

People + Places =??

A Discussion Paper

Prepared by

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for



Banbury and Evesham Area Quaker Meeting

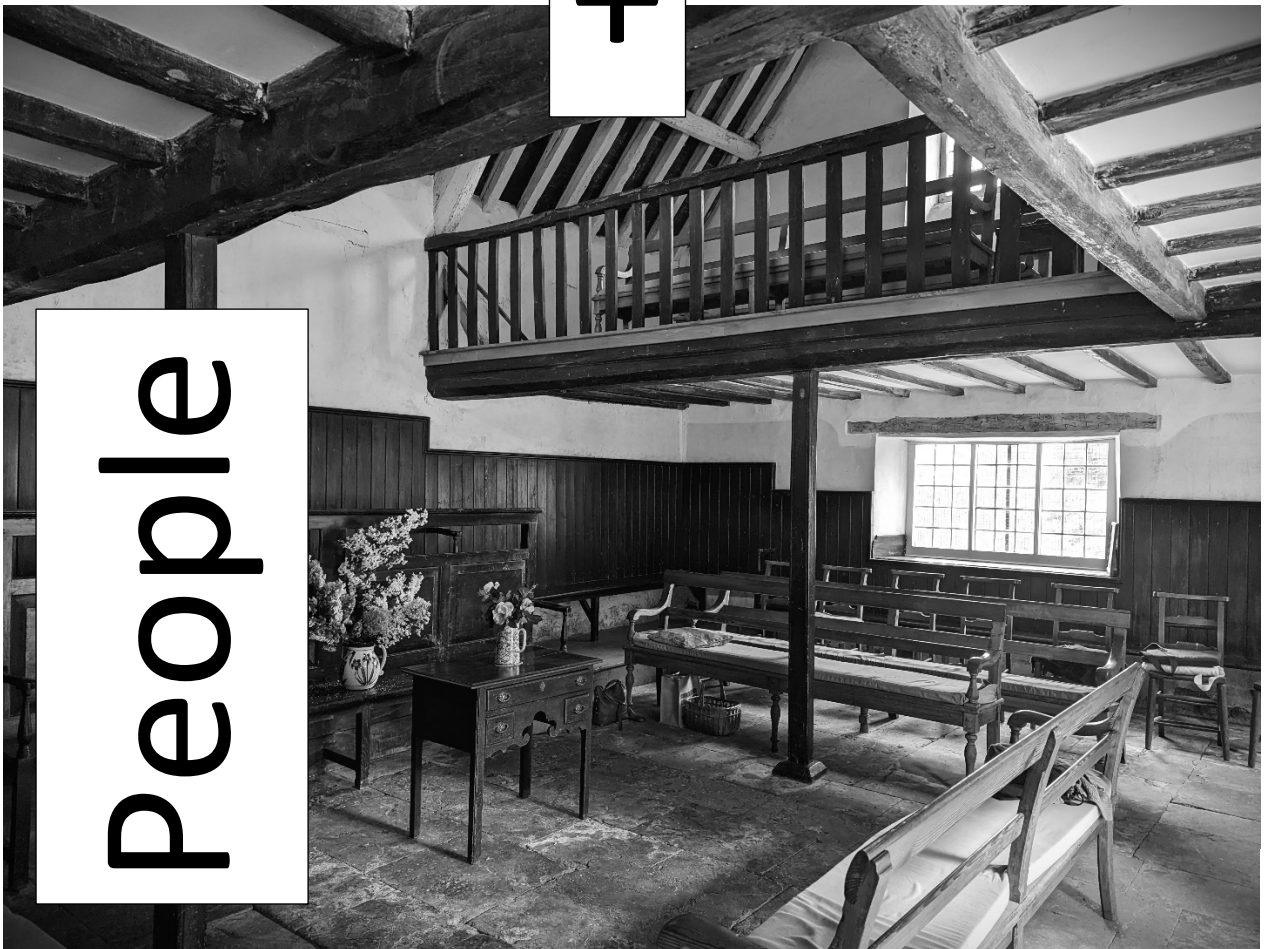
November 2023



Places

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People

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Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
A Personal Preface	4
Guidance from Quaker Faith and Practice	4
The Context	5
Quaker Facts or Myths?	5
The Here and Now in BYM	6
Figure 1 Local Membership Changes 2019 – 2021	6
Figure 2 Number of Quakers per 1,000 people by Area.....	7
Figure 3 Local Meetings in Britain with and without a MH.....	8
Figure 4 Local Meetings in Britain: in Size Order.....	8
The Here and Now in Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting.....	9
People	9
Table 1 Members and Attenders by Meeting.....	9
Table 2 Area Meeting by Size 2011 to 2021.....	9
Places	10
Where do we go from here?	10
Questions arising	10
Financial Considerations	10
Figure 5 Sources of Area Meeting Income.....	11
Figure 6 Sources of Area Meeting Expenditure.....	11
Towards a Vision for the Future Sustainability of AM.....	12
Going Beyond Scenarios.....	13
The Choice is Before You.....	14
Figure 7 The Choice Matrix.....	14
What Next.....	15
References	16

Executive Summary

*“It is not what we can say of our ancestors
that is important
but more what they will say of us.”*

Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting have over recent years struggled to find sufficient people willing and capable of running our charity. It is acknowledged that similar challenges face many Area Meetings and Britian Yearly Meeting. This paper aims to provide a basis for discussion and consideration of two related factors:

- The decline in the number of members and attenders (People).
- The complexity and cost of maintaining our property portfolio (Places).

