Hertford & Hitchin Area Meeting Communications and Website

Background

Area Meeting asked me to explore options for improving communications and outreach across our local meetings and to report back with proposals.
Our websites and digital communications are often the first point of contact for people exploring Quakers. The current website contains good, up to date information, which is maintained, but at present:

- The Area Meeting website is outdated and not mobile-friendly.
- Most meetings rely on volunteers with limited time to maintain websites and communications.

At the same time, many meetings are interested in welcoming newcomers and strengthening their presence in their local communities. Improving our communications could help us do this more effectively.

I have:

- Spoken with **two potential communications providers**
- Consulted with our **Local Development Worker**
- Asked **local meetings for initial views on the Quaker Meetings Network website platform**

Responses from local meetings were **positive**, with no objections raised.

Options explored

1. Quaker Meetings Network platform

The **Quaker Meetings Network (QMN)** platform (https://quaker.app/about) provides a shared website system designed specifically for Quaker meetings.

Benefits include:

- Mobile-friendly modern websites
- Simple editing tools suitable for volunteers
- A consistent structure for meeting information
- Hosting and technical support included
- Designed specifically for Quaker meetings

Many meetings across Britain are now using this system. It is very affordable (the most expensive annual plan is only £99, which is incredible value considering what you get compared with other off-the-shelf providers), built by Quakers for Quakers.
You can read more about how it all works here: Brochure 2025

2. David Curtis – Website development

I spoke with **David Curtis**, Communications Coordinator for Hampshire and Islands Area Meeting, who was introduced to me by Aileen Braidwood, our Local Development Worker. David has extensive experience building Quaker websites and has built **14 sites using the Quaker Meetings Network platform**.

Example:
https://hampshirequakers.org.uk/

David has offered to help us establish a similar structure for our Area Meeting.

His estimate:
- **£30 per hour**
- Approximately **140 hours** to build:
  - One Area Meeting website
  - Six linked Local Meeting pages
  - Integration with Welwyn Garden City's existing Wordpress site
- Estimated total: **around £4,200**

This would include consultation with local meetings during development.
David would currently be available to **begin work in late September**.

3. Better Story communications proposal

I also received a proposal from **Better Story**, a communications consultancy for churches, a copy is attached.

Their proposal includes:
- Communications strategy development
- Website development
- Social media management
- Email newsletters
- Storytelling and fundraising communications

While this proposal is thoughtful and professional, it represents a **much larger communications programme** than Area Meeting may currently need or have capacity to manage.

Costs include:
- £1,650 for communications strategy
- Website work from £1,840 plus build costs
- Ongoing communications management (£920–£1,100 per month)

- Newsletter production (£6,900 per year)

Given our current scale and volunteer capacity, this may be **more ambitious than we need at present**. I also don't know what funds we have available but suspect this will be well beyond our financial ability.

Recommended approach
I suggest that Area Meeting take a **simple first step** by focusing on our websites.

Proposal
1. **Adopt the Quaker Meetings Network platform** as the standard website platform for Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting and its local meetings (except Welwyn Garden City, which has recently invested in a new website).
2. **Engage David Curtis** to build the new Area Meeting website and linked local meeting pages.
3. **Appoint an Area Meeting lead for this work** (a Friend with interest in this area) to work with David and help coordinate communications across meetings.
4. **Ask each Local Meeting to nominate a contact person** to work with David on their meeting's page during development.
5. **Focus initially on the website only**, leaving social media and other communications for future consideration.

Why begin with the website?
- It is the **most important first point of contact** for newcomers.
- It provides a **shared foundation** for future communications.
- It is a **manageable project** with clear scope.
- It supports outreach without creating ongoing workload immediately.

Once a new website is established, Area Meeting could later consider things like:
- Social media support
- Shared newsletters
- Storytelling about Quaker witness in our communities

Governance and coordination
To keep this manageable, the work could be overseen by:
- A **Lead from Area Meeting**
- A **small group of local meeting representatives**
- Coordination with the **Local Development Worker where helpful**

Financial implications

Estimated one-off cost for website development: **Approximately £4,200**

Plus ongoing hosting costs through the Quaker Meetings Network platform (2026 price is currently maximum £99 per year).

These costs would be significantly lower than commissioning a full communications programme.

Suggested next steps

If Area Meeting discerns that this is the right way to proceed:
1. If we want to adopt the **Quaker Meetings Network platform we need to supply them with a** record of our meeting decision to join QMN (i.e., a copy of a relevant minute from a business or committee meeting, or a signed letter from a clerk or convenor).
2. Authorise engagement with **David Curtis** to develop the website.
3. Ask local meetings to nominate **communications contacts**.
4. Appoint a **communications and outreach lead** to coordinate the work.