**Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**

 **Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting**

 **Annual Report 2016 from Trustees**

**Reference details**

1. This is the trustees’ report for the Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting of the Religious Society of

Friends (Quakers), abbreviated as Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting. The Area Meeting is also known

as Hertford and Hitchin Quakers, and was previously known as Hertford and Hitchin Monthly Meeting.

The Area Meeting is part of the organization of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain,

and the national body is known as Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM). The Area Meeting contains a number

of Local Meetings, which hold public Meetings for Worship and have day-to-day care of Meeting Houses and

other property.

The object of the Area Meeting is the furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of the Area Meeting and beyond. This may

be done by work such as:

* strengthening the life and witness of Quaker meetings both in the area of the Area Meeting and

beyond;

* spreading the message of Quakers and interpreting and developing the thought and practice of

the Religious Society;

* undertaking Quaker service for the relief of suffering at home and abroad;
* funding the concerns that Quaker meetings in the area of the Area Meeting or beyond have

adopted or agreed to support;

* providing for the pastoral care of individual Members and 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 organization of the Area Meeting and contributing to the

support of Britain Yearly Meeting

2. This report and accounts covers the calendar year 2016.

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.

Roger Jarvis

17 Moormead Close

Hitchin

Hertfordshire

SG5 2BA

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.

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5. Trustees in 2016:

Ian Chandler served in 2016, continues to serve in 2017

Katie Frost served in 2016, service ended 31st December 2016

Kim Noy Man Jackson served in 2016, continues to serve in 2017

Roger Jarvis served in 2016, continues to serve in 2017

Frances Prestidge served in 2016, continues to serve in 2017

6. Key officers

Area Meeting Correspondence Clerk David Hindle

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

Treasurer John White

Names and addresses of other relevant organizations or persons

**Bank:**

Triodos Bank

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

**Examiner of Accounts:**

Adam Armsby

**Custodian Trustees for the Area Meeting:**

Friends Trusts Limited

173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

**Public Benefit statement**

The principle benefit is that at least weekly each of the 5 Meeting Houses is open to the public for Meeting for Worship. The Meeting Houses are also made available as appropriate, sometimes at a subsidized charge, to suitable local community and interest groups and charities.

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**Governance**

1. The Area Meeting in session adopted a Governing Document on 13 October 2007 (Minute 81/07),

amended on 9 November 2008 (Minute 81/08)

2. The activities of the trustees are defined by the Governing Document, and by the Terms of Reference

for trustees adopted by the Area Meeting in session on 9 June 2007. The minutes of trustees meetings,

and supporting documents, are available (currently passworded) on the internet, and the attention of

existing and new trustees is drawn to this and other significant information sources on the internet.

3. Meetings for church affairs, in which the Religious Society conducts its business, are meetings for

worship based on silence, carrying the expectation that God’s guidance can be discerned if members are

truly listening together and to each other. The unity that is sought depends on the willingness of all to

seek the truth in each other’s utterances. There is no voting in any meeting as this would inhibit the

process of seeking to know the will of God as expressed in the sense of the meeting.

The Clerk of the meeting bears the final responsibility for preparing the business, conducting the

meeting and drafting the minutes of the meeting. Minutes are drafted by the Clerk during the course of

the meeting, but the final decision about whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the

responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the Clerk.

This procedure is used for the Area Meeting in session, and for meetings of the trustees.

4. The Area Meeting during 2016 had 6 constituent geographically based Local Meetings which organize public Meetings for Worship. These Local Meetings are at:

Guilden Morden Letchworth

Hertford Stevenage

Hitchin Welwyn Garden City.

The Local Meeting at Hoddesdon was laid down at the start of 2012. The Area Meeting continues to

oversee the building and plans are progressing. See *Plans for the Future* below.

5. All of these Local Meetings are authorized to hold bank accounts, and each (except Guilden Morden)

has the use of a Meeting House, as its place of worship. These are owned by the Area Meeting. Several of

the Local Meetings also have wardens’ accommodation, and Welwyn Garden City also has a small

building used as a function room.