Ways forward will emerge from discussion and discernment; the purpose of this paper is to suggest questions and provide some analysis of background facts that will hopefully allow us to proceed from the same page.

The report presents some facts and figures sourced from both our own Area Meeting and BYM. Before diving into the facts, figures, and potential ways forward the report reminds us of our charitable aims, which are the:

“Furtherance of the general religious and charitable purposes of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain in the area of Banbury & Evesham Area Meeting and beyond”.

Starting with People, the broader context of BYM is discussed before exploring our own Area Meeting. In recent years Nominations have found it difficult to fill every vacancy. Some questions are offered to start our discussions, for example: How can we do things differently to free up time from running Quakers for *being* Quakers - for our spiritual life, for building our community, for witness in the world, outreach, and generally ‘having a bit of a life’?

The final part of the report is about creating a vision for the future shape and direction of our Area Meeting. A vision of the direction we wish our Quaker community to go, what we want to achieve, and how we might achieve it is important to articulate. It is easy to lose sight of our direction of travel when we are all busy “keeping things afloat”, with a lengthy to-do list taking priority over longer term ambitions.

“The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.”

John Woolman, (1772).

A Personal Preface

I traced my family back to 1603 when Abraham Grimshaw was born. The Grimshaw family continued to live in Ivy House, Rawdon for 300 years and for most of that time they were Trustees of the Rawdon Meeting House.

In 1672 Sarah Grimshaw of Ivy House (Rawdon, Yorkshire) made an application for her home to be used as a regular Meeting Place. This was after Charles II had issued his Declaration of Indulgence granting freedom of worship to all non-conformists except Roman Catholics. Sarah entered her denomination as an Independent.

Before they were able to build a meeting house the Independents met secretly at Buckstone Common under the huge rock. Later the Grimshaw's became Friends and helped to build Rawdon Meeting House in 1697 on land that had been acquired by Abraham Grimshaw in 1632.

Yes, I am proud to have that historic connection but in looking to the future, as this discussion paper tries to do, we need to shape our own lives so that people who come after us can be proud of us.

*"It is not what we can say of our ancestors
that is important
but more what they will say of us."*

"At the end of the day, however much we are inspired by their good works, we should not lean on the worth of our predecessors but make our own "history".

Guise (1998)

Guidance from Quaker Faith and Practice

4.03 Not all area meetings will need to set up a complex committee structure. Meetings should bear in mind the importance of balancing the benefits of flexible patterns with the need to be accountable. Whatever business arrangements are adopted, it is helpful if they are regularly reviewed, to ensure that they are practical and workable. It is also important that certain specific responsibilities are considered carefully.

14.23 Real property – land or buildings – is held in trust by Britain Yearly Meeting, area meetings and their associated charities, to be used for their charitable purposes, either generally or for specific uses as determined by the donor. Real property can be either functional, being held by Friends for their own occupation and use, or investment property to produce income; some properties may serve both purposes. Local meetings and other bodies subordinate to area meetings do not own property themselves (see [14.14](#)). Legal responsibility for the purchase, upkeep, use and disposal of real property rests with the trustees of the relevant meeting even if Friends Trusts Limited (see [14.45](#)) is the custodian trustee, holding trustee or else nominee of the property.

25.01 "The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age."

John Woolman, 1772

The Context

Like many faith groups in Britain, Quakers are facing the twin challenges of a decline in membership, and an array of historic buildings with increasing costs of maintenance.

Nationally Britain Yearly Meeting has been addressing these issues through the Simpler Meetings Project (BYM, 2021).

In Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting we are experiencing a decline in the number of active members. Many members have given many years of service to the AM but are now feeling the time is right for them to step aside. The Nominations committee have found it increasingly difficult to fill the roles we have traditionally had.

Many of our Meeting Houses are listed buildings with costs of heating and maintenance increasing over time.

Some questions for discussion arise:

- How do we make our own history?
- Do we feel burdened by the time and energy used to maintain our buildings?
- How do we reduce the roles we need to fill?
- How do we simplify the roles of Trustees and Treasurer?
- How can we do things differently to free up time from running Quakers for *being Quakers* - for our spiritual life, for building our community, for witness in the world, outreach, and generally 'having a bit of a life'?
- How can we reduce the burden of administration landing on a small number of Friends?
- Can we seek a way forward by talking to other Area Meetings that have embraced change?
- What would the release of time and energy enable us to do to further our faith and live a life in the light well lived?
- How do we contribute to the major issues of our time like climate change and migration?

