

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting

Annual Report 2019

Reference details

1. This is the annual report, compiled by the trustees, of the Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), abbreviated as Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting. The Area Meeting is also known as Hertford and Hitchin Quakers, and was previously known as Hertford and Hitchin Monthly Meeting.

The Area Meeting is part of the organization of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and the national body is known as Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). The Area Meeting contains a number of Local Meetings, which hold public Meetings for Worship and have day-to-day care of Meeting Houses and other property.

The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond. This may be done by work such as:

- strengthening the life and witness of Quaker meetings both in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond;
- spreading the message of Quakers and interpreting and developing the thought and practice of the Religious Society;
- undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
- funding the concerns that Quaker meetings in the area of the Area Meeting or beyond have adopted or agreed to support;
- providing for the pastoral care of individual Members and Attenders¹ including assistance to those in need and for education;
- maintaining and developing its Quaker meeting houses as places for public worship and from which to carry our witness into the world;
- administering and maintaining the organization of the Area Meeting and contributing to the support of Britain Yearly Meeting

2. This report covers the calendar and financial year ended 31st December 2019.
3. The Area Meeting was registered with the Charity Commission on 29th September 2009 with Registered Charity Number 1131894.
4. Address that can be used for communication with the Clerk to the Trustees:
Nick Needham, 92 Skegness Road, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG1 2HT

¹ “Members” are those who have formally been accepted into membership of the Area Meeting, “Attenders” are those who regularly attend Meeting for Worship but are not Members. The Area Meeting has a general policy of not distinguishing between Members and Attenders.

5. Trustees:

The following Trustees served in 2019:

Ian Chandler (released from service 31 December 2019)
David Hindle
Roger Jarvis, (Clerk of Trustees) (released from service 31 December 2019)
Nick Needham
Frances Prestidge (released from service 20 July 2019)

The following Trustees are serving in 2020:

Clare Cooper
David Hindle
Andrew Meek
Nick Needham (Clerk of Trustees)
Headley Parkins (from March 15th 2020)

6. Key officers

Area Meeting Clerk Katey Earle

The appointment of an Assistant Clerk of Area Meeting has not been made after 2011, the functions of the role are rotated between the Local Meetings hosting the Area Meeting sessions.

Area Meeting Treasurer David Hindle

Names and addresses of other relevant organizations or persons

Bank: Triodos Bank, Brunel House, 11 The Promenade, Bristol, BS8 3NN

Examiner of Accounts: Sarah Partridge

Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:

Friends Trusts Limited 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

Public Benefit statement

The principal benefit is that, in normal circumstances, at least weekly each of the 5 Meeting Houses in current use is open to the public for Meeting for Worship. The Meeting Houses are also made available as appropriate, sometimes at a subsidized charge, to suitable local community and interest groups and charities.

Serious Incidents.

There were no serious incidents in 2019 which should have been reported, but were not.

Governance

1. The Area Meeting in session adopted a Governing Document on 13 October 2007 (Minute 81/07), amended on 9 November 2008 (Minute 81/08)
2. The activities of the trustees are defined by the Governing Document, and by the Terms of Reference for trustees adopted by the Area Meeting in session on 9 June 2007. The minutes of trustees meetings, and supporting documents, are available (currently passworded) on the internet, and the attention of existing and new trustees is drawn to this and other significant information sources on the internet.
3. Meetings for church affairs, in which the Religious Society conducts its business, are meetings for worship based on silence, carrying the expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if members are truly listening together and to each other. The unity that is sought depends on the willingness of all to seek the truth in each other's utterances. There is no voting in any meeting as this would inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God as expressed in the sense of the meeting.

The Clerk of the meeting bears the final responsibility for preparing the business, conducting the meeting and drafting the minutes of the meeting. Minutes are drafted by the Clerk during the course of the meeting, but the final decision about whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the Clerk. This procedure is used for the Area Meeting in session, and for meetings of the trustees.