Friends Trusts Ltd is the custodian trustee of the Area Meeting’s properties.

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

* the Finance Committee assists the Area Meeting Treasurer in recommending financial policy

and overseeing the financial affairs of the Area and Local Meetings.

* the Properties Committee oversees the care of properties, mainly by commissioning a

programme of surveys, receiving survey reports, and recommending actions arising from them.

* the Camp Committee organizes an annual residential camp on behalf of Grand Union Quaker Camps, a registered charity, for Members and Attenders of the Area Meeting and some others; the Camp Committee is authorized to hold a bank account.

The Area Meeting is part of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, of which Britain

Yearly Meeting is the body which centrally manages the policy, property, employment and work of the

Religious Society.

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6. Risk assessment: the Trustees have considered a number of areas of possible risk, as follows:

Care of property The properties are appropriately insured. There is a rolling programme of property inspections by professional surveyors, which is a structural survey. This process is overseen by the

Properties Committee.

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 are incorporating oversight of this into a memorandum of understanding.

Financial probity The Area Meeting and its constituent bodies have no activities which constitute a major financial risk. There is a financial reporting system which includes independent examination of the Area Meeting’s and its constituent bodies’ annual accounts.

Investments The Area Meeting’s funds are mostly in bank accounts. The placement of the funds is reviewed periodically.

Employment The Trustees have examined the employment practices in the Local Meetings with regard to legal requirements. New contracts have been employed by Welwyn Garden City Meeting.

Letchworth Meeting is currently exploring new contracts. Model contracts for paid workers and agreements for volunteers are close to completion.

Child Safety A Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy for the Area Meeting was agreed in 2009 and a network of responsible persons for the Area Meeting and each Local Meeting has been implemented. A

Safeguarding Handbook for the context of Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting was produced in 2010.

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**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.

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**Achievements and Performance**

1. At the end of 2016, the Area Meeting had 150 Members, and 124 Attenders. The Area Meeting lost 7

Members by death and 2 by transfer out. We also welcomed 3 new members by convincement

.

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

:

Meeting (location) Frequency of public No. of public Meetings Estimated Average Attendance

 Meeting for Worship for Worship in 2016

Guilden Morden Twice monthly 10.30am 24 5

Hertford Weekly Sunday 10.30am 52 18

Hitchin Weekly Sunday 10.30am 52 15

Letchworth Weekly Sunday 10.30am 52 15

Stevenage Weekly Sunday 10.30am 52 6

Welwyn Garden City Weekly Sunday 10.30am 52 20

 Weekly Sunday 8am 40 n/a

 (not 1st Sunday)

3. During 2016 the Area Meeting has continued to pursue policies of good governance and furtherance of

our charitable objectives in compliance with its governing document. Fiscal oversight has been achieved

at all levels by the receipt and acceptance of both the examined business accounts 2015 for the Area Meeting, and also the receipt of the examined amalgamated accounts 2015 for the local meetings over which it has oversight. The proposed budget for 2017 was also received. The financial timetable for 2017 was received, and Area Meeting quotas for 2017(contributions from Local Meetings) were expected to be the same in 2017 as 2016. Local Meeting quotas and revised budget for 2016 were also presented and accepted.

Pastoral and spiritual responsibility has been overseen by the appointment of Overseers and Elders. Development opportunities are always available for our younger members including representation at this year’s Junior Yearly Meeting, while a wide range of courses have been attended by our more mature members in subjects designed to further our charitable and religious objectives, which were reported back on.. Friends of all ages can go to our summer camp which promotes the Quaker ethos and testimonies in a fun environment. Twelve Friends were recorded as attending Britain Yearly Meeting and sharing their reflections.

