

The Vision and Our Building

Key Themes from the Open meeting held on 10th January 2026

1. A Vision of Warmth, Welcome and Inclusion (Spiritual, Emotional and Physical)

A very strong and consistent theme was “warmth” – understood holistically.

- Warmth is physical (heating, shelter, comfort), emotional (welcome, non-judgemental presence), and spiritual (God’s love, nourishment of soul and mind).
- “Feeding” is widely supported, but not narrowly as food – rather feeding *body, mind and spirit*.
- The language of “table” raised mixed responses: some felt it risked sounding fixed or inward-facing; others valued its symbolism.
- There is a strong desire to remain inclusive, welcoming people of any faith or none, without proselytising, but offering care, presence and invitation.
- St Peter’s is seen as:
 - A place people can come when they need it
 - Non-judgemental
 - Easy to attend
 - Authentic and “real”

There was a clear warning: *a warm building without a warm heart would miss the point.*

2. St Peter’s as a Town Church at the Heart of Harrogate

Many groups emphasised St Peter’s unique civic role:

- A central, town-centre church serving the whole of Harrogate.
- A place open during the week as:
 - A quiet, warm refuge
 - A walk-in point of help
- A desire to serve beyond the congregation, including:
 - Local community groups
 - Charities
 - Other churches (shared use / carbon offset ideas)
- Pride in being distinctive and visible, not retreating into church-only activity.

3. Making Better and Broader Use of the Building

There is strong appetite for greater flexibility and wider use, balanced with respect for worship.

Key ideas included:

- Increased community use (cafés, exhibitions, youth work, meetings).

- Clearer articulation of acceptable uses (e.g. beer festival, markets).
- Better use of existing space at busy times (e.g. refreshment areas).
- Hosting activities that are consistent with worship and core values.

At the same time:

- There is caution about not sacrificing what already works.
- Acknowledgement that opinions on change are polarised and will remain so.
- Recognition that clarity and leadership matter more than half-measures.

4. Flexibility of Seating, Space and Layout (Especially Pews and Dais)

This was one of the most debated topics.

Common ground included:

- Strong desire for greater flexibility (moveable seating, café layouts, partitions).

There was some support for removing:

- Some rear pews to improve circulation and welcome at the west end.
- Pew dividers, if practical, to improve accessibility and connection.
- Accessibility concerns (pipes, trip hazards, disabled access) must be addressed carefully.

Tensions included:

- Deeply held differences about pew removal.
- Concern about distancing the congregation from the altar.
- Frustration that past changes may have “gone halfway”.

The dais emerged as:

- Valued for worship (especially communion).
- A significant barrier to hospitality, refreshment and safety.
- Needing proper review rather than assumptions.

5. The Roof, Fabric and Sustainability as a Non-Negotiable Priority

Across multiple tables there was strong agreement:

- The roof is fundamental – without it, nothing else is possible.
- Making the building safe, watertight and usable is the first priority.
- Grant funding is essential and depends on:
 - A compelling, outward-facing vision
 - Demonstrated community benefit
- Sustainability featured strongly:
 - Solar panels (including sponsorship ideas)

- Insulation, draught-proofing, efficient heating
- Eco-church goals and carbon neutrality by 2030

6. Hospitality Infrastructure: Kitchen, Sound, Heating and Accessibility

There was broad consensus that:

- The kitchen needs a serious rethink, potentially a full redesign.
- Sound systems and loop systems need improvement.
- Heating must be:
 - More effective
 - More sustainable
 - Clearly visible as a shared responsibility (e.g. thermometer / roof appeal ideas).
- Accessibility (movement, seating, information, safety) is a priority throughout.

7. Information, Signposting and Practical Help

Several groups highlighted St Peter's role as an information hub:

- A walk-in place where people can find help.
- Clear signposting to:
 - Support services
 - Advice agencies
 - Practical information (transport, local help).
- Use of:
 - Bookshop
 - Press
 - Porch / west door
 - Welcomers trained to signpost effectively.
- Creative ideas such as a post box for requests.

8. Bookshop as Mission, Income and Engagement

Strong support emerged for a permanent Christian bookshop, with:

- Missional purpose: helping people explore faith.
- Community draw: no equivalent in Harrogate.
- Proven fundraising success (£1 books).
- Recognition that:
 - Proper planning is needed

- Transition must support the Fair-Trade shop
- A paid manager may be required.

9. Youth, Age and the Future Church

Repeated emphasis on:

- Youth and teenagers being part of the vision.
- Desire for an employed youth worker.
- Attracting and serving all ages, not just maintaining current patterns.
- Realism about clergy capacity and future staffing.

10. Consultation, Communication and Taking People With Us

There was clear agreement that before making any plans:

- This conversation must widen:
 - Beyond those present
 - Into smaller groups, worship settings and the wider town.
- Communication needs to be:
 - Intentional
 - Ongoing
 - Transparent
- People will respond best to a clear, coherent plan, not endless options.
- Compromise for its own sake risks leaving everyone dissatisfied.

In summary

Across the tables, the dominant message was:

St Peter's is called to be a warm, welcoming, outward-facing town church — spiritually alive, practically helpful, environmentally responsible, and housed in a building that is flexible enough to serve both worship and community, without losing its heart or integrity.