

Analysis of Business Questionnaire

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Introduction

The purpose of this survey was to enable local businesses to express their views in relation to commercial development within the parish of Much Marcle up till 2031.

Methodology

In the absence of a parish business directory, every address in the parish was sent the questionnaire. Those who were not in business within the parish were asked to ignore the survey. A period of just over two weeks was allowed for the returns to be placed in a box in Much Marcle post office and store. By that date just twelve returns had been made, one other arriving some time later has been included in this analysis.

Analysis

(N.B. Percentages rounded to nearest whole number)

The reason for such a poor response could be due to two factors. The first being that it was only just over six months since being asked to complete the Residents Questionnaire (RQ), with many of the aspects covered in the Business Questionnaire being similar to those within the former. Secondly, some of the wording of the Business Questionnaire could have been read as implying that the Neighbourhood Plan had the ability to “allocate land” for employment purposes, not just “identify locations”. “Not sure I understand the question”.

With such a poor response it is near impossible to justify any firm conclusions that may be drawn from the information. In addition, it would appear that more than half of the

respondents are current members of the Much Marcle Neighbourhood Plan working group. This, of course, may or may not have an influence on the outcome, but it could be argued that their views would not be untainted by the work already carried out within the group.

Q1 Should the Neighbourhood Plan allocate land for employment purposes?

One third of those who answered this question (31%) stated that land should not be earmarked for business. This is similar to the overall outcome from the (RQ) that identified more than half (57%) in favour with less, (23%) against. “Businesses develop under their own steam at rate determined by owner making personal decisions”.

Q2 What types of site should be allocated for employment purposes?

Allowing for the fact that this makes no concession to the one third of those who stated that land should not be made available (Q1), this question engendered a total response (100%) in favour of using existing buildings. This follows the trend of the (RQ) where a vast majority opted for residences being conversions of existing/redundant buildings. Business premises were acceptable to eleven of the thirteen (85%) being put on brownfield sites while just one (11%) was in agreement with businesses being built on greenfield sites. “Reuse and/or conversion of existing buildings which meet core strategy RA5 policy requirements only” “Village environment suited to people working from home” “Small areas only please remember this is a village”.

Q3 Which of the factors listed would encourage businesses to locate in Much Marcle parish area?

Better/faster broadband was a recurring theme throughout the replies with all (100%) identifying this as a factor. This was closely followed by workshop or office space in converted premises for rent or sale (85%) with nearly two thirds (62%) seeing a need for live/work options. Better road access was a requirement for only two respondents (15%). “Please do not widen roads” “Is better road access likely?” The overall theme would appear to be for better broadband and small live/work premises, for rent or sale.

Q4 What barriers or constraints prevent businesses moving to Much Marcle area, or prevent existing businesses from expanding or prevent business?

Eight persons commented upon the infrastructure with seven (88%) seeing broadband as a problem, while roads concerned one (13%). “Narrow roads & ever increasing size of lorries.”

All five respondents saw public transport, particularly buses, as a problem.

There were three replies to the policy and governance question identifying “planning difficulties” “lack of government grants” “threat to duty levy on small/artisan producers”

On the social front a lack of housing as well as a lack of potential employees is seen as the problem.

Roads and the availability of a workforce were again mentioned in the “other” category, together with patchy mobile phone reception and better undergraduate education in the local area.

Q5 What will help your business to develop and thrive in the plan period to 2031?

Whilst being a similar question to the one above, with similar answers being given, there were some additional areas covered. “Utility service providers are able to support business in Much Marcle” “Promotion of area as tourist area – keeping area tidy” “School very important to the village” “Pedestrian crossing over A449.”

Q6 What additional space will your business require over the plan period to 2031?

There were just five businesses requiring additional space. Three of these were for areas less than 50m², one for more than 200m² and one identifying two buildings of over 200m². As the period in question is more than fifteen years it would appear that there are no plans to greatly extend most business premises. However, the following question reveals the continual replacement and upgrading of buildings and equipment by Westons.

Q7 Please tell us what other requirements your business will have over the plan period to 2031?

Mains water and a new farmhouse were the only requirements identified, other than the Westons upgrading and replacement and, again, broadband.

Q8 Please describe the nature of your business.

It was perhaps surprising that just one person described their business as farming, particularly as it is such a large part of the geographical area in which we live/work. Three identified with cider as a business and three could be described as involved with tourism. Three were involved with retail, either direct or online, while fine art, business consulting, wedding venue and secured tenancy lettings made up the remainder.

Q9 Please tell us any other comments you may have.

I think the four comments made speak for themselves, and very much reflect the overall opinions that came out of the (RQ).

“Help for small scale green energy – no large windmills”

“While Westons is vitally important and brings huge benefits to the village, it must not become too controlling. Village is best suited to small businesses with a few people employed in each”

“Encourage small businesses, avoid creating a business park, encourage small scale market gardening organic food production, avoid mono-cropping and fossil fuel inputs, non – sustainable. Lower fossil fuels inputs and diverse crops will increase resilience and provide local jobs. Selling local food in area will keep money local”

“Encourage proposals converting existing buildings to residential use with some business aspect included.”

Q10 Please tell us how many local people are employed within your business that live within the parish.

A total of forty nine live within the parish, the proportions being full time (86%), part time (12%) and casual (2%). Without access to the numbers who live outside the parish, the numbers or proportions mean little. Additionally, the fine art business employs “numerous casual specialists employed”. I make the assumption that few, if any, reside within the parish and therefore do not relate to these numbers.

Conclusion

With the caveat that there was a very small return, this questionnaire does provide similar conclusions to those of the (RQ).

Existing buildings should be used wherever possible, either solely for small businesses or as live/work premises.

Broadband speed is not up to that which is required by business.

Only a limited number of new/extended business properties are foreseen as required within the next sixteen years.

It is unfortunate that not having a complete catalogue of local businesses prevents thorough analysis of the limited information supplied. It does not however, contradict that which was found in the Residents Questionnaire.