

EACR Bequests Strategy v2.0

Executive Summary

This strategic proposal represents a distillation of 2 years of work from a small group of people, and many conversations and exercises have led to the production of this document. It is intended to be viewed as a guide for the Association management committee and trustees to direct best use of the money generously left to us by Donald Heath and David Cobb. Across Recruitment and Training, Communications and PR, and ringing Infrastructure, investments will be targeted to secure the future of ringing in Essex, recruit retain and develop the skills of young ringers and train to increase the general ringing ability in Essex. At all times, we will ensure that investments represent the best value for money. Where suggested levels of investment are indicated, these are intended as a guide and should not be regarded as a target or aspiration – it is unlikely that investments will exceed illustrative amounts and, in many cases, will be substantially less, safeguarded by the Association trustees.

Introduction and scene setting

The most important asset we have in bellringing is our bellringers. Membership has declined in the association following Covid, and unless we retain the ringers we have, and effectively train new ringers, we will struggle to recognise ringing in its current form in 10 years. Everything that we do has to be oriented to supporting recruitment, retention, and training of bellringers.

In 2021, a bequests subgroup was formed, comprising members nominated from each district in the association, a Life Vice President, and a group of trustees, to consider how to make best use of the monies left to the association by Donald Heath and David Cobb. A set of principles to guide use of the bequests was created, leading to a wider consultation with the membership. Analysis of this exercise concluded that the following principles were deemed to be the most important:

- Investment for the future of ringing in Essex
- Investment in recruiting, retaining, and developing the skills of young ringers
- Training to increase the general ringing ability in Essex

Notably, investment in bells and “hardware” did not receive strong support as an investment principle at this stage.

In response to this consultation the bequests sub-group, led by Tony Bloomfield, Vicki Chapman and Beth Johnson, designed a set of illustrative proposals describing how we could meet these broad aims, which have been successively considered by the bequests subgroup, the management committee and the Association trustees.

This iterative process worked on a principle of an overall majority of support permitting further consideration of the proposal. As we progressed, it became clear that it was extremely challenging to invest the money in projects that did not include an element of “hardware”. Some of the more ambitious proposals were felt to be too high risk to proceed with at this stage, although the trustees did not want to exclude them from future consideration. There were concerns that some of the proposals implied that money would be spent “for spendings sake”, rather than on projects where there would be a defined, proportionate, and secure return on investment.

Thus, this strategy sets out to describe in outline a series of proposals for the management committee and trustees to progress over the next 6 years, leading up to the 150th anniversary of the Association. A proportion of the funds is proposed to be dedicated to bells and hardware, but with controls that ensure that the main principles (Investment for the future of ringing in Essex; Investment in recruiting, retaining, and developing the skills of young ringers; Training to increase the general ringing ability in Essex) are met as part of these investments.

It became clear throughout the process that a crucial success factor of many investments is local leadership, rather than association led projects. Thus, a high proportion of the bequests funds is to be made available to application from the membership.

Whilst each project could be delivered in isolation, the success and speed of delivery of some will be consequential on others. This, and other emergent factors, will be considered by the management committee and trustees as these proposals are progressed, to ensure that the money is invested responsibly.

The strategy is described in 4 sections: Recruitment and Training, Comms and PR, Ringing Infrastructure, and Enablers. Each section indicates the support that was received from the iterative selection process (in general, proposals above 50% support were taken forward). Several projects that were not supported are also described where these are to be considered for future investment once further assurance can be gained. Two proposals were supported but will be funded through other routes.

Recruitment and training

“Energising ringing in Essex” (ERIE)

This comprises several proposals which were considered separately, but which have clear synergy and as such are described as part of an overall programme of recruitment and training. This is a 6-year programme culminating in the 150-year anniversary of the foundation of the Association in 2029.

Deliverables: Aim for a 30% increase in membership plus trained teachers in 75% of towers in Essex.

a) Awards programme 50% support

As part of this programme there could be an award to a tower every other year. Detailed criteria for award will be determined by the management committee but could include achievements such as most enhanced training facilities, outstanding recruitment efforts, most developed band.

The investment could be up to £3,000 over 6 years, which would include award & award ceremonies to meet our aims. Awards would be selected to enhance training and development. As this is a new concept, it is proposed that this concept is piloted and reviewed after first year and if successful continue to anniversary year. Success factors will include feedback from members, impact on recipients and the wider district.

b) Youth projects 50% support

As part of the ERIE project, schemes will be developed to approach youth groups (including the Scouting and Guiding Associations) plus school visits and projects in co-ordination with R&T sub-committee and CCCBR youth group.