4. A total of 6 Area Meetings were held with a total attendance of 118 Friends. An Area Meeting play reading of the Tribunal Project enabled us to engage with pacifism issues, and this was also engaged with at this year’s camp. Reports have also been received regularly from Meeting for Sufferings, our standing executive body between Yearly Meetings; and the various committees accountable to Area Meeting. Triennial reports from our local meetings continue to be received. Regular reports from the Hoddesdon Action Group have been received by Area Meeting., as has correspondence received. During the year we revised our safeguarding handbook, and have embarked on the process of revising our Area Meeting list of members and attenders. As well as a report on a Care of Our Meetings workshop, we also received a minute from a Threshing Meeting to consider our shared responsibility for the upkeep of our buildings and the management of our finances. An initiative from our Trustees to start a programme of Listening to Our Meetings was approved. Oversight of the Hoddesdon Action Group was achieved by having it as a continuing minute at each Area Meeting.

5. Area Meeting dates for 2017 were agreed, and the tabular statement (an indicator of the numerical strength of our local meetings) for 2016 was received; the Area Meeting being the body responsible for membership. It was agreed at the request of a local meeting to prepare a Testimony to the Grace of God, as shown in the life and service of one of our deceased Friends; a Testimony being a living expression of our faith for the inspiration of others. Among the reports received last year was one on the Area Meeting Quaker Work Committee, this Committee provides small grants to enable friends to pursue lines of work in accord with our Quaker faith.. We continue to support financially the chaplaincy work carried out at Luton

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Airport, and agreed to a request to help with a pension deficit for the previous retired chaplain. This year’s Area Meeting Camp was on the theme of Conscientious Objection. The site contained several disused World War II air raid shelters, and through proximity to RAF Duxford a constant reminder of the grim realities of war was always present. The Area Meeting camp includes significant spiritual content with Meetings for Worship on each day and some discussions Camp is a Quaker community for a week and we spend practically all hours of the day together – in worship activities, meal times and duty and relaxation. We are sometimes thankful for the joy and laughter of being together and sometimes reminded of the need to be tolerant of others. Whilst the lack of modern facilities demands greater reliance on manual work, such communal activity requires cooperation and strengthens the group. Camp offers us the chance to remember and reflect on what is really important in our busy lives.

 6. During 2016 five trustees served. We see one of our functions as providing advice and counsel to Area Meeting in session. We occasionally flag up matters of concern to Area Meeting by minute .Trustees appoint representatives to all Area Meetings in session. New trustees are appointed by the Area Meeting following nomination from the Area Meeting Nominations Committee. The trustees presented to Area Meeting their annual report for 2015 to the Charity Commission, as well as their own internal report to Area Meeting. During 2016 all trustee meetings were quorate. Support is made available by Area Meeting to all trustees, and one trustee from our Area Meeting is also a trustee on Grand Union Quaker Camps.

7. Each of the Local Meetings had a formal or informal programme of developing the spiritual and social

life of its members. These included, at individual Local Meetings:

* Fundraising Events
* New Year’s Party
* Shared lunches and breakfasts
* Afterword
* Friendly Bible Study
* Get to know your Ffriends
* First Monday Get Togethers for discussion.
* Reading group
* Becoming Friends
* Experiment With Light
* Discussion Sessions on Quaker Faith and Practice
* Quiet Day

Local Meetings for Worship included the regular reading of advices and queries. Our Elders and

Overseers met regularly together to keep in mind the spiritual and pastoral needs of all Friends and

Attenders. Welwyn Garden City Meeting held a monthly Meeting for Worship in a Hatfield Care Home. Regular visits are also made to a long standing member now in residential care. A memorial meeting was held for a much valued member. In their business meetings Local Meetings considered items prior to Area Meetings.

Local Meetings encouraged the attendance of Friends at a number of learning opportunities. These

included at Hitchin Local Meeting the ‘Food for thought’ discussion meetings that have been well

attended, and Afterword a time for reflection on ministry after Meeting for Worship. Local; Meetings have also been involved with Becoming Friends courses, and the Woodbrooke on line resource Being Friends Together. Welwyn Garden City Local Meeting initiated a programme of First Monday Get-Togethers, when local people are invited to learn more about and discuss a particular issue, such as refugees or the Palestine/Israel conflict. A public discussion was organized in June entitled Objections to War, on the theme of conscientious objection as part of the Hitchin Festival.

