

Marple Neighbourhood Forum - First Annual General Meeting

Held at 10 a.m. on 14 January 2017 in Marple URC

Open Debate: That Marple is and Should Remain a Village

Proposed by Tony Smith and opposed by Simon Temple.

In Favour of the Proposition that: “Marple is a Village and Should Remain So!”

Proposed by Tony Smith

I wonder what the word village brings to mind for each of you? For me the village of the Christmas card is a thing of the past – maybe it has a picturesque pub and some pretty cottages – but it's probably without shops and a post office – and has very little community life. We all live in the so-called global village, but that is a place where multinationals have more power than governments and it is definitely not a friendly place; admittedly it has shops of a kind but what you buy from them is their choice – not yours! On a local scale, my retirement home is clearly a village in one sense of the word and many similar places are referred to as villages.

Words change their meanings but a “VILLAGE” I still take to mean a self-contained and self-sufficient community – a close association of people with a strong sense of togetherness.

By this definition Marple definitely is still a village – the Marple WEB site says so! Many of its residents refer to it as “the village” - and why shouldn't they? The Civic Society and this Forum and our many other groups are the expression of our sense of community and we can still walk to most meetings.

But what else is there about Marple?

Look at our assets : a village green (the memorial park and the recreation ground) two good railway stations with friends to look after them, and, soon, a community orchard not to mention many interesting and attractive buildings – and of course – the canals and Oldknow's heritage. Our local shops and the post office provide much better venues for a friendly chat than do the out of town supermarkets. Thanks to the green belt the limits of our village are still well defined and the countryside around still has many attractions. And therein lies the essence of a village – a close, vibrant and clearly defined community surrounded by easily accessible and attractive countryside but with access to all the basic facilities. However I could wish that the Council did not consider it their duty to cut all our grass to within an inch of its life and to kill all the wild flowers (not weeds)? that can be so attractive and are vital for our pollinators.

We still have real shops - we have a butcher (actually 2) a baker and even a candlestick maker (if you count the hobby of an acquaintance) as well as a good variety of other shops including a builder and a furniture supplier – and many more – and a couple of good pubs! And all of these are within walking distance

of our homes and the shopping environment includes generous pedestrian access. This is important. Out of town supermarkets with only vehicle access can be death to traditional villages.

And so Marple has all the facilities of a living village with the added benefits of good transport systems of which the historic importance of water, rail and road is still apparent and the basis of our present day transport network. Furthermore good footways and a surprising number of traffic-free byways enable us to dodge the worst of the traffic and its pollution as we walk to the shops..

The nice thing about a pedestrian way of life is that you soon become familiar with your surroundings and local people – all of them village characters. In this the Civic Society and various “Friends” do a wonderful job because they value what they have and are prepared to work to keep our village environment the way it is for the rest of us. Those refurbished seats and the veggie troughs are a brilliant idea. And of course a pedestrian way of life is acknowledged to be a healthy one.

In contrast, the conventional village – the one you saw on your Christmas card - has lost its shops and communications and become nothing more than a commuter dormitory for green welly wearers. Its inhabitants are dependent on shops and friendly pubs far away from the village centre and it seems that their communities have not been able to save the essentials of life. In contrast – Marple has a cunning plan in view!

Of course we can't change national or even local legislation. But the idea of our plan is to make the most of what we've got and to make sure that we keep our way of life and our village lifestyle! Given all this and a good transport system with beautiful countryside close by and what more could be needed to make the perfect village? Let's keep it that way! Don't let our green surround be breached and make sure that we keep our village greens. If there are incomers – and there most certainly will be – let us welcome them into our community so long as they respect our way of life and don't seek to change it to the hurried modern lifestyle which is so destructive and seems to be characteristic of life outside the village.

So let us ignore the numbers and forget all the chocolate box cottage pictures – they're not real – root for a real Marple with its community spirit – and shops and a post office – a living village. Let's value what we have and not seek for more so that we retain our village way of life. Hopefully long into the centuries!

“Marple is and Should Remain a Village” debate:

Opposing Speech

Opposed by Simon Temple

Marple is a town.

The Marple website describes our community as “a small town near Stockport and Manchester in England.”

Wikipedia says, “Marple is a small town within the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport.”

Before local government re-organisation in 1974, Marple had its own Urban District Council for 80 years – official recognition that it was a town.

The British Government’s definition of an urban area is a community with more than 10,000 residents. This is quite high by international standards. The threshold is 200 in Sweden and Denmark, 1,000 in Canada and Australia, 2,000 in France and 2,500 in the USA. Our Marple Neighbourhood Plan area has 13,000 residents. If we take Greater Marple, including the suburbs of Marple Bridge, Mellor and Strines, the population is over 20,000. We are clearly a town on the government’s definition.

What are the characteristics of a town that make it different from a village, apart from its population?

Firstly, employment.

Historically villages were dependant on a single industry or employer for work. Usually this was agriculture, but mining villages dependant on a single pit and mill villages dependant on a single mill developed during the industrial revolution. Compstall is a good example. The building of Oldknow’s mill in the 1790s started the process of creating a mill village from isolated farming hamlets. But the process didn’t stop there. Other mills were built, new industries arrived such as the brickworks at Rose Hill and the coming of the railway in 1865 opened up a wider range of employment opportunities for residents, making it a town. While we have lost many of our traditional industries, the employment base remains diverse.

Second, education.

Today, villages are fortunate if they have a primary school. Secondary education normally takes place in a nearby town. We have several primary schools, a large high school and a sixth form college. Marple draws in students from surrounding areas, not exports them.

Retail.

Many villages have no shops at all. The large or lucky ones have a convenience store. Marple has a largish supermarket and a wide range of other shops. In our town we have butchers, green grocers, delicatessens, bakers, clothes shops, banks, a hardware shop, a toy shop and a garden centre.

Eating and drinking.

Villages often have a pub, occasionally two, and perhaps a café or a takeaway. We have 9 pubs and bars in the Neighbourhood Plan area, plus another 7 in Greater Marple. We have Chinese, Indian, Italian, Spanish, British and Cambodian restaurants plus numerous cafes and takeaways.

Leisure and sport.

Villages typically have a village hall or community centre, a cricket club and a football team. If they are lucky a travelling library comes once a week. We have a permanent library, swimming baths, a cinema, a theatre, numerous churches and 2 cricket clubs together with rugby, football and even lacrosse teams. The Marple website lists 95 organisations on its community pages from the Allotments Society to the Wine Club. Not quite an A to Z but pretty close!

On any rational definition, Marple is a town.

But from the point of view of the Neighbourhood Plan, the most important question is not “what we are” but “what we want to become.”

Do we want?

- Further erosion of our employment base;
- Loss of Marple Hall school and Marple Sixth Form College;
- Closure of our remaining banks and most of our shops
- No library, swimming pool or cinema
- A much less diverse range of places to eat, drink and socialise

If we see Marple becoming a village, our Neighbourhood Plan should not be worried about the loss of many of the things that we now have – they are simply not consistent with what a village is. Given our population, I don’t think this would really make us a village, just a rather boring commuter and retiree suburb. Or do we want to build on the great assets that we have in our town and work to help them develop and thrive over the next 20 years, making Marple an even better place than it is today. That is what I want. I urge you to vote against this proposition.