For example, in consultation with CCCBR, we will produce packs for towers who want to approach youth groups to include presentation material and advise how to structure a visit to the tower or 'lesson plan' for a school visit. We will help those who would like to make such an approach but lack the direction and confidence.

A budget of up to £6,000 over 6 years could cover design of posters, presentation materials, activity sheets and follow-up action sheets targeted to specific age groups, plus two sessions run by trainers in how to make effective presentations, ideally in year 2 and year 3 of ERIE.

The association will also consider how to develop a manageable, portable activity resource (not a mini ring) that would be used to engage a group of youngsters. The costs for this would be considered by trustees following further development and are unlikely to exceed £5,000.

c) Adult engagement
70.6% support

The aim is to inform and enthuse adults by presenting to groups such as U3A, Probus clubs, Women's Institute, Townswomen's Guild, Rotary and Round Table Society meetings. Local knowledge of organisations such as church groups and lunch clubs would extend this reach. All these organisations are looking to plan speakers for their annual programmes but expect presentations of a high standard. We will consider development of presentations and training a group of presenters to work county-wide during the 6 years of ERIE programme. We would recruit a small sub-group to take the project forward and review after two years. It is estimated that up to £15,000 could be invested in this scheme over 6 years, which could also have value for the wider ringing community. All investments in this (and all other schemes) will need to pass a value for money assessment by association trustees to ensure that monies are spent responsibly and will be driven by local implementation to ensure that they are used.

For example, we would research opportunities to approach adult groups, both county-wide national organisations (e.g., Rotary Clubs) and local groups (business breakfast clubs). We could commission material (scripts, video) that will deliver our message in a consistent way. To support the presenter, an engaging video could be developed (where existing products are not suitable). This could cover the history of bells and change ringing, physical and mental benefits, and the contribution of ringing to the community, tailored to the local area while setting parochial ringing in the national and world spectrum. Guidance would be given on follow-up leaflets, press coverage and creating individual links between interested individuals and teaching towers.

d) Investment in training hubs
64.7% support

We would develop a scheme to create training centres to exploit and supplement current facilities, providing more localised opportunities for training throughout the year. As part of this, we will encourage local implementation of simulators and dumbbells both for silent practice and for developing individual's ringing abilities through access to Bequest-funded grants. Initial discussions considered an investment of approximately £10,000 across 11 sectors (as defined by the Recruitment and Training subcommittee), £110,000 over 6 years. However, it is likely that this degree of investment is not required or could not be used effectively at this scale, and so it is estimated that these investments would not exceed £50,000. Additionally, all investments in this (and all other schemes) will need to pass a value for money assessment by association trustees to ensure that monies are spent responsibly and will be driven by local implementation to ensure that they are used.

Communications and PR

e) **Commemorative plaques**

94.1% support

It was strongly felt that the bequests left by Donald Heath and David Cobb should be commemorated with plaques or other identification appropriate to the initiative as a way of acknowledging that these activities would not be taken forward without this investment. The cost of this is relatively trivial (no more than £150 per investment).

Ringling infrastructure

f) **BRF (Bequest Training & Development Fund)**

76.5% support

The only infrastructure initiative that received support (76.5%) was supplementing the Bell Restoration Fund (BRF). However, this still leaves decisions to be made as to the quantity set aside for the BRF, and whether Bequest money is ring-fenced and treated separately to the existing BRF funds and decision-making processes.

It is proposed that a sum of £200,000 be set aside in a fund separate from the existing BRF. The use of these funds would be accessed between 2023-2026 with up to £50,000 per annum to be awarded to projects that met specific objectives in relation to training and development, including the 3 main principles identified as being of prime importance (Investment for the future of ringing in Essex; Investment in recruiting, retaining, and developing the skills of young ringers; Training to increase the general ringing ability in Essex). This should give a reasonable number of towers the opportunity to consider what they may need and to apply for a meaningful grant over the next six years. The officers and trustees will determine the criteria for making awards and towers should apply for access to these funds.