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 Friends attended meetings on behalf of our Area Meeting including Britain Yearly Meeting in London.

8. Most Local Meetings had regular contact with Church and Community groups within their immediate

areas and actively worked with others in our community. Examples of these are:

* Hitchin Survival – an information leaflet for those in need locally
* Hitchin Counselling Service
* Cellar Club- providing food and support for people with mental health and other problems in Welwyn Garden City
* Food Banks

9. All the Local Meetings except Guilden Morden have Meeting Houses and other facilities which are

available for use by the wider community. Welwyn Garden City has The Backhouse Roomwhich is an

additional, separate meeting room. The availability of these premises is regarded as a form of service to

the community, particularly when they are used by groups answering a social need or providing a

cultural service. In some cases additional support eg staffing or facilities is provided to some of these

groups. Examples of these in 2016 were:

* Music and dancing groups and clubs
* Alcoholics Anonymous
* Gamblers Anonymous
* Circles of Support
* Health and Well Being groups
* Educational groups
* A Day Centre for adults with learning difficulties at Stevenage Meeting House
* Moslems(Friday prayers and Ramadan observance)

Many of our Meeting Houses have undergone investment this year. Some of this was as follows. Welwyn Garden City completed the major refurbishment providing much enhanced facilities, which has proved popular with Friends and hirers alike and is a well-used community facility. Stevenage premises work included re-roofing the Quiet Room, and resealing the cork flooring in the Meeting Room. Better quality chairs were purchased for the Meeting Room. Hertford installed accessible entrance from the street to the Quaker Room, and removed the Quaker Room ceiling, and installed a new ceiling and lights. Hitchin replaced the rotten wooden surrounds to a number of windows, and implemented a number of actions (including a fire policy) following a fire inspection and a health and safety assessment. The Peace Garden at Hitchin is starting to take shape. A dove-shaped pond has been dug and a special seat and plaque to commemorate conscientious objection has been installed; the aim is to involve other faiths as well as the local community so that it is a garden for all.

The hiring of these premises remains a significant source of revenue for the meetings, however, charges

may also be reduced or held to a level which encourages groups in difficulty. The development of

facilities within and outside Meeting Houses are also seen to be closely related to outreach.

10. Quaker witness includes supporting Quaker organizations and also non-Quaker organizations which

pursue aims in line with Quaker values, particularly (but not exclusively) historical Quaker concerns such as peace, justice, refugees, treatment of criminals, and emergency relief, all areas where “that of God in all people” is often not recognized.

As part of our support, Local Meetings have raised funds for Quaker and non-Quaker charitable bodies both on a regular basis and as special events or series of events. These include:

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* Donation to various charities and appeals
* Central work of Britain Yearly Meeting
* North Herts Sanctuary

Activities include raising donations for Calais Camp, and hosting speakers from Calais Kitchens and St. Albans for Refugees as part of Quaker Week. Individually Friends have supported the local resettlement of refugee families. Several meetings have supported Christian Aid Week. Hertford Friends held Christian Aid lunches during Lent. Hitchin Friends supported a Christian Aid quiz and supplied collectors for Christian Aid Week. Several meetings have been involved with activities to support local Churches Together groups.

11. Local Meetings held or prepared to hold Children’s Meetings during 2016. Several Meetings held all age Meetings for Worship during 2016, and most Meetings have monthly Children’s Meetings: Topics have included sessions on each of the Quaker testimonies, as well as Chocolate, The Kindertransport and Sustainability.