4. The Area Meeting during 2019 had 6 constituent geographically based Local Meetings which organize public Meetings for Worship. These Local Meetings are at:
 - Eyeworth (Guilden Morden Meeting)
 - Letchworth
 - Hertford
 - Stevenage
 - Hitchin
 - Welwyn Garden City.

The Local Meeting at Hoddesdon was laid down at the start of 2012; the Area Meeting continues to oversee the building and plans for its use are progressing. See *Plans for the Future* below, also the Hoddesdon Options Group in *Achievements and Performance (5)*.

5. All of these Local Meetings are authorized to hold bank accounts, and each (except Guilden Morden) has the use of a Meeting House, as its place of worship. These are owned by the Area Meeting. Several of the Local Meetings also have wardens' accommodation, and Welwyn Garden City also has a small building used as a function room.

Friends Trusts Ltd is the custodian trustee of the Area Meeting's properties.

A number of advisory and executive functions are delegated to subsidiary committees, including

- the Finance Committee assists the Area Meeting Treasurer in recommending financial policy and overseeing the financial affairs of the Area and Local Meetings.
- the Properties Committee oversees the care of properties, mainly by receiving properties reports from each Local Meeting, and reporting annually to Area Meeting.

- the Camp Committee organizes an annual residential camp on behalf of Grand Union Quaker Camps, a registered charity, for Members and Attenders of the Area Meeting and some others; the Camp Committee is authorized to hold a bank account.

The Area Meeting is part of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, of which Britain Yearly Meeting is the body which centrally manages the policy, property, employment and work of the Religious Society.

6. Risk assessment: the Trustees have considered a number of areas of possible risk, as follows:

Care of property

The properties are appropriately insured, and Area Meeting Properties Committee have oversight of any significant alterations to property which Local Meetings propose and provide advice as needed on proposals, and receives annual reports on the condition of the Meeting Houses and other properties.

Health and Safety

The Local Meetings are responsible for assessing the safety aspects of the use of the buildings in their care or which they use. The Trustees have incorporated oversight of this into a memorandum of understanding.

Financial probity

The Area Meeting and its constituent bodies have no activities which constitute a major financial risk. There is a financial reporting system which includes independent examination of the Area Meeting's and its constituent bodies' annual accounts.

Investments

The Area Meeting's funds are all in bank accounts and building societies. The placement of the funds is reviewed periodically.

Employment

The Trustees have examined the employment practices in the Local Meetings with regard to legal requirements. New contracts have been employed by Welwyn Garden City Meeting. Letchworth Meeting has now employed a new contract. Model contracts for paid workers and agreements for volunteers are close to completion.

Child Safety

A Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy for the Area Meeting was agreed in 2009 and a network of responsible persons for the Area Meeting and each Local Meeting has been implemented. A Safeguarding Handbook for the context of Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting was produced in 2010, and revised in 2016.

Objectives and Activities

1. The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends.

The main activity of the constituent Local Meetings is the right holding of public meetings for worship, and regular meetings for church affairs.

The Area Meeting itself holds meetings for church affairs and supports its constituent Local Meetings, including providing grants and practical support to develop the life of meetings, and of individual Quakers and attenders.

Other activities include:

- Sustaining faith relations. Nurturing relations with other Quaker bodies, with other denominations and with other faiths.
 - Promoting the Quaker way of life, including promoting our beliefs and practices.
 - Witness through action, which involves carrying out active programmes of work to address social problems including conflict resolution and reconciliation. This work is often in partnership with or by supporting other organizations.
2. The Area Meeting and its constituent Local Meetings decide how to use their funds to support Britain Yearly Meeting and other Quaker bodies, and also to support individuals and non-Quaker organizations whose objects and actions are in accordance with core Quaker values, including peace, truth, justice, and equality.

Achievements and Performance

1. At the end of 2019, the Area Meeting had 149 Members, and 117 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 2 Members by death. We also welcomed 3 new members by conviction.
2. The constituent Local Meetings held public Meetings for Worship as follows:

<i>Meeting (location)</i>	<i>Frequency of public meetings</i>	<i>No. of public Meetings</i>	<i>Est. Average Attendance</i>
Guilden Morden (Eyeworth)	Twice monthly 10.30am	24	5
Hertford	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	17
Hitchin	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	17
Letchworth	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	15
Stevenage	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	6
Welwyn Garden City	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	20
	Weekly Sunday 8am (not 1 st Sunday)	40	n/a

Occasional Meetings for Worship were also held at Hoddesdon from June 2019, usually twice monthly.

