

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

**Annual Report 2022**

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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 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 organisation 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 2022.
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 2022:

Clare Cooper  
David Hindle  
Andrew Meek  
Paul Evans

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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.

## 6. Key officers

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

These roles are rotated between Clerks and Members/Attenders 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, Brunel House, 11 The Promenade, Bristol, BS8 3NN

**Examiner of Accounts:**     Chris Maylin

**Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:**  
Friends Trusts Limited 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ#

### Serious Incidents.

There were no serious incidents in 2022 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 worship being held online due to Covid, a further amendment was made to incorporate this change (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 2022 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 Area Meeting'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 will incorporate oversight of this into Memoranda 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

Our Safeguarding policy and practice was revised in 2022 in light of new guidance from British Yearly Meeting working with the Christian safeguarding charity Thirtyone:eight. A programme of induction provided for all Meetings during the year to explain the implications of the new policy. Due emphasis was placed on the responsibility of all Friends and Attenders to abide by the Safeguarding policy for everyone who comes to our Meeting Houses or premises. Where needed, Friends or Attenders volunteering with children attended Safeguarding training, which was funded by the Area Meeting.

## **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. While we have seen an increase in attendance by younger people in two Meetings, the membership in general continues to age and decline in numbers. Fewer people are available to take on administrative roles within the local and area meetings due to age or other work/life commitments. At the Local Meeting level, some committee functions continue to be held by Local Meetings' Business Meetings (eg Premises Committees). At the Area Meeting level, committee functions 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, engaging in work to address social problems including supporting those struggling with the cost of living, and resettling and befriending of refugees, often in partnership with 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**

### **1. Membership and meetings for worship**

At the end of 2022, for Tabular Statement purposes, there were 142 Members of the Area Meeting, the same as the previous year, and 108 attenders. The Area Meeting lost 1 Member by death, and 1 by transfer out. We also welcomed 2 new members by convincement and 1 by transfer in.

The year 2022 continued to see the gradual return to weekly Meetings for Worship across the Area Meeting. The pace of return across the Area Meeting was varied, given that Covid-19 was still around but became less of a threat as most people were vaccinated. In general, local meetings reported a reduced attendance following Covid. The use of a laptop using Zoom enabled blended meetings to continue to take place in Hertford and Hitchin Meetings, and this allowed the participation of those who lived, or had moved, further away, which was warmly welcomed. In Welwyn Garden City, online participation was discontinued as Friends returned to the Meeting House. Hitchin Meeting continued to hold a second half-hour online Meeting for Worship on Wednesday evenings, and Welwyn Garden City Meeting held two meetings for worship on Sundays. Average attendance, including online meetings, varied from three to five in the two smallest meetings, 14 – 18 in larger meetings and up to 30 in the largest meeting.

Six Area Meetings for Business were held online until the middle of the year, when they resumed in person. Average attendance was between 10 and 15 attending when meetings resumed in person. Reports were received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings (the national standing executive body between Yearly Meetings) and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. Triennial reports were received from Stevenage and Welwyn Garden City. Area Meeting dates for 2023 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our Local meetings) for 2021 was received, the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership.

### **2. Children and Young People**

In-person children's meeting continued regularly at Hitchin and Welwyn Garden City Meetings where families regularly attended with their children. In Hitchin, the regular child attenders were under 2 years old and so the meetings were mostly play and stories, or garden activities. In one local meeting an online older children's meeting took place monthly at weekends until October 2022, held to keep some contact with families who had

moved abroad. Four children (along with their parents) regularly took part in discussions ranging from the meaning of gifts to what they thought about war. Welwyn Garden City Meeting held monthly children's meetings with between 2 and 6 children joining. In other local meetings, children joined in shared lunch events for celebration occasions, such as summer picnics and Christmas. Three local meetings held All Age Worship Meetings at different times of the year, some monthly, including at Christmas, and these were often followed by shared lunches.

### **3. Pastoral and spiritual life of the community**

Local meetings continued to support Friends and Attenders through the roles of Elders and Pastoral Carers. Regular meetings, usually around six times a year, allow these role holders to share information and consider ways to reach out to other Friends and Attenders with vulnerabilities, and plan activities to strengthen their Quaker community. As numbers have declined however and it continues to be difficult to fill these roles, Local meetings have started to share these functions and work more collaboratively. The use of the term 'Overseer' was replaced across all local meetings by the term Pastoral Carer or Pastoral Friend, given its association with oppressive contexts. One meeting agreed to also drop the term 'Elder' as this could feel exclusive to some, and now use the term 'Pastoral and Spiritual Care Friend'.

