

Proposal and Report

of the Moving Forward / Symud Ymlaen Group

Our Group

Quakerism in Wales and the Marches is both vibrant and fragile¹. The Moving Forward group was appointed to consider ways of building the vibrancy by lessening its fragility. Representatives were appointed by the four Area Meetings (Mid Wales, North Wales, South Wales and Southern Marches) and from Meeting of Friends in Wales. The task was to look back at what had been done in the past, to consult widely and to research ways of simplifying the Quaker structures in Wales and the Marches². Just as we have spiritual reviews, an audit of our efficiency, effectiveness and economy is helpful in understanding our structures and complexities. The current Moving Forward process has a focus on streamlining the operation of Area Meetings, but this is expected to lead to an evolution of local groupings so they are better able to focus on spiritual hospitality and action, collectively and regionally. We seek to release more time, energy and enthusiasm of Friends for the tasks of the spirit.

PROPOSAL

Our preferred option, is the amalgamation, into one new charity, of the five existing charities (North Wales Area Meeting, South Wales Area Meeting, Southern Marches Area Meeting and Meeting of Friends in Wales which are already registered and Mid Wales Area Meeting which is still an excepted charity). The Trustees would be nominated by the Area Meetings. This has the appeal of simplicity in that it would reduce the number of charities to one whilst retaining the current structure of four Area Meetings, which could be further divided as required, and would include the responsibilities of Meeting of Friends in Wales. It would require Area Meetings to delegate to this new body, that element of their responsibilities relating to running a charity.

¹ See Appendix 1 - *Vibrant but Fragile, the state of Quakerism in Wales and the Marches*

² See Appendix 2 - *The remit of the group*

Report

Background information

Information about Quakers in Wales and the Marches

- We have **627** Members, **456** adult Attenders and **83** children listed for the four AMs
- There are five charities which currently appoint more than 30 Trustees, including Clerks and Treasurers
- We own 17 Meeting Houses and appoint more than 40 members of Premises Committees
- We calculate that we appoint Friends to nearly 500 roles

Information about our properties³

- Some of our properties are listed and many require major works and we do not have sufficient liquid financial resources to do this work
- We own Burial Grounds and investment properties.
- The insured value of our property portfolio represents something like £7 million of fixed assets.

What this report is trying to achieve is a **simplification of our structures in order that Area & Local Meetings can focus on spiritual nourishment and outreach**. The task initially, is **to enable Friends to understand the challenges**.

The document Quaker Structures in Wales and the Borders⁴ written in October 2006 made recommendations then that are similar to the recommendations being made now. The discussions regarding the seven Area Meetings in London⁵ mirror the views and provide a framework for this report from Moving Forward Group

Friends have asked why we are Registered Charities. We have received advice from the Recording Clerk explaining that we effectively have no option but to be a Registered Charity in order to carry out essential functions within the law⁶.

³ See Appendix 10b – *Schedule of properties owned by the 4 Area Meetings* and Appendix 10c – *Property finances*

⁴ See Appendix 8 – *The 2006 report Quaker structures in Wales and the borders*

⁵ See Appendix 13 - *Thoughts on the future shape of Quakers in London*

⁶ See Appendix 5 – *Why we have to be a registered charity*

QF&P 15.04 Trustees responsibility

Friends who accept service as trustees take on specific and personal responsibility, on behalf of the meeting, for the obligations that rest on all Friends.

The commandment that we love our neighbours manifests itself for trustees as a duty to ensure, among other things, that the meeting fulfils the requirements of health and safety and child protection. Our love is diminished if, through our carelessness, we let our neighbours suffer.

The obligation to ensure the right use of our corporate resources requires trustees to take and weigh and act upon expert advice on, for example, law and good practice in employment, building maintenance and investment. We do not serve the meeting well if, for instance, we lose the use of a meeting house – not because it is no longer needed and the money can be put to better use elsewhere, but because we have failed to keep it in good repair or to retain wardens or are forced to dispose of it to meet other unplanned commitments.

Challenges facing us

- the Nomination of Friends who are willing, able and competent especially as Trustees and Treasurers
- the management and upkeep of our extensive property portfolio
- increased demand for compliance in many areas but particularly in financial recording and reporting for the Charity Commission with increased demands imposed by the Banks 'for security reasons'
- There is a need to reduce the burden of administration.

The group's second task was to explore possible ways to reduce this administrative burden. We considered a number of scenarios:

Status Quo for comparison.

Option 1 – The transfer of ownership of our properties to one charity responsible for the management of the properties, their upkeep and their associated finances whilst retaining the existing area meeting charities and the consequential need for a plethora of appointments.