3. During 2019 the Area Meeting has continued to pursue policies of good governance and furtherance of our charitable objectives in compliance with its governing document.

Fiscal oversight has been achieved at all levels by the receipt and acceptance of both the examined Area Meeting business accounts 2018, and also the receipt of the examined amalgamated accounts 2018 for the Local Meetings over which it has oversight. The proposed budget for 2019 was received and accepted. The financial timetable for 2019 was received, and Area Meeting quotas for 2019 (contributions from Local Meetings) were accepted.

Pastoral and spiritual responsibility has been overseen by the appointment of Overseers and Elders. Development opportunities are always available for our younger members, while a wide range of courses have been attended by our more mature members in subjects designed to further our charitable and religious objectives, which were reported back on. Young Quakers were involved in a Participation Day held alongside Meeting for Sufferings. Friends of all ages can go to our summer camp which promotes the Quaker ethos and testimonies in a fun environment.

4. A total of 6 Area Meetings were held with an average attendance of 19.7 Friends. Reports have been received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings, the national standing executive body between Yearly Meetings; and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. Triennial reports from our Local Meetings continue to be received. Hoddesdon Options Group which is driving the planned redevelopment of the Hoddesdon Site continues to report regularly to Area Meeting. A fraud case that involved one of our Local Meetings in 2018 is still being pursued. Correspondence received by the Area Meeting was reported on.
5. Area Meeting dates for 2020 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our Local Meetings) for 2018 was received, the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership.

The Area Meeting Peace Group, formed with the aim to as far as possible to ensure that local schools have a balanced approach to teaching and exposing children to ideas of war and peace, was supported in running a summer school.

The Hoddesdon Options Group continues to report regularly to Area Meeting. During 2019 the plans for this project are continuing to progress slowly. One of the aims of this project is to exercise our responsibility to a grade 2 listed disused Meeting House, and working towards a rejuvenation of its fortunes by breathing new life into it. With changes in ideas and aspirations, and in planning requirements, the Area Meeting has left the previous intention of gaining planning permission for the adjacent plot containing the warden's cottage for eventual sale to provide funds. The Area Meeting is now supporting the Options Group in exploring ways to develop the complex as a community resource while encouraging a Quaker presence. Discussions are being held widely with community groups and other interested parties, and in November and December some improvements were made to allow the properties to be used as a daytime resource for a local winter night shelter project. Some Meetings for Worship have been held in the Meeting House, with members of the public present.

6. During 2019 five trustees served. The trustees see one of their functions as providing advice and counsel to Area Meeting in session. Trustees occasionally flag up matters of concern to Area Meeting by minute. Trustees appoint representatives to all Area Meetings in session. New trustees are appointed by the Area Meeting following nomination from the Area Meeting Nominations Committee. The trustees compiled the Annual Report for 2018 on the activities of the Area Meeting, which was presented to the Area Meeting and

submitted to the Charity Commission. The trustees also produced a report to Area Meeting on trustees' activities. Trustees also have the opportunity to bring items to Area Meeting throughout the year. During 2019 all trustee meetings were quorate. Support is made available by Area Meeting to all trustees, and one trustee from our Area Meeting was also a trustee on Grand Union Quaker Camps.

7. Each of the Local Meetings had a formal or informal programme of developing the spiritual and social life of its members. These included, at individual Local Meetings:
 - Fundraising Events
 - New Year's Party, and Christmas Celebrations
 - Shared lunches and breakfasts
 - Quaker Study Group
 - Meetings for discussion, and Afterword
 - Food for Thought Reading group
 - Becoming Friends
 - Experiment With Light
 - Regular Newsletters
 - Friendly Bible Study

Local Meetings for Worship included the regular reading of "Advices and Queries". Our Elders and Overseers kept in mind the spiritual and pastoral needs of all Friends and Attenders. Local Meetings have supported Friends in informal ways such as helping with hospital visits, and maintaining contact with Friends who are ill or in residential care.