Meetings for worship included 'Afterword' sessions or sharing of spiritual readings or art works. Most local meetings continued to share readings from Advices and Queries during their Meetings for Worship for Business. Three local meetings held regular discussion groups on spiritual themes, reading from different texts, including Friendly Bible Study, Advices and Queries, and 'Experiment with Light'. One Meeting invited a speaker from Quaker Peace Education to talk to their community.

Across different local meetings, special meetings were held to bless a wedding, celebrate a birth, and to celebrate the lives of two Friends who had passed away.

As in-person contact increased, local meetings gradually resumed regular group activities to support each other and rebuild their social connectedness, such as shared lunches, discussion or book groups, craft mornings, monthly walks and talks. Hitchin continued to produce their monthly newsletter (Quakerview) which is also shared and enjoyed by other local meetings. Other meetings set up email or digital messaging groups, to share notices and news, or photos with each other.

The emerging trend of on-line training, which increased during Covid, has allowed the increased availability to learning for Friends and Attenders. This included regular online discussions regarding the revisions to the Safeguarding policy, and meetings for Clerks and Trustees around the country. Friends across different Local Meetings attended on-line or in-person talks and workshops during the annual Britain Yearly Meeting conference.

### **4. Outreach to other communities**

Local meetings continued to have regular contact with Church and community groups within their immediate areas. Examples in 2022 were:

- Churches Together 'Warm Spaces' initiative
- Interfaith group meetings

- Food banks
- Refugee groups
- Baby and toddler group

Some meetings have strong links with other faith groups and volunteers attended and assisted in regular Interfaith events and shared suppers. One meeting house was regularly used by their local Ukrainian support group for Hosts and Visitors free of charge, twice a month. The group loved coming to the QMH and valued the opportunity to meet each other. A number of Friends and Attenders across all local meetings were involved individually with working with refugee groups, disability groups, food banks, and projects in the UK or overseas working for the relief of poverty.

Welwyn Garden City Meeting hosted a successful Arts and Craft Extravaganza to draw in the local community, including Ukrainian refugees. The Peace Garden in the grounds of Hitchin Meeting which is also supported by other faith groups saw the installation of the sundial donated by Churches Together in Hitchin, a Unity sculpture, and a mosaic panel. This brought together local artists and sculptors, the Tilehouse Rotary Club and local churches to share readings and prayers.

The Peace Garden was also used for an event recognising International Peace Day on 21 September 2022. Members of the Orpheus Choir sang, and a Ukrainian refugee spoke of the loss of her country and flight to the UK, and doves were hung in trees.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century Hertford Meeting House opened for visitors on the second Saturday of the month from May to September and all day on September 10<sup>th</sup> for Heritage Open Day and the Herts and Beds Bike 'n Hike. Friends welcomed 34 Bike 'n Hike participants and 59 other visitors. The Meeting House also opened for visitors during Quaker Week in October and a group from Friends House visited in September when a friend gave a talk about the history of the Meeting House and Quakers in Hertford.

The Area Meeting joined other faith communities when invited to covenant with the local authority in building a relationship of mutual understanding and goodwill. Hertfordshire local authority were pleased to see the support offered by faith communities to local communities, during and after Covid. This may mean that faith bodies, including Quakers, are included into the council's consultation process regarding planning for example, or are encouraged to participate in training, such as safeguarding.

## **5. Use of meeting houses by 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, carrying out annual premises checks, repairs, servicing of equipment and annual 'deep' spring cleaning.

Some refurbishment and building work that was delayed due to Covid was able to be completed, such as restoring the perimeter wall at Hertford Meeting House. Letchworth Meeting undertook work to roof fascia boards, removing asbestos, refurbishment of the Warden's flat, and alterations to the Garden room in order to make it viable to be let to community groups and to decrease their carbon footprint.



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. Meetings reported a steady return to pre-Covid levels of hiring, or an increase, including to some new groups:

- Music clubs and town music festivals
- Addiction support: Gamblers Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous
- Muslims for Friday Prayers and Ramadan observance
- Hertford Spiritualist Church
- Carers in Hertfordshire
- Health and wellbeing: Yoga, pilates, Tai Chi, Buddhist meditation, dance, Weight Watchers
- Children's and young people: Pre-school music, children's theatre, Days for Girls (charity) (for production of reusable period pads)
- HACC (Hertford Action on Climate Change), and Climate Cafe
- Adult education: Language Tuition, U3A groups, Bridge Club
- Mental Health support: counselling, counselling training group, Rethink charity
- Community and Voluntary Services

The hiring of these premises remains a significant source of revenue for the meetings. Charges may be reduced to encourage groups in difficulty, however, as a result of increased energy charges, meetings also needed to increase their basic hire rates, and this was understood by hirers.

## **6. 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, buying this from renewable sources. Letchworth Meeting made alterations to their heating system and installed cavity wall insulation.

