

West Somerset Railway Heritage Trust

Major Donations and Legacy Recognition Policy

Introduction

The Major Donations and Legacy Recognition Policy is intended to provide clarity for those people who intend to provide significant donations or bequests as to how their financial contribution to the work of the Trust will be recognised by the charity.

The Trust receives donations from a wide variety of sources most of which are relatively small sums of money and often linked to Membership, but valued nonetheless. The Trust will continue to recognise receipt of these regular smaller donations (although not for sums below £1000 currently) and will always acknowledge this through a formal letter unless contact details are not available.

The Trust has historically adopted a largely passive approach to public recognition of significant donations and/or legacies. Although details are published in the Annual Accounts, we do not normally go beyond this point. However, it is the changing economic climate and emerging evidence of an increase in the number and impact of these funding streams on the work of the charity that has prompted the need for this Policy.

It is primarily legacies that can generate significant levels of funding, although the same principles apply to major donations particularly where these are repeated by individuals who are known to the Trust. Where these are given for specific purposes, the Trust will comply with the conditions of the bequest unless it is beyond the capability or control of the charity so to do. Where significant donations or legacies come with conditions, then such funds received will always be ring fenced and put into Restricted Funds designated for that purpose.

The challenge comes in relation to significant donations legacy bequests which have no conditions attached and for which it is for the Board of Trustees to determine how any money is used. In the last four years the Trust has received just under £400,000 in legacy bequests but none have come with specific requirements attached. However, Trustees now acknowledge that public recognition of significant donations/legacies is not only morally and ethically sensible but will have the additional benefit of publicising and hopefully, securing future potential income of this nature.

For the purposes of this Policy, a “**Significant Donation or Bequest**” is defined as any single gift of £10,000 or more.

Principles

- The Trust will always publicly acknowledge receipt of significant donations and/or legacies (but without quoting specific sums). This will be done through publicity including social media, website postings and other outlets;
- The Trust will always write formally to the person/executor making the donation or bequest thanking them on behalf of the charity for their generosity. This will be undertaken either by the Treasurer or Company Secretary;

- When the Trust Board has made a decision as to how to use the money, it will write to the person/executor concerned telling them how the money has been (or will be) spent;
- Where monies are given for specific purposes, the Trust will comply with the conditions of the donation or bequest unless it is beyond the capability or control of the charity to do so. In such cases, it will discuss with the donor or executors whether the conditions can be amended;
- The Trust will set out a clear mechanism for deciding how to recognise a donation or a legacy and publicise this on its website, social media and other outlets;
- The Trust will not make individual donations or bequests public or provide information on the donor/estate unless it has the written permission of the individual/representative concerned or the Trust has been asked to do so as a condition of receipt of the funds;
- The Trust will not accept donations or bequests for purposes that are outside of its Objects and Powers as set out in the Articles of Association. Where an initial approach suggests that this might be the case, then there will be discussions with the donor or legacy executive to examine how the requirements of the charity can be met. If this is not possible and the donation or legacy has already been received, it will then be returned with the appropriate explanation. Where there is potential for difficulty to arise, the Trust will seek legal advice as to the appropriate action to be taken.

Approach to Recognition

There are many ways/levels in and at which the Trust can recognise the value of any funding contribution. These include:

- Simple written acknowledgement particularly if the donor or person passing on a bequest does not wish there to be any over publicity;
- Public acknowledgement through website and social media
- Linking donations or bequests to specific projects publicly acknowledging how the funding contribution has helped to deliver the outcome;
- Linking donations or bequests to specific objects on a similar basis. This may also include a plaque or some other written way in which the name of the individual can be easily recognised for example, on a donor board in the Museum;
- Naming an object, location, project or activity after a specific individual including, for example, targeted access through arranged visits;

How do we Decide?

This is the most difficult area to consider because any judgements and decisions are likely to be seen as largely subjective and open to challenge in terms of any personal, emotional or historical connection with the donor or the individual making a legacy bequest.

We therefore need some working criteria (which will always be subject to review) on which to base decisions. The agreed approach is a financial value based one as follows:

We have a graduated “Funding Pole”. If you donate:

- Between £1000 and £5000 you get the first two bullet point actions listed above
- Between £5000 and £10,000 you get the first two bullet points and the third
- Significant donations or legacies beyond £10,000 takes us to the level of the fourth and fifth bullet points. The Trust Board may wish to have a financial cut-off point at which we differentiate between fourth and fifth in terms of preference.

We also need to be clear that if the object, project or activity is a large scale one that making a decision on recognition and naming does not set a precedent for the future because there may be situations which create difficulty for the Trust. For example, if a prior decision about the use of an unrestricted legacy or donation “closes off” the opportunity to use that object, project or activity for other donations or legacies for which that might also be suitable. This is particularly the case if these are ones which come with specific conditions.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As this is a new policy area for the Trust Board which has yet to be tested in terms of the reality and consequences of its application, it is recommended that the Board adopt the current proposals for a period of up to 2 years and then conduct a formal review. If circumstances dictate, then the timing of such a review can be brought forward.

Chris Bolt, Don Fraser and Steve Williams

November 2024

Format Updated September 2025

DOCUMENT CONTROL

THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT CONTROLLED ONCE PRINTED

Version No	Date Approved	Revision
0.1	Trust Board 28 November 2024	Review Date 28 November 2026. Responsible Trustee Company Secretary
0.2	Format updated September 2025	Company Secretary