Option 2 – The amalgamation of the four Area Meeting charities and Meeting of Friends in Wales into one new charity. This would involve the transfer of ownership of our properties and governance responsibilities to this new charity. Area Meetings (with their constituent Local Meetings) would be retained, but would no longer be separate registered charities. This would reduce the number of charities from five to one and most importantly allow the Area Meetings to focus on their primary task of Spiritual Nourishment and Outreach. This is our preferred option.

Throughout the discussions the group has been aware that some Local Meetings situated in England are part of Area Meetings that are constituent meetings of Meeting of Friends in Wales. Southern Marches Area Meeting has considered a number of options and at its meeting on Saturday 18 July 2020 the view was expressed that most Friends value highly the distinctive character of Southern Marches and its importance as a link between the two nations. The group consider that the national boundaries should not be a determinant of these considerations and greatly value the contribution that Southern Marches makes particularly to Meeting of Friends in Wales and wish to encourage Friends to join this exciting new collaboration.

Consideration of the Options

The Status Quo, as already demonstrated, is unsustainable but the group has collated information about the Status Quo and compared it with two alternative options considered.

Option 1 would involve the creation of a new charity which might be called Wales [and the Marches] Quaker Properties Trust (WQPT) and would be comparable to the newly formed London Quaker Properties Trust (LQPT)⁷ (formerly Six Weeks Meeting established by George Fox) which owns and manages the properties of the seven London Area Meetings. The group was somewhat surprised to discover that this might actually increase the number of appointments required.

Option 2 which is the preferred option, would be the amalgamation of the five existing charities (North Wales Area Meeting, South Wales Area Meeting, Southern Marches Area Meeting and Meeting of Friends in Wales which are already registered and Mid Wales Area Meeting which is still an excepted charity). This has the appeal of simplicity in that it would reduce the number of charities to one whilst retaining the current structure of four Area Meetings, which could be further divided if desired, and would include the responsibilities of MFW. The Trustees would be nominated by the Area Meetings. It would require adjustment to the relationship between Area Meetings and the new charity and in this regard is timely because of the current revision of our Book of Discipline but would still align with the main parts of Quaker Faith and Practice 4.02. The simpler meetings project encourages us to live adventurously⁸.

Ownership of all of the properties would be transferred to this charity. The Trustees would also be responsible for governance including financial recording and reporting, safeguarding, data protection, etc. This would reduce the number of trustees required from approximately 30 to possibly as few as 12. In addition it would significantly simplify the financial recording and reporting with a consequential reduction in the work required of treasurers. A similar option for the amalgamation of the seven Area Meetings and the London Quaker Properties Trust is currently being considered in London.

⁷ See Appendix 14 - *London Quaker Properties Trust*

⁸ See Appendix 14 - *Simpler Meetings Project*

Advice would need to be taken from Britain Yearly Meeting Stewardship Committee and the Charity Commission in order to achieve this and a Scheme drawn up in co-operation with the Commission. The group understand that the Commission is keen to encourage such mergers. This would undoubtedly be a lot of work and a useful document 'Cumberland United'⁹ produced by Cumbria Area Meeting describes the careful planning that was involved in the creation of this Area Meeting by the amalgamation of two Area Meetings. We should be under no illusion that this is going to be a quick fix and even if this way forward is agreed by Meeting of Friends in Wales and its four constituent Area Meetings this year it will take time to navigate the complexities involved.

Properties (Meeting Houses, Burial Grounds and other)

The group believe that the Custodian Trustee for these properties is Friends Trusts Limited (FTL). A Charity Commission Scheme would be required to enable the transfer of ownership of assets from the current Area Meeting Charities. Inevitably this would incur expenditure but is likely to result in long-term savings. The experience of the formation of LQPT would be helpful and we know that FTL is well versed in such transfers.

Some of the Meeting Houses need repairs and major works.¹⁰ The group suggests that a full review of our property portfolio is made in relation to the objects of the charity and the use of our resources both human and financial.

Norfolk & Waveney Area Meeting have developed a system of outsourcing their property management to the Churches Conservation Trust which has reduced the amount of work required and had a positive financial impact¹¹.

Finance

The creation of the new charity would enable a different but simpler system of financial management¹² for an indication of a possible future structure. In particular we suggest that the possibility of an online accounts package is explored. Southern Marches Area Meeting has recently introduced the use of QuickBooks for all of its finances. This has taken time but is already bearing fruit. It requires someone to oversee the project. The greatest pay-off is that QuickBooks does the work of consolidation needed to prepare the Trustees Report for the Charity Commission which considerably reduces the work of the treasurers in preparation for the annual financial examination and the Trustees Annual Financial Report for the Charity Commission.