12. Both Local Meetings and Area Meeting considered their outreach activities. A silent vigil for the Calais Children was held in Hertford town centre, which received positive publicity in the local press, and the ongoing Peace Garden project at Hitchin received publicity in the local paper leading to enquiries from other churches and faiths. Transition Hertford held an annual Apple Day at the Meeting House, which was also open for visitors one Saturday per. Month from April through to Heritage Open Day in September. To mark 100 years since the 1916 Military Service Act which legally recognized the right to refuse military service on grounds of conscience, Stevenage Friends negotiated with the Mayor and British Legion to participate in the official Remembrance Day commemoration. A wreath of red and white poppies was laid with a note to say it was in memory of all who suffered in wars. A white poppy wreath was laid separately on Remembrance Sunday in the 100th year since the introduction of the law that exempts people from military service on grounds of conscience, and in memory of all who lost their lives in war. Stevenage Meeting House was used as a polling station, and remains a popular and well-used venue for local community, cultural, campaigning and religious groups. Several Meetings opened their Meeting Houses for Heritage Open Days in September, and Beds And Herts Historic Churches Trust Sponsored Bike ‘n Hike. both these events resulted in people exploring the Meeting Houses who might otherwise never do so. Stevenage Friends ran an outreach stall at a local Town Centre Gardens community event.

13. Friends have been active in ensuring the vibrancy and health of our religious society. During 2016 some

Friends have continued to be exercised by membership being well over the age of 60 and difficulties in

finding Friends to take on essential tasks of service to the Meeting. Some local meetings looked at

creative ways of addressing the problems this brings. Friends with wardens greatly appreciated the work

of wardens during 2016 who look after our Meeting Houses, organizing hirings and contributing in so

many ways to the life of our Meetings, including administration, outreach and our Quaker witness with

energy and enthusiasm.

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**Financial Review 2016**

**Reserves Policy**

The reserves policy for Area Meeting central funds is based on holding money in various nominal funds

at Area Meeting level. The level of Area Meeting funds is agreed annually by the Treasurer in

consultation with Finance Committee. The level for 2016 is as follows:

**Funds held for the following purposes Amount £**

Building Fund 40,000

General Purposes 15,000

Outreach 2,000

Peace Witness 1,000

Quaker Work 5,000

Camp Committee 7,000

**Total 70,000**

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 2016 is:

**Local Meeting Amount £**

Guilden Morden 1,000

Hertford 18,000

Hitchin 18,000

Letchworth 18,000

Stevenage 10,000

Welwyn Garden City 40,000

**Total 105,000**

**Income and Expenditure**

1. None of the Area Meeting’s funds were in deficit during 2016.

2. **Income:** Funds from members were £46,000 and from letting our Meeting Houses £96,000.

Legacies plus grants or donations from outside bodies were £1,000. Interest received on cash

balances were £1,000.

3. **Expenditure**: Our largest expenditure is normally on maintaining buildings (£122,000) in support

of our role as a religious organization at a local level. In 2016 a significant amount (£27,000) was

expended on grants, of which about 48% 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 2016 was £7,730.

4. **Investment Policy:** Our funds are generally held by or invested in organizations with good ethical

policies such as Triodos Bank, Ecology Building Society, Co-operative Bank and Shared Interest.

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**Key plans for the future**

1. The Trustees are continuing to review their work and relationships, and hope to establish more formal agreements (Memoranda of Understanding) as to the reciprocal responsibilities of the Area Meeting and its constituent bodies.
2. Following the laying down of Hoddesdon Meeting at the beginning of 2012, the Hoddesdon group continues to meet and report to Area Meeting.
3. In the continuing environment of economic austerity, Local Meetings plan to support food banks and other initiatives.
4. Involvement with local initiatives to participate in Herts Welcomes Syrian Refugee programme
5. Local Meetings look to work on best ways to utilise what spiritual, financial, and people resources are available to nurture the life of the Meeting.
6. Plan our revitalisation and outreach strategy for the longer term, including encouragement of new, especially younger attenders
7. Continue to have an outreach presence at local events, our capacity allowing, including the Stevenage Town Centre Gardens community day.
8. Improvements to, and continuing laying out of a Peace Garden at Hitchin Local Meeting.
9. Greater greening of our Meeting Houses.

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