Local Meetings encouraged the attendance of Friends at a number of learning opportunities. These included at Hitchin Local Meeting the 'Food for Thought' discussion meetings that have been well attended, on subjects like spiritual journeys, death, and simplicity. "Afterword", a time for reflection on ministry after Meeting for Worship, takes place monthly. Local Meetings have also been involved with Becoming Friends courses, and the Woodbrooke on line resource Being Friends Together.

In their business meetings Local Meetings considered items prior to Area Meetings, including their representation at the Area Meetings. Friends also attended meetings on behalf of our Area Meeting including Britain Yearly Meeting in London.

8. Most Local Meetings had regular contact with Church and Community groups within their immediate areas and actively worked with others in our community. Examples of these are:
 - Hitchin Counselling Service
 - Food Banks
 - Supporting refugee groups
 - Joining Remembrance Day events
 - Hosting homeless support group events
 - The Peace Garden in the grounds of Hitchin Meeting is also supported by other faith groups
9. All the Local Meetings except Guilden Morden have Meeting Houses and other facilities which are available for use by the wider community. Welwyn Garden City Meeting has the Backhouse Room which is an additional separate meeting room. The availability of these premises is regarded as a form of service to the community, particularly when they are used by groups answering a social need or providing a cultural

service. In some cases additional support eg staffing or facilities is provided to some of these groups. Examples of these in 2019 were:

- Music and dancing groups and clubs
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous
- Spiritualists
- Health and Well Being groups
- A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House
- Muslims(Friday prayers and Ramadan observance)
- Children’s Art and Community Art Groups
- A number of social and cultural events with and for Syrian Families
- Liberal Jewish Synagogue.

Our Local Meetings continue to support our commitment to the policy of sustainability being pursued by Britain Yearly Meeting, and this includes the care and use of our properties. Building on the various past activities of reducing energy and resource usage, some double glazing has been renewed, the use of plastics has been tackled (especially single use plastics), and meetings are continuing to manage their grounds to encourage wildlife and biodiversity.

The hiring of these premises remains a significant source of revenue for the meetings, however, charges may also be reduced or held to a level which encourages groups in difficulty. The development of facilities within and outside Meeting Houses are also seen to be closely related to outreach.

10. Quaker witness includes supporting Quaker organizations and also non-Quaker organizations which pursue aims in line with Quaker values, particularly (but not exclusively) historical Quaker concerns such as peace, justice, refugees, treatment of criminals, and emergency relief, all areas where “that of God in all people” is often not recognized. As part of our support, Local Meetings have raised funds for Quaker and non-Quaker charitable bodies both on a regular basis and as special events or series of events. These include:

- Peacedirect
- Central work of Britain Yearly Meeting
- Helping Herts Homeless (previously North Herts Sanctuary)
- Bigg Welcome refugee settlement project in Biggleswade

Individually Friends have supported the local resettlement of refugee families. Several meetings have supported Christian Aid Week. Several meetings have been involved with activities to support local Churches Together groups. Welwyn Garden City Meeting participated in inter-faith work and Herts and Beds Welcomes Syrian refugees, contributing to study events, and hosting a number of social and cultural events.

11. Local Meetings held or prepared to hold Children’s Meetings during 2019. Several Meetings held all age Meetings for Worship during 2019, and most Meetings have monthly Children’s Meetings.

12. Both Local Meetings and Area Meeting considered their outreach activities. Stevenage Meeting House, and Welwyn Garden City Meeting Houses remain popular and well-used venues for local community, cultural, and religious groups. Stevenage Meeting House also served as a meeting place for Syrian families and their support workers. Several Meetings opened their Meeting Houses for Heritage Open Days in September, and the Beds and Herts Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Bike ‘n Hike, both these events resulted in people exploring the Meeting Houses who might otherwise never do so.

