

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

Annual Report 2021

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Structure and objectives of the Area Meeting

1. This annual report has been 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 organisation of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and the national body is known as Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). The Area Meeting contains six Local Meetings (LMs), which hold public Meetings for Worship and have day-to-day care of Meeting Houses and other property.

The objective 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 local communities they serve, and sharing Quaker values and principles through outreach;
- 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 the Area Meeting has 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 organisation 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 2021.
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:
Clare Cooper, 11 Eleanor Road, Hertford, SG4 3DN
5. Trustees: The following Trustees served in 2021:
Clare Cooper
Paul Evans
David Hindle
Andrew Meek
Nick Needham
Headley Parkins

6. Key officers

- Area Meeting Clerk for Meeting for Worship for Business (held six times annually)
- Assistant Area Meeting Clerk

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.

These roles are rotated between Clerks and Members/Attendees of constituent local meetings. A Continuity Clerk (Kathy Hindle) was appointed to maintain the flow of information between constituent local meetings.

- Area Meeting Treasurer David Hindle
- Safeguarding Coordinator Clare Cooper

Names and addresses of other relevant organisations or persons

Bank: Triodos Bank, Deanery Road, Bristol, BS1 5AS

Examiner of Accounts: Sarah Partridge

Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:

Friends Trusts Limited, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ#

Serious Incidents.

There were no serious incidents in 2021 which should have been reported.

Public Benefit Statement

1. The principal public benefit of the Area Meeting 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 subsidised charge, to suitable local community and interest groups and charities. Due to Covid, many Meetings for Worship continued to be held online at the start of the year, before government guidance allowed the reopening of places of worship. Access to the online meetings was permitted for genuine requests from members of the public who contacted the local meeting link.
2. The Area Meeting and its constituent Local Meetings provide financial support to Quaker activities in the UK 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.

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). As a result of meetings for business being held online due to Covid, a further amendment was made to incorporate this change on 14 May 2022 (Minute 22/23)
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 business meeting 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.

4. The Area Meeting during 2021 had 6 constituent geographically based Local Meetings which organise public Meetings for Worship. These Local Meetings are at:

Eyeworth (Guilden Morden Meeting)
Letchworth
Hertford
Hitchin
Stevenage
Welwyn Garden City (WGC).

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.

5. All of these Local Meetings are authorised 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. Three of the Local Meetings also accommodate wardens, and WGC also has a small building used as a function room.

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

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

- 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 organises 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 authorised 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.

Safeguarding

A Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy for the Area Meeting was agreed in 2009 and a network of Designated Safeguarding Friends for the Area Meeting and each Local Meeting was implemented. A Safeguarding Handbook for the context of Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting was produced in 2010, and revised in 2016. This is being updated in light of new guidance from British Yearly Meeting working with the Christian safeguarding charity Thirtyone:eight. We plan to implement the actions in the revised policy by the end of 2022.

Activities

1. The main activity of the constituent Local Meetings is the holding of public meetings for worship using Quaker practice, and regular meetings for church affairs. The Area Meeting itself holds business 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 (Members) and attenders.
2. The membership in general is aging and declining in numbers, resulting in fewer people being available to take on administrative roles within the local and area meetings. Some committee functions have therefore reverted to LMs' Business Meetings (eg Meeting House Management Group, at WGC), or have been shared amongst different local meetings (such as the Area Meeting Nominations Committee, and Area Meeting Business Meeting Clerking).
3. Other activities include:
 - Nurturing relations with other Quaker bodies, other denominations and other faiths;
 - Promoting our Quaker way of life, values, beliefs and practices;
 - Witness through action, carrying out active programmes of work to address social problems including conflict resolution and reconciliation, often in partnership with or by supporting other organisations.
4. 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 organisations whose objects and actions are in accordance with core Quaker values, including peace, simplicity, truth, justice, and equality.