The financial management of 17 Meeting Houses will be a challenge and it may well be that a paid employee is necessary for the bookkeeping. In addition this would require the

⁹ See Appendix 14 – *Cumberland United*

¹⁰ See Appendix 10b – *Schedule of properties owned by the four Area Meetings*

¹¹ See Appendix 14 – *Norfolk & Waveney/Churches Conservation Trust*

¹² See Appendix 11 *A possible model for financial recording and reporting*

Trustees Annual Report to the Charities Commission to be audited because of the turnover of the consequential charity but might also reduce costs in that there would only be one rather than a number of audits or examinations.

The experience of the formation of London Quaker Property Trust has been that a reduction of the number of Funds, particularly Restricted and Endowment, has been possible in collaboration with the Charity Commission.

Recommendations for the Way Ahead¹³

The Objectives of the Moving Forwards Group were described as:-

To consider what changes might be made to enable us to work better together in Wales, to promote relationships between Friends and to free up time and energy for spiritual life, outreach and witness in the world.

To explore possible options for more effective working and cooperation. These could include sharing responsibilities of Trusteeship such as property management, and policies for legal responsibilities.¹⁴

Recommendations

1. In response to these objectives we recommend the four Area Meetings and Meeting of Friends in Wales agree in principle to adopt the group's preferred proposal that a new charity should be created and that the five charities should merge to form that charity.
2. We see that this is only the first step and recommend the appointment of a group to take forward this proposal.
3. In order to do this we further recommend that the work of the group should include:
 - a. the drafting of all necessary documentation e.g. Charity Commission Scheme, Memoranda of Understanding etc. necessary to enable the merger of the five charities
 - b. a thorough review of the property portfolio with regard to state of repair, usage and costs
 - c. an exploration of the use of an online accounts package and its associated systems
 - d. a review of the nominated appointments that we make
4. We encourage the group to involve Friends from within and without the four Area Meetings to make good use of our wealth of knowledge, skills and expertise.

¹³ See Appendix 13 – *Possible road map to a single charity*

¹⁴ Meeting of Friends in Wales meeting 22/02/20 minute 19.33i

5. We recommend that the group brings a detailed work plan for discernment and we suggest that they should report to the Area Meetings and their Trustees on a regular basis and at least to each meeting of MFW.

We recognise that this is going to take time and suggest that for the next triennium each Area Meeting appoints three trustees to work together in the following way as a shadow board of trustees:

An interim step – the appointment of shared trustees.

In this scenario each Area Meeting would appoint at least three Trustees from their own membership, one of whom would also be appointed as the Clerk to Area Meeting trustees. To this would be added a further three trustees, one from each of the other three Area Meetings, giving each Area Meeting a trustee body of at least six members plus a treasurer. This does not mean that 24 trustees would be appointed but in fact a minimum of only 12 who would form a combined group which would work together on matters which concerned all four Area Meetings such as buildings, finance and other governance matters such as policies. This would enable trustees to work together during the next triennium, learning about the situation of meetings across the whole of Wales and the Marches. It is important that this is only an interim step for one triennium while the single amalgamated charity is set up¹⁵.

In her Swarthmore Lecture Christine Davis reminded us that:-

*Stewardship involves prayer, and it involves thought, and it involves applying what emerges from the two. As individuals our particular talents may lead us to greater emphasis on one of those elements, but they can never be wholly divided within any of us, and as a community we need to be faithful to all three: prayer, thought and application.*¹⁶

The Moving Forwards Group believe that our proposals will lead to a better balance between prayer, thought and application in the life together of Quakers in Wales and the Marches. The focus is on streamlining the operation of Area Meetings and Meeting of Friends in Wales and allows more easily for the evolution of groupings of Friends better to reflect a focus on spiritual hospitality and action both locally and regionally.

¹⁵ See Appendix 9 – *Minute from Almeley Wootton LM*

¹⁶ Christine AM Davis. *Minding the Future* (Swarthmore Lecture) 2008; pp25-6 quoted in *Quaker Faith and Practice* 15.01

Appendices – Background Information to the Report

The appendices give some of the background information the Moving Forward Group has drawn on in compiling their report and reaching their proposal. Some is very detailed and some more general. They are presented as a separate document.

1. Vibrant but Fragile, the state of Quakerism in Wales and the Marches
2. The remit of the group
3. The process of the group
4. Consultation with Friends in Wales and the Marches
5. Why we have to be a registered charity - a response from Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly meeting
6. What is Meeting of Friends in Wales?
7. Quaker Faith and Practice 4.02 the functions of Area Meetings
8. The 2006 report 'Quaker Structures in Wales and the Borders'
9. Almeley Wootton LM minute
10. What each Area Meetings bring to a joint charity
 - 10.a) People and meetings
 - 10.b) Schedule of properties owned by the four Area Meetings
 - 10.c) Property finances
11. A possible model for financial recording and reporting
12. Possible road map to a single charity
13. List of policies and procedures we have worked on
14. Links to other material referred to in our report