Local meetings are continuing to manage their grounds to encourage wildlife and biodiversity (ponds, wild areas meeting house gardens). Hertford Meeting is exploring the idea of installing swift boxes although this requires planning permission as the building is Grade 1 listed.

Hertford continues to work closely with local sustainability groups when suitable opportunities arise, for example at the Extinction Rebellion carnival and hosting a Transition Hertford sustainability fair which was well attended by the local community.

## **7. Quaker witness**

Our witness included supporting Quaker and non-Quaker organisations which pursue aims in line with our 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 provided funds for Quaker and non-Quaker charitable bodies either on a regular or one-off basis, or by holding a special event to raise funds: These include:

- Central work of Britain Yearly Meeting
- Campaign Against the Arms Trade
- Water Aid
- Glebe House (Friends Therapeutic Community Trust, Cambs)
- Drop In Centre for disabled adults and children
- Herts Domestic Abuse Helpline
- Tree Aid (NGO tackling climate poverty in Southern Africa)
- Palestine Trauma Centre (UK)
- Food banks
- Helping Herts Homeless
- Herts Welcomes Refugees

Financial support for Quaker organisations in 2022 amounted to £12438, for non-Quaker organisations £8977.

Local meetings have supported Amnesty International in various ways, including organising and participating in letter writing events (individually and in groups).

#### **8. Peace Cottage Community Hub (formerly Hoddesdon Quaker Meeting House)**

The Peace Cottage Community project continued to thrive, with significant involvement from a dedicated steering group from Welwyn Garden City, Hertford and Eyeworth Meetings. Relationships with representatives from the Hoddesdon community continued to strengthen and events were held to draw in local people. Another open day was held in August and further progress made in developing and clearing the garden with a team of committed local volunteers. Further grant applications were successful in obtaining funds to upgrade the building.

#### **9. Financial governance**

During 2022 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, and also the receipt of the examined Area Meeting amalgamated accounts, for 2021 for the Local meetings over which it had oversight. The proposed budget, financial timetable, and Area Meeting Quotas for 2023 were received and accepted.

## **10. Trustees**

During 2022 four trustees served. The trustees see one of their functions as providing advice and counsel to local meetings. 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 2021 on the activities of the Area Meeting, 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 2022 not all trustee meetings were quorate although records were kept of matters discussed.

## **Financial Review 2022**

**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 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 2022 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 2022. At 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, the Area Meeting had a total cash value of £324,394 (2021: £219,793). A significant part of the increase in value was due to a legacy received by one of the Local Meetings.

**3. Income:** Our income was significantly increased by a legacy and by insurance payments for lost income during the Covid shutdowns, income in 2022 was £300,882 (2021: £128,614). A further insurance payment will be reflected in the 2023 accounts.

Funds from Friends were £33,676 (2021: £53,306).

Income from letting our Meeting Houses etc was £94,217 (2021: £53,502), a fall of 14% compared to pre-pandemic income. Much of the letting business has now returned, but there are some previous hirers who no longer operate. Local Meetings have received insurance compensation for some of the lost business due to Covid.

Grants or donations from outside bodies were £35,850 (2021: £21,240). This includes grants of £10,900 for various aspects of the work at Peace Cottage at Hoddesdon. At the end of 2021, £7,320 remained held as restricted funds for the purpose of developing Peace Cottage; this includes some donations by individual Friends for this purpose. Grants to Local Meetings amounted to £24,950, mostly for work on the Hertford Meeting House which is a Grade 1 Listed Building. £705 remains held as a restricted fund.

Interest received on cash balances was £2,581 (2021: £359).

**4. Expenditure:** Our largest expenditure remains the insurance, maintenance, and improvement of our properties, at £159,176 (2021: £99,063) in support of our role as a religious organisation at a local level. This includes planned expenditure at the Peace Cottage, Hoddesdon, of £21,017 to repair and improve the property, of which £16,841 was funded by external grants and donations.

In 2022, £21,415 (2021: £23,819) was expended on grants and other support to outside bodies, of which about 58% 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 2022 was £15,264 (2021: £11,709).

**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**

- Peace Cottage Community Hub project – to strengthen ties with the local community, attract more local use of the building, and progress with the improvements to the building, including obtaining a grant to install sustainable heating
- To undertake maintenance and repairs to Local Meeting Houses, when funds become available.
- To grow our membership and develop outreach, particularly to engage the interest of families and younger attenders.
- To use our newly acquired knowledge of virtual communication to develop Quaker community and Quaker work.
- Continue 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.
- To engage services outside the Society to take on management of some financial tasks if needed
- Carry on support of food banks and homelessness initiatives and participate in Hertfordshire refugee support programmes.
- Continue to find ways towards reducing our carbon footprint and make our buildings more sustainable.
- Trustees to work on establishing more formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding) as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies (Local meetings).