Achievements and Performance

Membership and meetings for worship

1. At the end of 2021, the Area Meeting had 142 Members, and 108 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 5 Members by death, 2 by transfers out, and 1 by termination of membership. We also welcomed 4 new members by conviction, and 1 by reinstatement.
2. The measures taken by the government as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact Meetings for Worship in 2021. Over the year our Meeting Houses reopened in line with government guidance, and according to the needs and decisions of each local meeting. Trustees were asked for advice on the correct interpretation of Covid guidance. Some Friends and Attenders continued to use 'blended' meetings for worship (with additional online access), particularly those with health conditions or disability. Weekly meetings for worship continued online or in a blended format throughout the year. In two local meetings, a second weekly meeting was also held online. Average attendance, including online meetings, varied from three to five in the two smallest meetings, 15 – 19 in larger meetings and up to 30 in the largest meeting.

Meetings for children and young people continued but mostly took place online. In one meeting, children and parents resumed face to face meetings for a short period. There were three meetings with active children's groups and in two there was an increase in the number of children joining. In two meetings there were single families with children and they often joined online with other local meetings.

3. Six area meetings were held online with an average attendance of **16.7 Friends**. Reports were received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings (the national standing executive body between Yearly Meetings) and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. A Triennial report from Hitchin Meeting was received. Area Meeting dates for 2022 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our Local Meetings) for 2020 was received, the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership.

Pastoral and spiritual care

This was provided by the appointment of Overseers and Elders. Local Meetings considered use of the word 'Overseers' given its link to oppressive contexts, including slavery, some LMs replacing this with 'Pastoral Carers'.

Local Meetings found various ways for Friends to support each other while we were unable to meet, including cards, telephone calls, WhatsApp groups, online meetings, and meetings outdoors when permitted.

The self-isolation measures to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic continued to affect access to in-person development and training opportunities. However, an emerging trend has been the increased availability and access to online learning. An example of this was a series of free discussion sessions run by Quakers in Britain on running 'simpler meetings', a nationwide initiative to help local meetings manage their meeting houses in more equitable ways and reduce the burden on a few individual role holders. A number of Friends and Attenders participated in these sessions, and local meetings have implemented some of the ideas generated. Other online learning events included local library and civic society history talks on Quaker slavery links and Quaker meeting houses, safeguarding (ThirtyOne:Eight), and Quaker spirituality (Woodbrooke).

Meetings for worship included 'Afterword' sessions or sharing of spiritual readings or art works. Most LMs continued to read from Advices and Queries. Regular small discussion groups took place across several meetings: Friendly Bible Study, 'Food for Thought' topics, and reading groups using books that had inspired Friends, or extracts from Quaker Faith and Practice.

Spiritual and social life

The usual formal and informal programmes of our Local Meetings to develop the spiritual and social life of Friends, continued to be curtailed in 2021 by the restrictions to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic. Events taking place in 2021 were online in most cases but some face to face group activities also took place when the lifting of Covid restrictions permitted:

- Festive meetings for worship / New Year's Party
- Outdoor picnic lunches (own food, not shared) when possible
- Art together session
- Friendly Bible Study
- Reading/Study group
- Eldership and Oversight meetings
- Experiment with Light

Hitchin continued to produce a monthly newsletter (Quakerview). The all-age summer camp was cancelled, and the earliest date for resumption is 2022. Friends and attenders joined other local meetings for open mornings or afternoons when these were possible (at Welwyn Garden City, Hoddesdon). A number of friends from local meetings attended Yearly Meeting workshops and gatherings, which was held online this year.

Outreach to other communities

Most Local Meetings had regular contact with Church and Community groups within their immediate areas as far as Covid restrictions would allow, and often using online communication. Examples of these were:

- Churches Together
- Interfaith groups
- 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
- World Day of Prayer

To celebrate the 350th anniversary of Hertford Meeting House in 2020, which in the event could not be celebrated due to Covid, Hertford Meeting produced a series of Quaker information banners. These were displayed in another Hertford church during a public concert of music from around 1670, in June. Hertford Meeting was also open for the September Heritage Weekend and Bike 'n Hike Historic Churches sponsorship event.