Quaker Facts or Myths?

- Almost all Local Meetings have a Meeting House.
- Some small Local Meetings (less than 10 people) don't have a Meeting House.
- All Local Meetings with more than 20 people have a Meeting House.
- 20% of Quakers go to a Local Meeting without a Meeting House.
- Between 2011 and 2021 members and attenders in BEAM declined by more than twice the BYM average.
- If our numbers decline at the same rate in the period up to 2033 there will be 45 members.
- In BYM 43% of the decline in numbers was due to deaths and terminations.

Please consider and decide, for each of the above, if it is a fact or a myth. Then read on to reveal the facts.

The Here and Now in BYM

People

Most churches in the country have experienced a decline in attendance in the past few decades. Elliot (2021) has explored the past 20 years of Tabular Statements (published annually from 1861) and reveals that the average size of a Quaker meeting was 21 in 2021, a decline from 24 in 2009. This average figure hides the fact that over the same period 25% of meetings grew, with 13% of meetings doubling in size. The largest 9% of meetings have an average of 78 members.

If we take a longer view of membership patterns over the 50-year period from 1970 – 2020, membership declined from 20,752 to 12,125. Meanwhile the number of attenders was much more stable, increasing slightly from 5,796 to 6,902.

Figure 1 Local Membership Changes 2019 - 2021

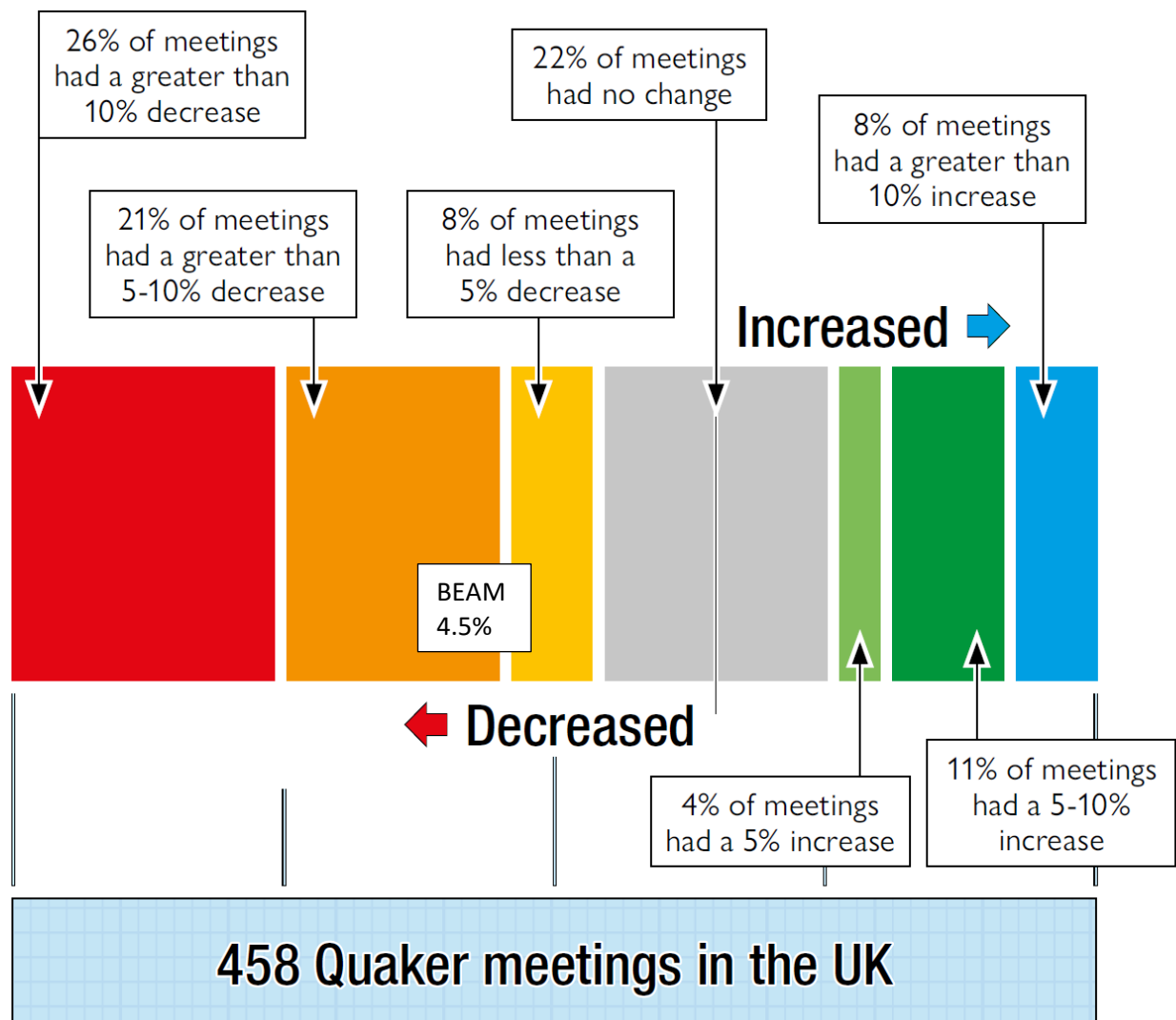
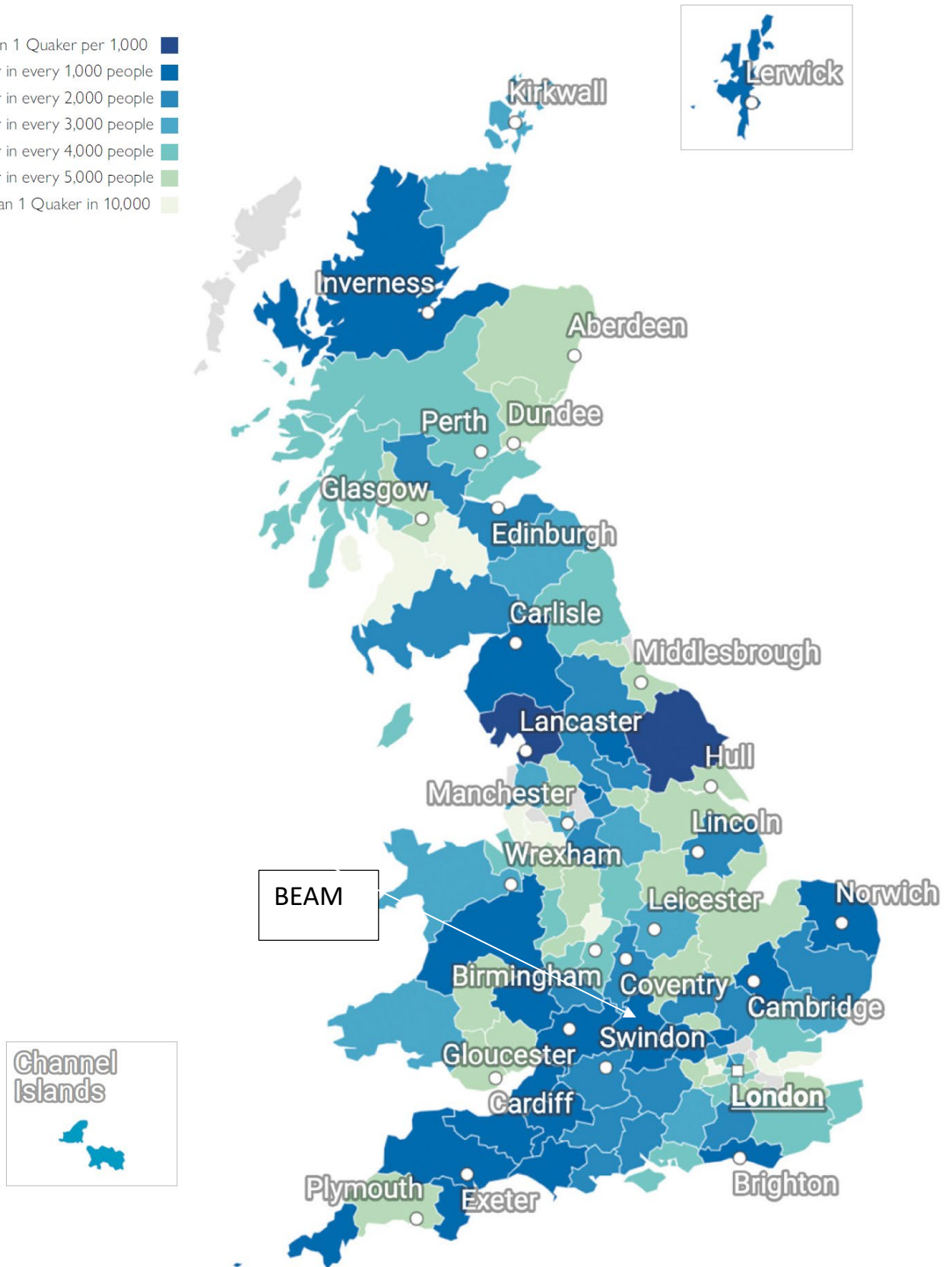


Figure 2 Number of Quakers per 1,000 people by Area

- More than 1 Quaker per 1,000
- 1 Quaker in every 1,000 people
- 1 Quaker in every 2,000 people
- 1 Quaker in every 3,000 people
- 1 Quaker in every 4,000 people
- 1 Quaker in every 5,000 people
- Fewer than 1 Quaker in 10,000



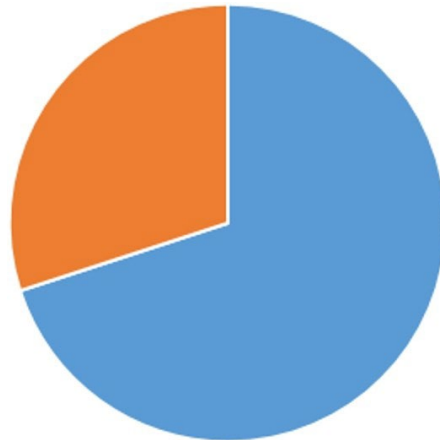
Source: BYM (2023)

