

Quaker Centre, Milton Keynes

1 Oakley Gardens, Downhead Park, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK15 9BH

National Grid Reference: SP 86466 40390



Statement of Significance

An attractive modern (1980s) single-storey building, generously-planned round three sides of a courtyard and well-used by the community. It has low heritage value.

Evidential value

As a structure dating wholly from the 1980s the building has low evidential value.

Historical value

As a relatively modern structure the meeting house has low historical value.

Aesthetic value

The meeting house is a carefully-designed and attractive building with medium aesthetic value.

Communal value

The meeting house was built expressly to serve both Quakers and the local community, which it does very successfully and has high communal value.

Part 1: Core data

1.1 Area Meeting: *Luton & Leighton*

1.2 Property Registration Number: *0009960*

1.3 Owner: *Friends Trusts*

1.4 Local Planning Authority: *Milton Keynes Council*

1.5 Historic England locality: *East of England*

1.6 Civil parish: *Great Linford*

1.7 Listed status: *Not listed*

1.8 NHLE: *N/a*

- 1.9 Conservation Area: *None*
- 1.10 Scheduled Ancient Monument: *No*
- 1.11 Heritage at Risk: *No*
- 1.12 Date(s): *1986*
- 1.13 Architect (s): *Wayland Tunley of Denton & Tunley*
- 1.14 Date of visit: *29 September 2015*
- 1.15 Name of report author: *Neil Burton*
- 1.16 Name of contact(s) made on site: *Mervyn Dobbin*
- 1.17 Associated buildings and sites: *None*
- 1.18 Attached burial ground: *No*
- 1.19 Information sources:

Butler, D.M., *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain*, 1999, vol.1, p.27
Local Meeting survey by Gloria Dobbin, 2015
Local meeting archives, including the architect's drawings

Part 2: The Meeting House & Burial Ground: history, contents, use, setting and designation

2.1. Historical background

The meeting here began almost as soon as the New Town was established. Friends met first in a small village hall near the present town centre. When the meeting sought its own premises it decided that the building should serve the whole community, not Friends alone. The New Town Development Corporation supported this approach and the new building is has more generous provision than most modern meeting houses.

2.2. The building and its principal fittings and fixtures

The meeting house is a single storey building, laid out round three sides of a rectangular garden space which is open to the east. The walls are of brown brick, with large windows set close under the eaves of the broad shallow-pitched roofs. The roofs themselves are covered in concrete tiles. The meeting room is placed at the south west corner of the building and is marked externally by a small rectangular lantern light on the roof-ridge. On either side of the main meeting room are small meeting rooms and the northern arm of the building contains a warden's flat. All the rooms are connected by a corridor round the central garden. The meeting room is rectangular, and is lit by a large projecting bay window at the south west angle.

2.3 Loose furnishings

Most of the furnishings are modern and acquired for the present building. The central table in the meeting room was designed by Anna Cunyngham.

2.4. Attached burial ground (if any)

None

2.5. The meeting house in its wider setting

The meeting house occupies a corner site in the Downs Barn housing area of Milton Keynes, north east of the central area and close to the A509 (Portway). The site is now enclosed by trees and bushes.

2.6. Listed status

The building is not listed and is not a candidate for the statutory list

2.7. Archaeological potential of the site

Low: the building was erected on a greenfield site.

Part 3: Current use and management

See completed volunteer survey

3.1. Condition

- i) Meeting House: Good
- ii) Attached burial ground (if any): Not applicable

3.2. Maintenance

There has been no recent quinquennial inspection. Annual inspections are carried out by members of the finance and Property Committee. Maintenance works and repairs are carried out as necessary. The meeting has funds to cover the costs, with a reserve in case of unexpected work. The meeting does not have a 5-year maintenance and repair plan; work is carried out as need arises.

3.3. Sustainability

The meeting does not use the Sustainability Toolkit but has implemented measures to reduce its environmental impact. These include

- New energy-efficient boilers in the meeting house and warden's flat.
- Additional insulation in the roof
- Windows have been double-glazed
- Solar voltaic panels on the roof
- Waste is recycled
- Low-flush toilets have been installed (but have caused some problems)

Both the meeting house and the wardens flat have an EPC: the meeting house EPC rating is 66 (C); the warden's flat is 69 (C).

3.4. Amenities

The meeting presently has all the amenities it needs in the meeting house, but the size of the meeting is increasing and may outgrow the meeting house. There is a resident warden, whose accommodation is part of the meeting house building.

There is good public transport by three bus routes every day of the week, but with fewer buses on Sundays. There are 16 car spaces and there is a public car park nearby. There is secure storage for bicycles on site.

3.5. Access

The meeting house is accessible to people with disabilities. There is level access into and inside the building, an accessible WC and a hearing loop in the main meeting room only. There are no special facilities for partially-sighted people, but the building is well-lit with no external or internal steps or stairs. There has not been a Disability Access Audit but the building was designed with the requirements of disabled people in mind and facilities have been periodically updated.

3.6 Community Use

Friends use the building for about 7 hours per week. The building is theoretically available for community lettings for a maximum number of 296 hours per week and is used for approximately 110 hours per week (70 of those hours are accounted for by an office which is rented to a single organisation). The meeting has a lettings policy which excludes groups promoting violence, racism etc. No gambling or alcohol is allowed. Preference is given to activities which benefit the community. Groups allowed to use the meeting house for free are those instigated by and/or actively supported by the meeting and serving people in need. Users value the convenient location, peaceful ambience competitive rates and friendly service.

3.7. Vulnerability to crime

There are no signs of general crime at the site and there has been no heritage crime. There have been occasional low-level nuisance problems, like graffiti, the theft of a fire extinguisher or the letting out of a rabbit from a cage next to the warden's flat. The locality is generally well cared-for, has low crime levels, low deprivation and high community confidence. There was some contact with the local police over the loss of the rabbit and they have responded well to other minor incidents.

3.8. Plans for change

There are no immediate plans for change but the meeting is increasing in size.

Part 4: Impact of Change

4.1. To what extent is the building amenable or vulnerable to change?

i) As a Meeting House used only by the local Meeting: the meeting house currently has all the required facilities but the size of the meeting is increasing and there is limited scope for enlarging the meeting room itself.

ii) For wider community use, in addition to local Meeting use: the meeting house currently has all the facilities required but is already heavily used and there may be pressure for expansion in the future.

iii) Being laid down as a Meeting House: another use could doubtless be found for the building should the meeting house be laid down.

Part 5: Category: 3