

# Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting Annual Report 2017 from Trustees

## Reference details

1. This is the trustees' report for 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 Attenders<sup>1</sup> 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 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017.

3. The Area Meeting was registered with the Charity Commission on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2009 with Registered Charity Number 1131894.

4. Address that can be used for communication with the Clerk to the Trustees.

Roger Jarvis  
17 Moormead Close  
Hitchin  
Hertfordshire  
SG5 2BA

<sup>1</sup> "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 in 2017:

Ian Chandler	served in 2017, continues to serve in 2018
Kim Noy- Man Jackson	served in 2017, continues to serve in 2018
Roger Jarvis	served in 2017, continues to serve in 2018.
Frances Prestidge	served in 2017, continues to serve in 2018

## 6. Key officers

Area Meeting Correspondence Clerk

David Hindle

*At the time no appointment of Clerk or Assistant Clerk of Area Meeting had been made after 2011, the functions of these roles are rotated between the Local Meetings hosting the Area Meeting sessions, and a Correspondence Clerk was appointed to receive communications.*

Treasurer

John White

Names and addresses of other relevant organizations or persons

### **Bank:**

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

### **Examiner of Accounts:**

Andy West

### **Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:**

Friends Trusts Limited  
173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

### **Public Benefit statement**

The principal benefit is that at least weekly each of the 5 Meeting Houses 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 Incident**

There was one serious incident that took place this year, which was reported to the Charity Commission, resulting in a fraud of £31,000.

There were no serious incidents which should have been reported in the previous year, 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 2017 had 6 constituent geographically based Local Meetings which organize public Meetings for Worship. These Local Meetings are at:

Guilden Morden	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 are progressing. See *Plans for the Future* below.

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 commissioning a programme of surveys, receiving survey reports, and recommending actions arising from them.
- 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. We no longer have a rolling programme of property inspection by professional surveyors because the Area Meeting Property Committee decided that local Friends could conduct these inspections and call on experts if needed.

**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 mostly in bank accounts. 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 is currently exploring new contracts. 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 2017, the Area Meeting had 149 Members, and 116 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 3 Members by death, 2 by transfer out, and 1 by resignation. We also welcomed 5 new members, 3 by convincement, 1 by reinstatement, and 1 by transfer in.

2. The constituent Local Meetings held public Meetings for Worship as follows

Meeting (location)	Frequency of public Meeting for Worship	No. of public Meetings for Worship in 2016	Estimated Average Attendance
Guilden Morden	Twice monthly 10.30am	24	5
Hertford	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	18
Hitchin	Weekly Sunday 10.30am	52	15
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 <sup>st</sup> Sunday)	40	n/a

3. During 2017 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 business accounts 2016 for the Area Meeting, and also the receipt of the examined amalgamated accounts 2016 for the local meetings over which it has oversight. An amended 2017 budget for Area Meeting and the proposed budget for 2018 were also received. The financial timetable for 2018 was received, and Area Meeting quotas for 2017 (contributions from Local Meetings) were accepted. Our membership of Churches Child Protection Advisory Service continued. 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. One Member was assisted financially to attend Britain Yearly Meeting. 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 18 or 19 Friends. Reports have been received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings, our standing executive body between Yearly Meetings; and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. Triennial reports from our local meetings continue to be received. A report on the state of Hoddesdon was commissioned and the Hoddesdon Action Group laid down, to be replaced by a newly-formed Hoddesdon Options Group which continues to report regularly to Area Meeting. Oversight of this project has been achieved by having it as a continuing minute at each Area Meeting. The future of a building attached to one of our local meetings was actively considered, as was a serious fraud incident involving one of our local meeting bank accounts. Trustees took action on this latter point to satisfy themselves that adequate safeguards had been put in place, and Area Meeting encouraged all local meetings to check their financial processes. We completed the process of revising our Area Meeting list of members and attenders and made printed copies available to our membership. Any correspondence received by the Area Meeting was reported on.

5. Area Meeting dates for 2018 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our local meetings) for 2016 was received; the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership. It was agreed at the request of a local meeting to prepare a Testimony to the Grace of God, as shown in the life and service of two of our deceased Friends; a Testimony being a living expression of our faith for the inspiration of others. Two testimonies were also received by the Area Meeting.

The Area Meeting Quaker Work Committee continues to report annually to Area Meeting. This Committee enables Friends to be given grants to carry out Quaker Work without being financially penalized. Each application is carefully assessed both for its service to the community, and also for personal development opportunities for the applicant. Each application is required to be costed before the grant is approved. During 2017 one grant was made to enable the development of a Peace Garden at Hitchin by the provision of an outdoor tap and the installation of two water butts.