The Here and Now in BYM

Places

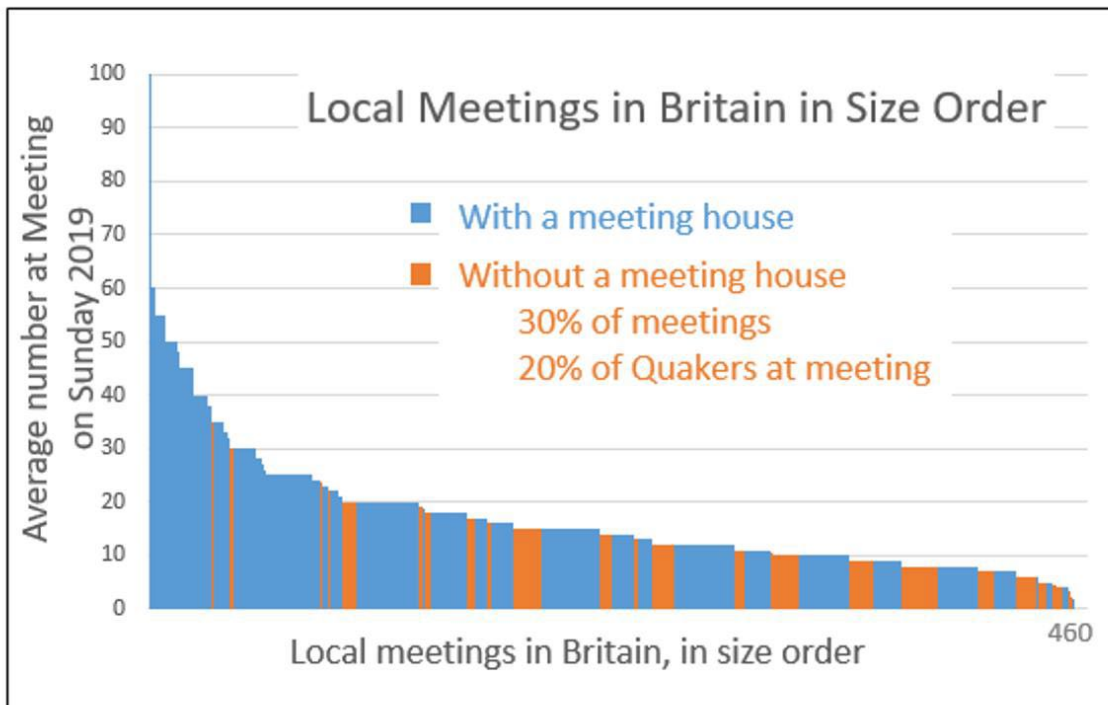
Figure 3 Local Meetings in Britain: With and Without a Meeting House

30% without a meeting house



70% with a meeting house

Figure 3 Local Meetings in Britain: In Size Order



Between 2019 and 2021, 6 local meetings closed and one opened. In 2023 Woodbrooke is closing its property to deliver courses online or in regional locations.

The Here and Now in Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting

People

The roles identified in the Directory for 2023 add up to 55 people. Several Trustees have resigned in the past two years. At the beginning of 2024 we will need 3 new Trustees. At the July 2023 AM 3 people were released from their roles. We need to embrace a simpler way of organizing ourselves.

The Area Meeting had a 48% reduction in members and attenders (combined) between 2011 and 2021. Only one other AM (Dorset and South Wiltshire) had a higher decline (59%) (BYM, 2023). Some of the names included in the list of 94 members live outside our area, others may well be inactive. We need to face the reality of the decline in our numbers.

Table 1 Members and Attenders by Meeting

Meeting	Membership	Attender
Banbury	14	15
Broad Campden	17	7
Ettington	11	9
Evesham	10	11
Sibford	16	18
Stratford	5	11
Totals	71	71

Note: excludes those who live outside our AM and/or are members of other AMs.

Source: BEAM Directory for 2023 version 16

Table 2 Area Meeting by Size 2011 to 2021

AM#	AMs by number of members	Members			Attenders				Combined			Changes: ten year changes as percentage (%) of current AM				
		Members 2011	Members 2021	Average annual change 2011–2021	Adult attenders 2011	Adult attenders 2021	Average annual change 2011–2021	% Adults who are attenders in 2021	Total members and attenders at end 2021*	Change in total members & attenders 2011–2021	Increase or decrease as % of 2011 total	Convincements	Transfers in	Transfers out	Terminations	Deaths
5	Banbury & Evesham AM	139	94	-4.5	121	49	-7.2	34%	146	-133	-48%	36%	16%	13%	9%	22%

Source: BYM (2023)

Our AM is one of the smallest in BYM (8 are smaller) and our rate of decline is only exceeded by Dorset and South Wiltshire AM.