Any grant application would need to demonstrate how the proposed work would enable training and the development of ringing in Essex. Examples could include:

- Costs towards rehangling poor going bells.
- Work to improve the go of bells, (e.g., rope guides, re-roping, pulleys, clappering, relocation of ringing room, etc)
- Available for towers that are actively recruiting and training ringers, have training capabilities and/or have a committed plan to do so.
- Available to towers that are available and open for wider use by members of the Association.
- May relate to the investment in training hub initiative (but not compulsory)

Whereas the funds would not be intended for casting new bells, where works include casting of new bells, an individual bell cast in memory of either of the donors may be considered by the trustees, especially in towers that have a link with the donors.

Projects supported through other funds

g) **Church links**
73.5% support

The proposal from the Trustees is to support this initiative by asking the Management Committee to implement a Bell Sunday programme, remove it from the Bequests strategy and manage it through the Communications sub-committee. The thrust will be to build on the relationship between the Diocese and the parishes, concentrating on less-engaged churches.

h) **Website Redesign**
82.4% support

A significant proportion of support recognised that the website requires updating and consideration as to how it answers to both external prospects wanting to find out more about bellringing and the Essex Association, versus providing information and resources to our existing ringers. However, it was recommended that this work needed to be carried out independently of the Bequests as a core business development for the Association. The Communications & PR workgroup have already developed a style guide (as presented to the Management Committee) to consider basics such as logo design, colours and fonts. This then forms part of the brief being developed to send to website design agencies the Association may engage in supporting this development. Depending on the complexity of the website design, approximate costs could be in the region of £10,000 from the General Fund.

Other projects not supported at this stage

The following initiatives did not reach the 50% threshold and will not be progressed as part of this strategy. However, it was felt that there may be merit in revisiting these at a future date.

i) **Tower Survey**
41.2% support

This initiative was to engage with one/several bell hangers/engineers to undertake a survey of all our bells to determine their state. Whilst this initiative did not reach the approval threshold, it was agreed that a register of bells, their installations and conditions could be collected based on collective knowledge from skilled individuals throughout the Association

j) **Upgrade to local training centres**
38.2% support

It was felt this should be managed via Bell Restoration Fund activity as normal.

k) **PR & Marketing Survey**
38.2% support

It was not felt this would be a good use of time and money to understand our external reach and audience. The Central Council of Church Bell Ringers is engaging with a marketing company undertaking a similar activity and we could use those findings. However, this proposal could be reconsidered at a future date (e.g., dependent on the findings of the CCCBR exercise).

l) **Dumbbell / Mobile Belfry**
38.2% support

This was not supported on the grounds there are several mobile belfries available for hire. This would reduce the need for ongoing storage, transport, insurance costs and the number of occasions where it may be utilised would not necessarily cover the costs. However, the

trustees are considering making an investment of approx. £2,000 towards the Central Council of Church Bellringers mobile belfry in return for recognition of Donald Health and David Cobb, and enhanced access to this facility.

Enablers

m) Paid role

It was felt not enough information was available at present to support the proposal to develop a paid role. Whilst there is limited precedent for this in ringing (e.g., Mancroft Ringing Discovery Centre, The Bells of St Clements Cambridge), there are wider ecclesiastical examples (e.g., many PCCs employ administrative support). Opportunities exist to accelerate the development of training and recruitment activities by paying for services from an appropriate individual.

This proposal would not require the association to become an employer, and self-employed or contracting for service arrangements remain an option. Whilst there are risks and consequences associated with employment, these could be mitigated.

The Association is well served by dedicated volunteers giving significant amounts of their free time to teach new ringers and train bands across the county. Through our performance to date, have shown that a purely volunteer delivered offer (as is usual in ringing) is limited by other time pressures, and there remains potential value in paying for services to accelerate the initiatives that the association wants to develop. It is unlikely that a paid role would do things that our volunteers don't have the skills to do, but they would have the time.

A paid administrator could be key to success of a scheme such as 'Energising Ringing in Essex'.

For example, for an adult initiative a paid administrator would find good speakers/presenters from within the EACR community who could fulfil the initiative; develop and control the production of the video and follow up material; approach organisations in strategic locations (where active towers could take on adult recruits) and manage the programme to ensure success, including testing different organisations for their receptiveness. Administrator to set up training of presenters to instill confidence and make our presentations first class.

However, at this time it was felt by many to represent a level of risk that we did not want to commit to but did not want to rule out in its entirety, as the potential benefits were significant. The trustees will continue to explore the option of some limited pilots of payment for service, with clarity on return on investment and risk, and will report back to the membership in due course following this ongoing exploration.

Review

This strategy will be formally reviewed by trustees after 2 years to allow members to scrutinize the outcomes of these proposals, with a report on monies spent.