6. During 2017 four trustees served. We see one of our functions as providing advice and counsel to Area Meeting in session. We 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 presented to Area Meeting their annual report for 2016 to the Charity Commission, as well as their own internal report to Area Meeting. During 2017 all trustee meetings were quorate. Support is made available by Area Meeting to all trustees, and one trustee from our Area Meeting is 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
- Friendly Bible Study
- Meetings for listening and/or discussion, and Afterword
- Evening summer walk and outings.
- Reading group
- Becoming Friends
- Experiment With Light
- Quiet Day
- Craft day and fortnightly craft group

Local Meetings for Worship included the regular reading of advices and queries. Our Elders and Overseers met regularly together to keep in mind the spiritual and pastoral needs of all Friends and Attenders. Welwyn Garden City Meeting held smaller Meetings for Worship at a local Care Home. Regular visits are also made to a long standing member now in residential care. Several memorial meetings were held for much valued members. In their business meetings Local Meetings considered items prior to Area Meetings.

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 The Ministry of Money, Four Doors to Worship, and Heart and Vision-Living Lives of True Godliness. 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. Hitchin Meeting launched a recipe book at a public meeting during Hitchin Festival; to raise money for North Herts Sanctuary, addressed by the Director of North Herts Sanctuary.

Friends 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:

- Participating in Women's World Day of Prayer
- Hitchin Counselling Service
- Cellar Club- providing food and support for people with mental health and other problems in Welwyn Garden City
- Food Banks
- Pulpit Swap and annual unity services.

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 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 2017 were:

- Music and dancing groups and clubs
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous
- Children's Art
- Health and Well Being groups
- Educational groups
- A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House
- Muslims(Friday prayers and Ramadan observance)

Many of our Meeting Houses have undergone investment this year for building work and associated premises requirements. Some of this was as follows:

Area Meeting helped Hertford Meeting financially to replace dangerous paving stones in their courtyard with a resin-bound gravel surface, which also addressed drainage problems.

Welwyn Garden City installed wireless heating controls to enable the heating to various parts of the Meeting House to be controlled remotely. Seating in Friends Room and lobby has been reupholstered.

Hitchin Meeting had a talk from Groundwork about the energy efficient report completed about the Meeting House, with a view to future improvements. Annual and monthly safety checks were carried out in accordance with the health and safety policy. Members were made aware of the Fire procedure document and fire wardens were designated. Hitchin Meeting are continuing to develop their Peace Garden by completing their Dove Pond, installation and providing some garden furniture, and inspiring others to contribute: The Hitchin Boys' School will design a sculpture, and receiving a donation of a multi-coloured table and benches from North Herts Interfaith Forum.

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
- North Herts Sanctuary

Activities included collection of clothes and equipment for Calais Camp. A concert Walk Cheerfully was held as part of Quaker Week. Individually Friends have supported the local resettlement of refugee families. Hertford Meeting became a Sanctuary Meeting, and also hosted a Transition Apple Day. Several meetings have supported Christian Aid Week. Hitchin Friends supported a Christian Aid quiz and supplied collectors for Christian Aid Week. Several meetings have been involved with activities to support local Churches Together groups. Welwyn Garden City Meeting promoted events, including concerts, to fundraise for various charities

11. Local Meetings held or prepared to hold Children's Meetings during 2017. Several Meetings held all age Meetings for Worship during 2017, and most Meetings have monthly Children's Meetings: Topics have included sessions on Refugees, Fairness & Justice, Stories from Quaker History, Our Gifts, and Elizabeth Fry.

12. Both Local Meetings and Area Meeting considered their outreach activities. Stevenage Meeting House, and Welwyn Garden City Meeting House remain popular and well-used venues for local community, cultural, and religious groups. Several Meetings opened their Meeting Houses for Heritage Open Days in September, and 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. Hitchin Friends participated in the Hitchin Festival, and Hertford Friends opened their Meeting House to visitors one Saturday morning per. month from April through to Heritage Open Day in September.

13. Friends have been active in ensuring the vibrancy and health of our religious society. During 2017 some Friends have continued to be exercised by membership being well over the age of 60 and 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 problems this brings. Friends with wardens greatly appreciated the work of wardens during 2017 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.

## Financial Review 2017

### 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:

<b>Funds held for the following purposes</b>	<b>Amount £</b>
Building Fund	25,000
General Purposes	10,000
Outreach	2,000 (allocations within the reserves)
Peace Witness	1,000 (allocation within the reserves)
Quaker Work	5,000 (allocation within the reserves)
Camp Committee	7,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>42,500</b>

For the operation of Local Meetings it is expected that each of these should hold enough reserves to operate for 1 year and meet future building requirements. The level of funds for 2017 were::

<b>Local Meeting</b>	<b>Amount £</b>
Guilden Morden	1,000
Hertford	18,000
Hitchin	18,000
Letchworth	18,000
Stevenage	10,000
Welwyn Garden City	40,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>105,000</b>

### Income and Expenditure

1. None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2017. At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017, The Area Meeting had a total cash value of £190,180.
2. **Income:** Funds from members were £48,000 and from letting our Meeting Houses £105,000. Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £2,000. Interest received on cash balances were £835
3. **Expenditure:** Our largest expenditure is normally on maintaining buildings (£115,000) in support of our role as a religious organization at a local level. In 2017 a significant amount (£28,000) was expended on grants, of which about 58.5% 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 2017 was £7,615.

4. **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**

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 Refugee programme
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 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hertford Meeting House in 2020.