13. Area Meeting and the Local Meetings have been active in support of the Quaker commitment to peace. Stevenage Meeting participated in a wreath laying ceremony as part of Remembrance Day celebrations. The Area Meeting Peace Group organized a Peace Week during the summer at Welwyn Garden City Meeting House, with 27 children and 14 volunteers. The Peace Group has also written to local schools about the imbalance of having armed forces personnel in the schools without (as far as we can tell) much consideration of other ways of dealing with conflict and peace. Members of the group and others also took part in demonstrations at the biannual DSEI arms fair in London in September 2019. Local Meeting also supported Britain Yearly Meeting's activities towards reducing conflict.

14. Friends have been active in ensuring the vibrancy and health of our religious society. During 2019 Friends have continued to be exercised by difficulties in finding Friends to take on essential tasks of service to the Meeting. Some Local Meetings continued to look at creative ways of addressing the challenges this brings. Friends with wardens greatly appreciated the work of wardens during 2019 who look after our Meeting Houses, organizing hirings and contributing in so many ways to the life of our Meetings, including administration, outreach and our Quaker witness with energy and enthusiasm. Stevenage Meeting is looking for a Resident Friend or Friends to replace their wardens who will be retiring soon.

Financial Review 2019

- 1. Reserves Policy** The reserves policy for Area Meeting central funds is based on holding money in various nominal funds at Area Meeting level. We are in the process of running down Area Meeting funds as agreed by the Treasurer in consultation with Finance Committee. The level will be as follows:

Funds held for the following purposes	Amount £
Building Fund	15,000
General Purposes	10,000
Designated funds:	
Peace Group	500
Quaker Work	1,000
Camp Committee	7,000
Total	33,500

For the operation of Local Meetings it has expected that each of these should hold enough reserves to operate for 1 year and meet future building requirements. The level of funds for 2019 were:

Local Meeting	Amount £
Guilden Morden	1,000
Hertford	17,000
Hitchin	22,000
Letchworth	45,000
Stevenage	9,000
Welwyn Garden City	63,000
Total	157,000

The criteria and levels of reserves for Local Meetings will be reviewed in 2020/2021.

- 2. Income and Expenditure** None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2019. At 31st December 2019, The Area Meeting had a total cash value of £201,260.
- 3. Income:** Funds from members were £46,200 and from letting our Meeting Houses £105,800. Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £2,788. Interest received on cash balances were £1,281.
- 4. Expenditure:** Our largest expenditure is normally on maintaining buildings (£128,000) in support of our role as a religious organization at a local level. In 2019 a significant amount (£31,000) was expended on grants to outside bodies, of which about 53.0% went to Britain Yearly Meeting in furtherance of the centrally organized work of the Religious Society of Friends.

The amount spent on administration within the Area Meeting in 2019 was £8,302.

- 5. Investment Policy:** Our funds are generally held by or invested in organizations with good ethical policies such as Triodos Bank, Ecology Building Society, Co-operative Bank.

Key plans for the future

Note - the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted plans for 2020, but these plans still remain as long-term objectives.

1. The Trustees are continuing to review their work and relationships, and hope to establish more formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding) as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies.
2. Following the laying down of Hoddesdon Meeting at the beginning of 2012, the Hoddesdon Options group continues to meet and report to Area Meeting on ongoing developments.
3. In the continuing environment of economic austerity, Local Meetings continue to support food banks and other initiatives.
4. Involvement with local initiatives to participate in Herts Welcomes Syrian Refugees and similar programmes.
5. Local Meetings look to work on best ways to utilise what spiritual, financial, and people resources are available to nurture the life of the Meeting.
6. Plan our revitalisation and outreach strategy for the longer term, including encouragement of new, especially younger attenders.
7. Continue to have an outreach presence at local events.
8. Improvements to and continuing laying out of a Peace Garden at Hitchin Local Meeting.
9. Greater greening of our Meeting Houses.
10. How we can mark the 350th anniversary of Hertford Meeting House in 2020 (*now postponed to 2021*).