Places

Banbury and Evesham Area Meeting owns the following places (43% are active Meeting Houses):

1. Banbury Meeting House
2. Broad Campden Meeting House
3. Ettington Meeting House
4. Evesham Meeting House
5. Sibford Meeting House
6. Stratford-upon-Avon Meeting House
7. Adderbury Meeting House, repairing lease to Adderbury Parish Council.
8. Shipston-on-Stour Library (ex MH) repairing lease to Warwickshire CC.
9. 28a Cowl Street, Evesham
10. 28b Cowl Street, Evesham
11. 29 Cowl Street Evesham
12. 37a Maidenhead Road, Stratford-upon-Avon
13. 35 Maidenhead Road, Stratford-upon-Avon
14. Sibford Cottage

Where do we go from Here?

Questions Arising

1. Do we have the right balance between investment properties and Meeting Houses (43:57%)?
2. Do we want to spend time on managing investment properties?
3. Do we have too many roles to fill, given the number of members we have?

Financial Considerations

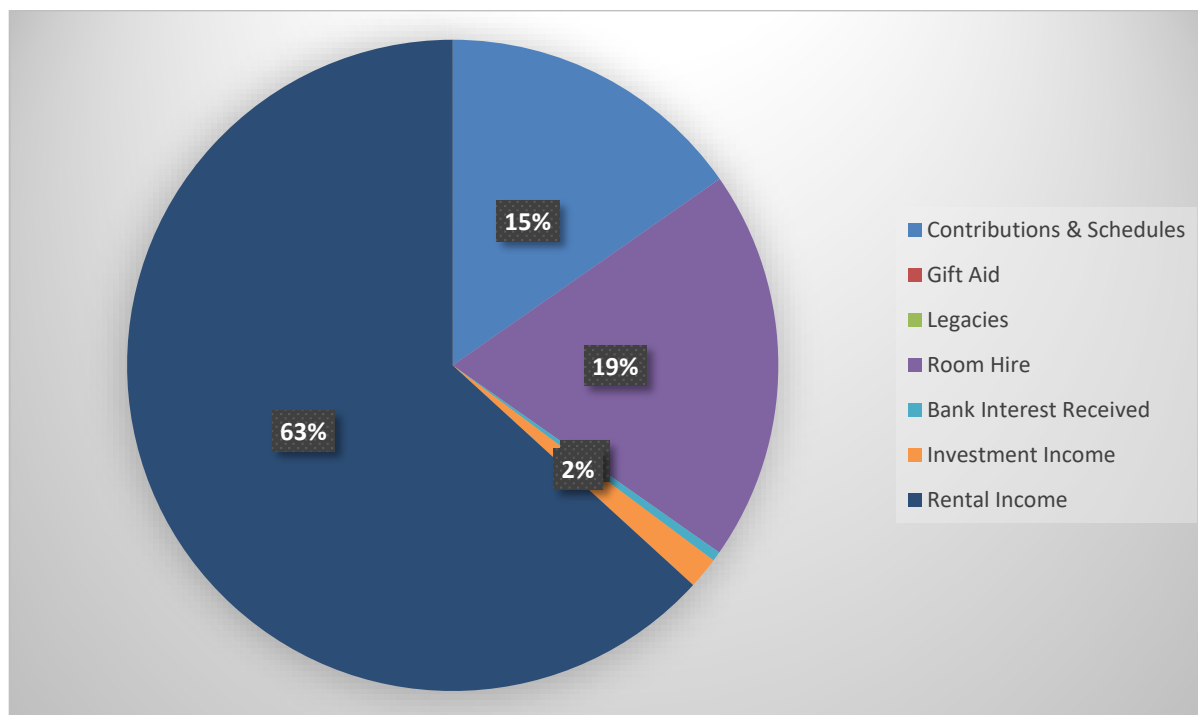
Income

The total income in 2022 was £98,943. Figure 3 shows the percentage contributions made by seven sources of income. Most of the income came from three main sources:

- Rental income – 63%
- Contributions and gift aid – 15%
- Room hires – 19%

Each of these income streams have their own limitations. We already have rental income from 7 rental properties, so unless we want to become a property management charity there are limits to the growth of this income stream. Growth in contributions is more likely to come from an increase in membership, however as Figure 4 shows our geographical area already has one of the highest densities of Quakers. It may be possible to increase income from room hires but this is limited by the changes in the economy as people have moved meetings online.

