

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

## Annual Report 2020

### 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 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 2020.
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:  
6 Mallard Walk, Biggleswade, BEDS, SG18 8DY

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<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. "Friends" describes both Members and Attenders.

5. Trustees:

The following Trustees served 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.

The Area Meeting and its constituent Local Meetings provide financial support to Quaker activities in the United Kingdom and abroad, mostly through contributions to national Quaker organisations. Support is also provided to a number of organisations and projects which are in broad agreement with Quaker principles, including peace, justice, and welfare.

**Serious Incidents.**

There were no serious incidents in 2020 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 Friends 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 2020 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.

Nationally Quakers are in the process of standardising the Safeguarding policies of Area Meetings so as to provide a common framework with improved structures and better defined responsibilities, and this Area Meeting is taking part in this process.

## 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 2020, the Area Meeting had 145 Members, and 106 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 9 Members by death. We also welcomed 4 new members by conviction, and 1 by transfer.
2. This section of the report usually lists the number of Meetings for Worship held by each Local Meeting, with an estimate of the average attendance, but the measures taken by the government as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted Meetings for Worship in 2020, and the effects have continued into 2021.

For much of 2020 our Meeting Houses have been closed, and the Local Meetings have varied in their responses, most using Zoom or similar for online Meetings for Worship. While some Friends were unable to access Meetings for Worship remotely, others have found access improved, especially when normally unable to attend Meetings for Worship due to distance, illness, or disability. Following the re-opening of our Meeting houses for worship, some Local Meetings intend to experiment with "blended" Meetings for Worship, combining remote and in-person attendance.

3. During 2020 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 2019, and also the receipt of the examined amalgamated accounts 2019 for the Local Meetings over which it has oversight. The proposed budget for 2020 was received and accepted, and

Area Meeting quotas for 2020 (contributions from Local Meetings) were agreed.

4. Pastoral and spiritual responsibility has been overseen by the appointment of Overseers and Elders. Local Meetings have found various ways for Friends to support each other while we have been unable to meet, including cards, telephone calls, Whatsapp groups, online meetings, and meetings outdoors when permitted.

The social isolation measures to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic had significant effects on the usual development and training opportunities available. An ongoing likely result is the current and future development of "distance learning" techniques which may replace the traditional in-person sessions. Our all-age summer camp was also cancelled, the earliest date for resumption is 2022.

5. A total of 6 Area Meetings (4 by Zoom) were held with an average attendance of 16.7 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. Area Meeting dates for 2021 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our Local Meetings) for 2019 was received, the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership.
6. The Hoddesdon Options Group continues to report regularly to Area Meeting. During 2020 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.
7. During 2020 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, and may bring proposals to Area Meeting in session. 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 2019 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. During 2020 all trustee meetings were quorate.
8. The usual formal and informal programmes of our Local Meetings, to develop the spiritual and social life of Friends, was curtailed in 2020 by the restrictions to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. For much of the year places of worship were closed by government order, but even at those times when the order was lifted our Local Meetings were very cautious about the use of our properties. Many Friends who normally attend our Meetings for Worship and other events are quite elderly and were at greater than average risk of harm from the Covid-19 virus.

Some events took place in the early part of 2020, before the lockdown was in place, including:

- New Year celebrations
- meetings to discuss climate change and support for climate change action
- meetings to explore aspects of our faith and our life and death

- Taize chant sessions
- interchurch events

Local Meetings were also able to organize some online events, including:

- poetry readings
- explorations of Quaker faith
- exploring "Build Back Better" for post-pandemic action

In their business meetings (online from March) Local Meetings considered items prior to Area Meetings, including their representation at the Area Meetings.

9. Most Local Meetings have regular contact with Church and Community groups within their immediate areas and actively work 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

10. All the Local Meetings except Guilden Morden have Meeting Houses and other facilities which are normally 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 e.g. staffing or facilities is provided to some of these groups.

Examples of these in previous years have been:

- 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.

Some of these groups used our facilities in the early part of 2020, and some activities were permitted to continue during lockdown, in particular food banks and health-related activities.

11. 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. A wildlife pond has been created at Stevenage.

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.

12. 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:
- Central work of Britain Yearly Meeting
  - Foodbanks
  - Helping Herts Homeless (previously North Herts Sanctuary)
  - A Quaker school in Lebanon
  - 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.

Financial support for Quaker organisations in 2020 amounted to £13875, for non-Quaker organisations £11662.

13. Local Meetings were unable to hold their usual events for children, but by using online Meetings for Worship some were able to re-establish contact with families who had moved away from the area.
14. 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, and although they were not used for much of 2020 we have received requests for their use since Covid-19 pandemic restrictions have been eased.
15. Area Meeting and the Local Meetings continue to be active in support of the Quaker commitments to peace and justice, although at a lower level in the light of restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Hitchin Meeting continues to develop their Peace Garden, which has attracted interest from media and other churches in the area. Friends at Hertford have participated in Amnesty campaigns. Black Lives Matter and other social justice issues have been the subjects of Friends concerns.



## Financial Review 2020

- 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:

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

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 2020 were:

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

The criteria and levels of reserves for Local Meetings are currently under review.

- 2. Income and Expenditure** None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2020. At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, the Area Meeting had a total cash value of £224,971 (2019: £200,462).
- 3. Income:** Although some sources of income were very significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, some unusual sources of income in 2020 resulted in an overall increase in income to £165,450 (2019: £163,579).

Funds from Friends were £49,984 (2019: £53,197).

Income from letting our Meeting Houses etc was £42,356 (2019: £105,888), a fall of 60% resulting from the closures because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Places of religion are excluded from the compensation scheme for lost business, but claims are being lodged with our insurers.

Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £27,220 (2019: £2,788), which includes a grant of £15,000 towards building work at Hitchin, and a grant of £10,032 as compensation for lost business for the non-Meeting House property at Welwyn Garden City.

Welwyn Garden City Meeting received a refund of £38,729 of funds taken by fraud in 2018.

Interest received on cash balances was £852 (2019: £1,281).

**4. Expenditure:** Some costs relating to the use of our properties were reduced as a result of the closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the cancellation of the annual Camp.

Our largest expenditure remains the insurance, maintenance, and improvement of our properties, at £104,940 (2019: £128,529) in support of our role as a religious organization at a local level. This includes planned expenditure at Hitchin of £27,740 to improve toilet and kitchen facilities, partly covered by a grant of £15,000.

In 2020 a £25,918 (2019: £30,725) 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 2020 was £9109 (2019: £8,302).

**5. Investment Policy:** Our funds are mostly held by or invested in organizations with good ethical policies such as Triodos Bank, Ecology Building Society, Co-operative Bank. Some funds are held by Lloyds Bank and National Westminster Bank. Investments are regularly reviewed, and care is taken that no institution holds funds in excess of the limits of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme.

## Key plans for the future

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted or delayed some 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. A Steering Group has been established to coordinate plans and activities with local organisations and individuals to develop the properties at Hoddesdon as the Peace Cottage Community Hub, intended to provide wellbeing facilities for local residents.
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 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hertford Meeting House in 2020 (*now postponed to 2021*).