The North Herts Interfaith Forum, in which Hitchin Quakers are active, published a statement from faith leaders encouraging people of faith to have the Covid vaccination, in response to the concern of low take-up in some communities.

Use of meeting houses for the community

Local meetings with Meeting Houses have continued to work to maintain their premises in good condition and improve them for the communities they serve. Some of this has been hard to complete due to the Covid restrictions. Work has included refurbishing of toilets and facilities for disabled people, and internal decorating, in preparation for lettings. Some significant building work plans had to be postponed in two meeting houses, due to Covid.

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 (staffing or facilities) is provided to some of these groups. Covid restrictions impacted heavily on lettings to the local community for group activities, and only in later months of 2021 did some groups start to resume their activities. Until the start of Covid, groups included all of the following, and it is hoped that they will return over time:

- Music, dance and art activities for children
- Community art groups
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Gamblers Anonymous
- Spiritualists
- Buddhist Meditation
- Counselling Tuition
- Health and Well Being groups
- Yoga and Tai Chi groups

- Local Music Society performances
- Bridge club
- Choir groups
- A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House
- Muslims (Friday prayers and Ramadan observance)
- A number of social and cultural events for Syrian families
- Liberal Jewish Synagogue.

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.

Sustainability

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. We continue to aim to make our meeting houses become sustainable and reduce our energy consumption. WGC Meeting successfully linked the heating system directly to the lettings system and to the outside temperature, and will potentially be fully automated throughout the year.

Members of local meetings took part in national and local projects to publicise the need for positive outcomes from the COP 26 climate conference which took place in November 2021. This included members taking part in a Vigil for the Earth, hosting a public climate change all-day event with workshops, and the 'Stitches for Survival' knitting project for a display to coincide with the COP 26 conference.

Local meetings are continuing to manage their grounds to encourage wildlife and biodiversity (ponds, wild areas meeting house gardens).

Quaker witness

Our witness included supporting Quaker organisations and also non-Quaker organisations 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 recognised. 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 Refugees settlement project in Biggleswade
- Bric-a-brac, plant and clothes sale for Herts Welcomes Refugees
- Selling of white poppies money to raise awareness of the victims of war, leading up to Remembrance Sunday.

Financial support for Quaker organisations in 2021 amounted to £19342, for non-Quaker organisations £3448

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.

Local meetings supported Amnesty International in different ways, including organising or participating in letter writing events (individually and in groups), and hosting a public Amnesty International Festival of Social Justice evening event (WGC).

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. Crowdfunding was successful in raising money for a sculpture for the garden, and the meeting held an event for the UN Day of Peace collaborating with other local organisations.

Meetings considered their banks' ethical investment performance and transferred their accounts to banks with stronger ethical credentials in some instances.

Peace Cottage Community Hub (formerly, the Hoddesdon Options Group)

The Hoddesdon Options Group was relaunched as The Peace Cottage Community Hub in June. The plan for this Grade 2 disused meeting house has been to rejuvenate and breathe new life into it as a centre for post-Covid recovery and well being for the local Hoddesdon community, while encouraging a Quaker presence. Discussions continued to be held with representatives from community groups and Churches Together in Hoddesdon, and local services (NHS primary care network) through the steering group. An open day in August with a range of activities attracted 100 local people. The Deputy Mayor and Deputy Leader of the Council also attended. Progress was made in clearing and developing the garden with a team of local volunteers and when possible, health walks were run by the local NHS social prescribing service, arriving afterwards at Peace Cottage for drinks and refreshment. Successful grant applications were successful in obtaining funds to upgrade the building, while some of the work was necessarily delayed due to Covid.

Financial governance

During 2021 the Area Meeting continued to pursue policies of good governance and furtherance of our charitable objectives in compliance with its governing document.

Fiscal oversight was achieved at all levels by the receipt and acceptance of both the examined Area Meeting business accounts for 2020 and also the receipt of the examined Area Meeting amalgamated accounts for 2020. for the Local Meetings over which it had oversight. The proposed budget for 2022 was received and accepted. The financial timetable for 2021 was received, and Area Meeting quotas for 2021 (contributions from Local Meetings) were also accepted.