Figure 5 Sources of Area Meeting Income

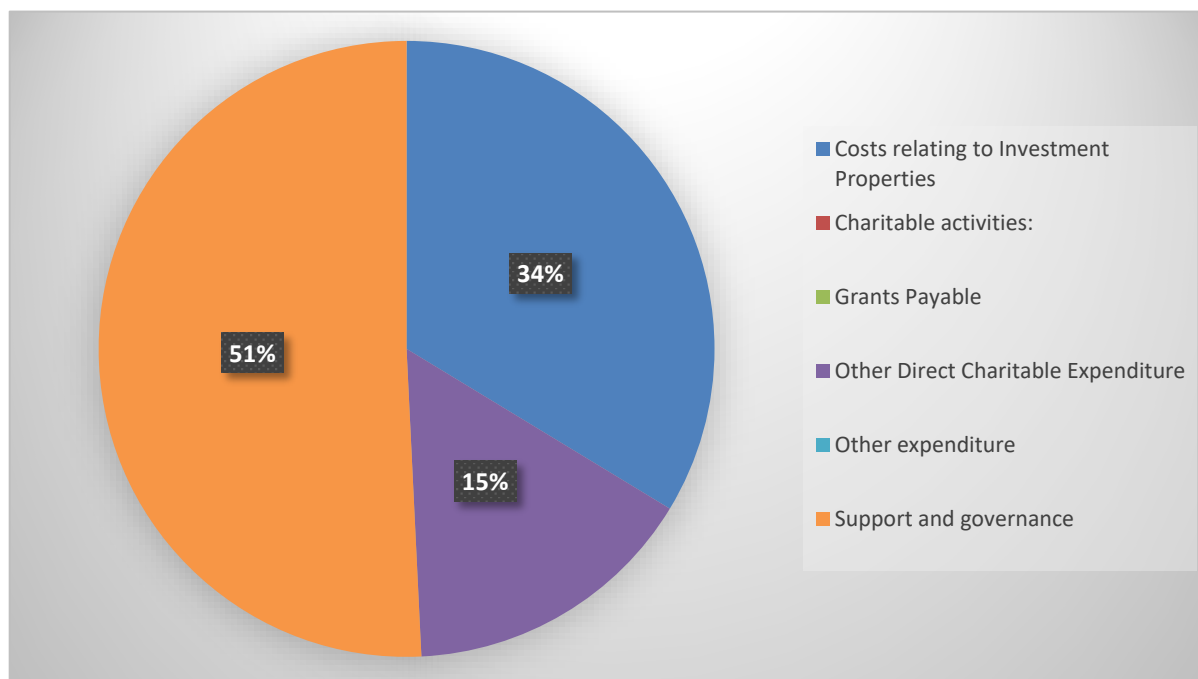


Expenditure

The total expenditure in 2022 was £50,351. Figure 4 shows the percentage contributions made by the six major sources of expenditure. All the expenditure was on three categories:

- Support and governance – 51%
- Costs of investment properties – 34%
- Other direct charitable expenditure – 15%

Figure 6 Sources of Area Meeting Expenditure



Towards a Vision for the Future Sustainability of AM

A vision of the direction we wish our Quaker community to go, what we want to achieve, and how we might achieve it is important to articulate. It is easy to lose sight of our direction of travel when we are all busy “keeping things afloat”, with a lengthy to-do list taking priority over longer term ambitions.

Trustees will take a lead to articulate a vision statement, but this should come from our community and be collectively discerned through worship at our MfB. A starting point might be:

“To foster an inclusive sustainable community based on love to deliver kindness to each other and the wider communities in which we live through letting our lives speak.”

Achieving any vision needs considerable thought and imagination. One way of combining these two processes is to articulate scenarios. By their nature scenarios tend to have some extreme features but in doing so aim to generate discussion, debate, and discernment.

Scenarios for the Future

The first three scenarios have their origins in Quaker Yearly Meeting minutes. We may well wish to embrace aspects of them all. The paper then concludes with a section on the themes of “people” and “places” where a choice matrix is outlined to facilitate discussion.

A True Social Order

Can we gain some inspiration from the past? The “Foundations of a True Social Order was approved by London Yearly Meeting in 1918, as reported by Muers, (2023).

1. The Fatherhood of God, as revealed by [Jesus Christ](#), should [lead us toward a brotherhood which knows no restriction](#) of race, sex or [social class](#).
2. This brotherhood should express itself in [a social order](#) which is directed, beyond all material ends, to the growth of personality truly related to God and man.
3. The [opportunity of full development](#), physical, moral and spiritual, should be assured to every member of the community, man, woman and child. The development of man’s full personality should not be hampered by unjust conditions nor crushed by economic pressure.
4. We should seek for a way of living that will [free us from the bondage of material things](#) and mere conventions, that will raise no barrier between man and man, and will put no excessive burden of labour upon any by reason of [our superfluous demands](#).
5. The spiritual force of righteousness, loving-kindness and trust is mighty because of the appeal it makes to the best in every man, and when applied to industrial relations achieves great things.
6. Our [rejection of the methods of outward domination](#), and of the appeal to force, applies not only to international affairs, but to the whole problem of industrial control. Not through antagonism but through co-operation and goodwill can the best be obtained for each and all.
7. Mutual service should be the principle upon which life is organised. [Service, not private gain, should be the motive of all work](#).
8. The [ownership of material things](#), such as land and capital, should be so regulated as best to minister to the need and development of man.

