste and implementing circular economy models?

What are the biggest environmental factors to consider when attending events? Travel? What to eat or drink? Which merchandise to buy? It is not always the first thought at the forefront of everyone's mind, but there has been growing interest and increased awareness on the amount of single use packaging produced from large scale sporting, festival, and concert events. This is in part due to the increased interest in the circular economy model, combined with public pressure to reduce the amount of single use packaging produced from the events industry.

Over the course of 2023, I visited several sporting and music venues in London (for pleasure not work!) and took some time to understand each venue's approach to reusable cup schemes and sustainability in general.

#### Twickenham Stadium:

I had been made aware before attending the event that Twickenham operate a reusable cup system on event days instead of single use. When arriving at

Twickenham, it was evident that they had removed the returnable cup system, in place of 'self-destructing' cups. Twickenham advertised on their website about designated cup collection points (although I only saw a few). They mention that the cups could be recycled, and if not recycled will degrade into a natural wax in two years. The move away from reusables to single use still creates vast amounts of single use waste and littered the surrounding areas of the stadium. These cups also create a false sense of environmental complacency as most normal consumers aren't aware these types of cups are still plastic, with an added additive to aide breaking down, but can still have the same negative environmental effects as standard littered plastic. Twickenham stadium have taken more strides to improve sustainability, such as a minimum of 80% of fruit and vegetables being British seasonal produce, 25% of the menu offered being plant based and have a zero waste to landfill policy.

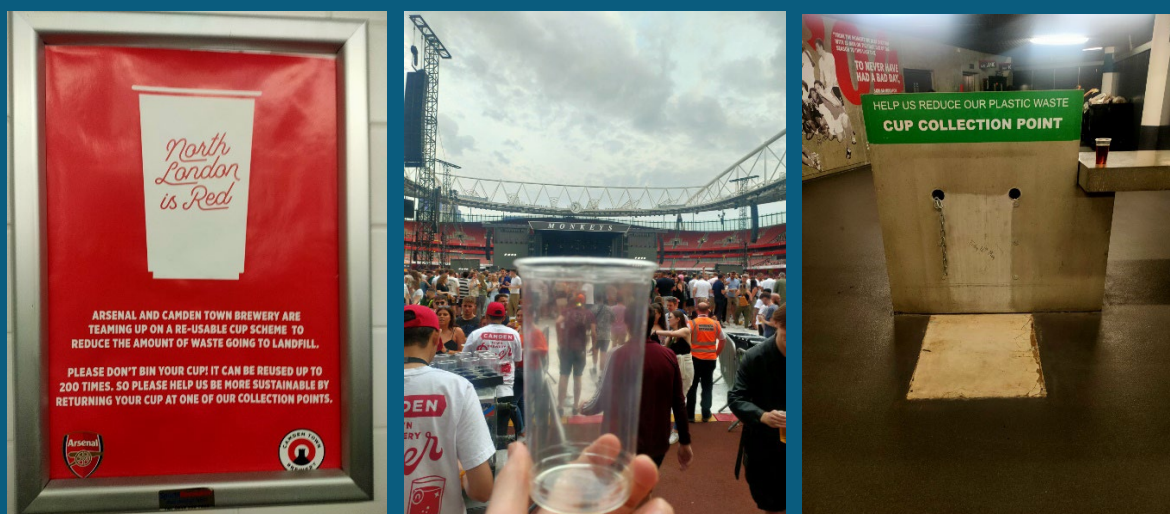


## The O2 Arena:

Visiting The o2 arena in October, I was pleasantly surprised to see they had implemented a reusable cup system. Once you were past security and in the arena vicinity, certain alcoholic drinks (draft beers and spirit/mixers) came in reusable One Planet Cups they had clear signage for return points in the arena, on the surrounding concourses and on the bins (with clearly labelled signs for cup collection). The soft drinks were still served in single use paper cups, which were then collected separately for recycling. The wristbands used for standing concerts are also made from recycled PET. The o2 also uses certified green energy and has an onsite wormery and bio-digester for any food waste, with any surplus food being donated to those in need. The o2 have also announced the first carbon removal concert next year at The 1975 concert in February 2024. The o2 are partnering with CUR8 and green events specialist A Greener Future through "*A portfolio of carbon removal methods to physically extract the carbon generated by the events from the atmosphere and durably store it*" a leading example of improving event sustainability.

## Emirates Stadium:

In the lead up to visiting the Emirates stadium in June, on their website I found that they had launched a reusable cup scheme in 2019 to reduce their single use cup usage. It is unclear if they have a different policy for non-football events, but when at the football stadium for a concert, it was evident that there was no returnable cup scheme in place (on this occasion). It was advertised around the stadium and there were the collection points that had been marked out, but strangely, it looked like they had been removed. It is unclear whether this was just for external events (such as concerts) or whether it had been removed entirely. The drinks in the stadium were served in single use R-PET cups and many were littered around the stadium once the concert had finished although there were a number of recycling points. Other things that Emirates Stadium are doing in the realms of sustainability include: sending all food waste for anaerobic digestion, composting the grass trimmings from the pitch, installing water fountains to cut down on plastic waste and installing a monitor for a month long trial with UCL to monitor the air quality around the stadium.



## Some thoughts on what can be done:

There are many different actions that can be taken by stadiums and venues to minimize waste. While moving away from single use to reusable cups is a good first step, to increase uptake and keep as many cups in the system as possible, it would be strongly recommended to implement a deposit system with

reusable cups. This can cause potential queuing at the end of events (although this could be reduced with a digital return system). However, the return is likely to be much higher than without a deposit, due to the added financial incentive. This would also aid in keeping the cups in the system, rather than being kept by the consumer or littered in the natural environment. In a study by Kaunas University of Technology<sup>1</sup>, it was found that at several Lithuanian music festivals, the most effective reuse method was a refundable deposit model. This had lower rates of damaged and lost cups compared to non-refundable reusable cup reuse models. This can be further supported by a study in Turin (Italy) which found that 70% of people would be incentivised to return their cup and collect abandoned cups in the street if a Deposit-Return System (DRS) for both, single-use and reusable cups was used.<sup>2</sup>

It is evident that although progress has been made and there is more incentive for venues to implement environmental actions, there is still more to be done and it seems that progress is inconsistent and differs greatly between venues. Arguably, this could be due to changes mostly being down to public pressure and perceived image, rather than being policy driven.

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<sup>1</sup> [Sustainability | Free Full-Text | Improvement of Packaging Circularity through the Application of Reusable Beverage Cup Reuse Models at Outdoor Festivals and Events \(mdpi.com\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Procedia \(unito.it\)](#)