Trustees

During 2021 six trustees served, five at a time. The trustees see one of their functions as providing advice and counsel to local meetings. This included guidance regarding the safe use of meeting houses during the Covid pandemic, as guidance changed and restrictions started to reduce. Trustees occasionally flag up matters of concern to Area Meeting for Business by minute and may bring proposals. Trustees appoint representatives to all Area Meeting Business Meetings. New trustees are appointed by the Area Meeting following expressions of interest from local meetings and nominations by local meetings. The trustees compiled the Annual Report for 2020 on the activities of the AM, which was presented to the Area Meeting Business Meeting and submitted to the Charity Commission. The trustees also produced a report to Area Meeting Business Meeting on trustees' activities. During 2021 all trustee meetings were quorate.

Financial Review 2021

- 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 £
Properties Emergency 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 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 2021 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 are currently under review.

- 2. Income and Expenditure** None of the Area Meeting's funds were in deficit during 2021. At 31st December 2021, the Area Meeting had a total cash value of £219,793 (2020: £224,971).
- 3. Income:** Our usual sources of income continued to be very significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, income in 2021 was £128,614 (2020: £165,450).

Funds from Friends were £53,306 (2020: £49,984).

Income from letting our Meeting Houses etc was £53,502 (2020: £42,356), a fall of 49% compared to pre-pandemic income, resulting from the closures because of the Covid-19 pandemic. This follows a loss

of about 60% of the income from lettings in 2020 for the same reason. Places of religion are excluded from the compensation scheme for lost business, but claims are being lodged with our insurers.

Grants or donations from outside bodies were £21,420 (2020: £27,220). These were all grants for various aspects of the work at Peace Cottage at Hoddesdon. At the end of 2021, £10,006 remained held as restricted funds for the purpose of developing Peace Cottage; this includes some donations by individual Friends for this purpose.

Interest received on cash balances was £359 (2020: £852).

- 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 £99,063 (2020: £104,940) in support of our role as a religious organisation at a local level. This includes planned expenditure at the Peace Cottage, Hoddesdon, of £21,059 to repair and improve the property, of which £13,851 was funded by external grants and donations.

In 2021, £23,189 (2020: £25,918) was expended on grants to outside bodies, of which about 83% went to Britain Yearly Meeting in furtherance of the centrally organised work of the Religious Society of Friends.

The amount spent on administration within the Area Meeting in 2021 was £11,709 (2020: £9,109).

- 5. Investment Policy:** Our funds are mostly held by or invested in organisations 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

1. Following the laying down of Hoddesdon Meeting at the beginning of 2012, the Peace Cottage Community Hub (previously, the Hoddesdon Options Group) continues to meet and report to Area Meeting with ongoing developments. We aim to progress with the improvements to the building delayed by Covid, using successfully obtained grant funds, and to attract more local activity use of the building.
2. Local Meetings plan to undertake maintenance and repairs to Meeting Houses postponed due to Covid.
3. We aim to rebuild our membership and develop outreach following the decline in meeting attendance and new enquirers in our meetings during Covid. We want to engage the interest of younger attenders and families. We continue to have an outreach presence at local events.
4. We hope to find ways to use newly acquired knowledge of virtual communication to develop Quaker community and Quaker work.
5. The Area Meeting continues to implement learning from the 'Simpler Meetings' approach to managing roles within local and area meetings, to reduce the burden on a small number of role holders.
6. Some local meetings plan to engage services outside the Society to take on management of some financial tasks.
7. In the continuing environment of economic austerity, Local Meetings carry on with their support of food banks and homelessness initiatives and participate in Hertfordshire refugee support programmes.
8. We continue to find ways towards a greater 'greening' of our Meeting Houses.
9. Local Meetings look to work on best ways to utilise the spiritual, financial, and people resources that are available to nurture the life of the Meeting.
10. The Trustees hope to establish more formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding) as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies (Local Meetings).