Sustainability

Where does the 2011 Canterbury Commitment lead us today?

“The action we are ready to take at this time is to make a strong corporate commitment to become a low-carbon, sustainable community.” (BYM, minute 36)

Now, twelve years on from the Canterbury Commitment we are experiencing the results of climate change around the world. The scientific consensus now is that we have gone beyond the tipping point of limiting our CO2 emissions to 1.5% (IPCC, 2023). There are many individual Quakers who have personally altered lifestyles to reduce flying, driving EV's and adopting solar power in homes. What can we do corporately as an Area Meeting?

As an AM we have:

- Moved our electricity suppliers to 100% renewable energy.
- Added double glazing to some properties.
- Enhanced the EPC levels of our rental properties.

Could we do more?

- Invest in co-operative wind farms or solar power.

Building Community via The New Economy

The new economy refers to an economic system that values human wellbeing, fairness, and sustainability above profits. For Quakers, the new economy makes possible:

“A way of living that will free us from the bondage of material things and mere conventions, that will raise no barrier between man and man, and will put no excessive burden of labour upon any by reason of our superfluous demands” QFP (2013).

Note that these are the same words as quoted in The Foundations of a New Social Order (point 4.).

Several non-Quaker organisations are currently working on these issues:

- [The New Economics Foundation](#)
- [Doughnut Economics Action Lab](#) (Raworth,2017)
- [Post Growth Institute](#)

As an AM we have:

- Used ethical banks for all our financial transactions.

Could we do more?

- Start a reading group based on the seven booklets produced by BYM.
- Join one of the above groups and engage in their activities.
- Use our Meeting Houses to host events.

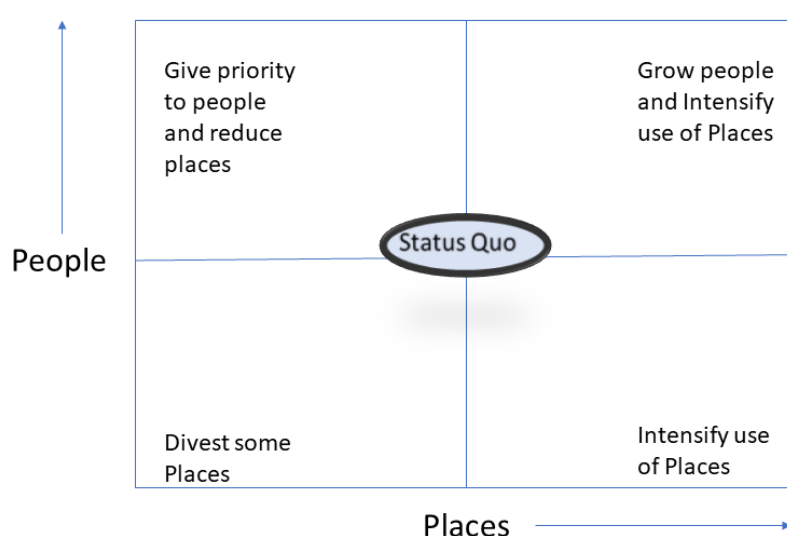
Going Beyond Scenarios

The scenarios above were meant to give us some ideas of what we might prioritize in our efforts to bear witness to our testimonies. In the final part of this report the focus returns to our themes of people and places. The choices are complex but can be simplified to the following four options.

The Choice is Before You

This paper has set out the current situation with respect to people and places within our Area Meeting. This final section will focus on the core choices we could make. Figure 7 takes the two factors and puts them as dimensions in a grid to show how our options can be broadly classified into four options. The fifth possibility being to stay with the *status quo*. Although this is a simplistic framework it does serve as a basis for discussion.

Figure 7 The Choice Matrix



Option 1: Divest some Places.

One or more of our Meeting Houses could be closed, releasing resources to invest in Quaker concerns. With fewer properties to manage, people would be released from management responsibilities and free to use their time on other more significant issues.

Option 2: Give Priority to People.

A more intense priority to people over places implies reducing our property portfolio further.

Option 3: Grow People and Intensify use of Places.

An optimistic scenario might attract more members via outreach. How could this be sustained in the longer term?

Option 4: Intensify use of Places.

This option would require people to invest their time to ensure the MHs are more fully utilized. Do we have people available who would be willing to invest their time. Success would also be dependent on the state of the economy.

What Next

The underlying notion of this report is that we cannot simply continue with the status quo. To do so is to go down a one-way road of decline in both people and places. Better to grapple with the complexity of choice and direction whilst there is still time to choose.

The next steps will be emergent from our discussion and discernment. However, every journey requires planning, staging points, rest points, review points, etc. Here is a suggested process to guide our journey:

1. Discussion
2. Discernment
3. Review of Membership Records
4. Vision for the Future
5. Review of Property Portfolio
6. Articulation of vision, benefits, and timescales to achieving them.

For each of these stages we need to define outcomes, preferably those that can be measured as tangible benefits to our community and living witness.

Your Notes

Please use this blank half page for your own notes.

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