

Making it local



Results of consultation programme Nov 2013 – Jun 2014



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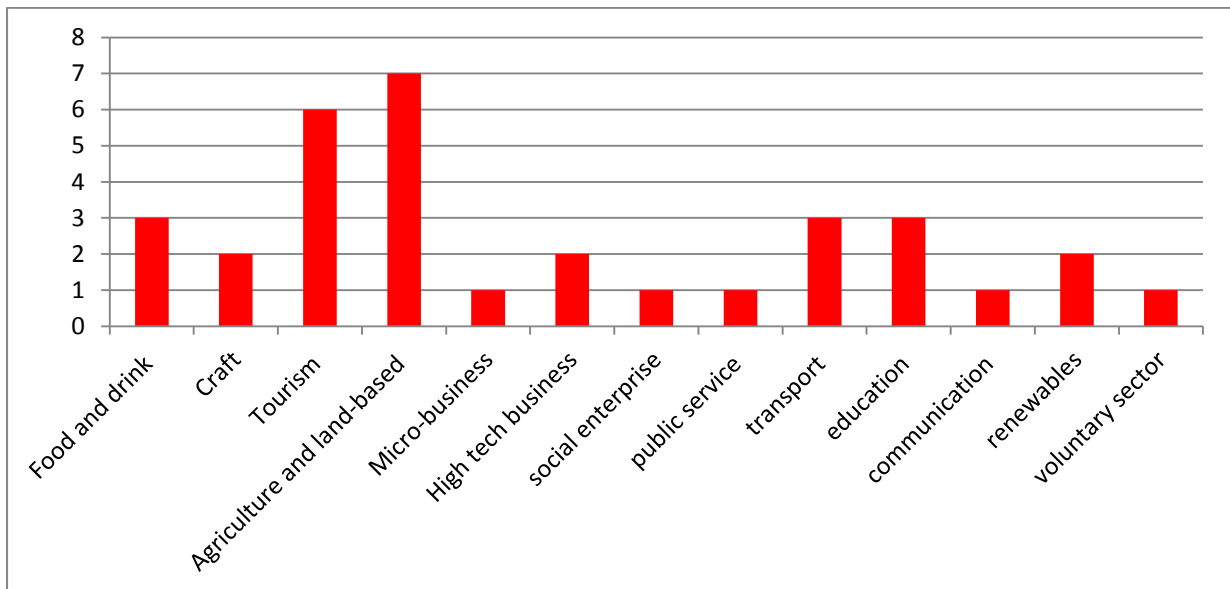


Making it Local Consultation on Priorities 2015- 2020

Most Local Action Groups in the UK were given transition funding in 2014. This enabled them to consult widely with their communities to establish the needs, challenges and opportunities for their area. Making it Local has taken all the comments individuals, organisations and businesses have given throughout the consultation period, and used them to identify the priorities for the next funding programme. This information has been incorporated into the Local Development Strategy (LDS) which will be used to bid to Defra for future funding.

November 2013 Stakeholders' Forum

Making it Local began the consultation process in November 2013 at the annual stakeholders' forum and funding fair, which attracted around 80 people. Round table discussions flagged up what attendees felt were the key sectors for the area:



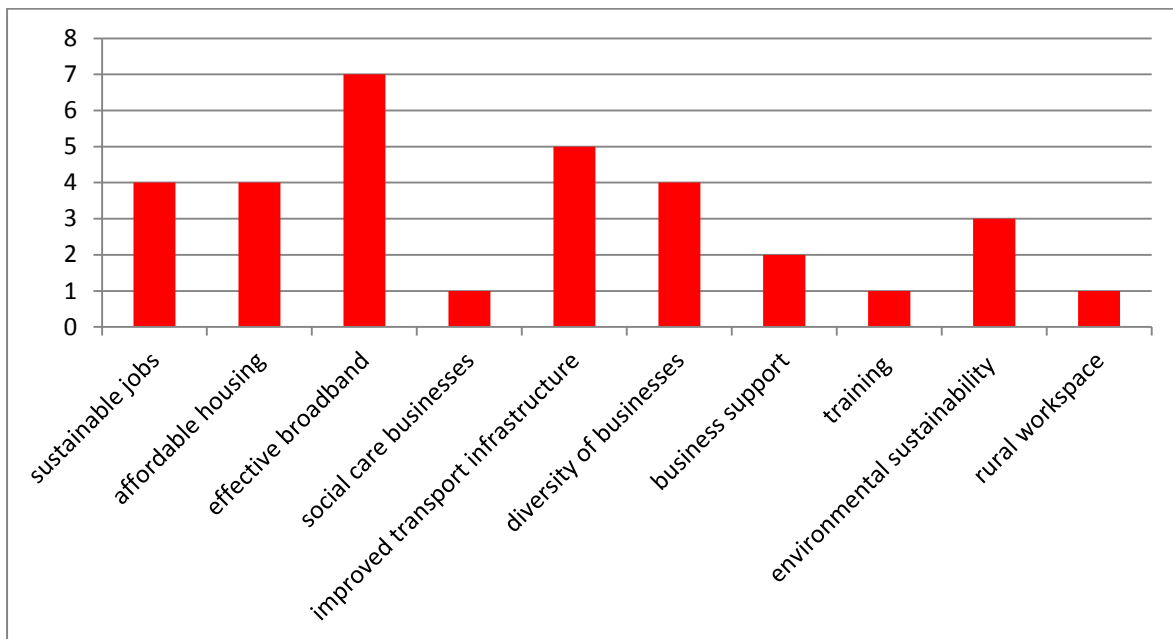
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And the key priorities:



Individual questionnaires were completed by 48 people at this event, highlighting what had been good about Making it Local and what could be improved. The questionnaires also identified 28 new project ideas that local people and businesses would like to develop.

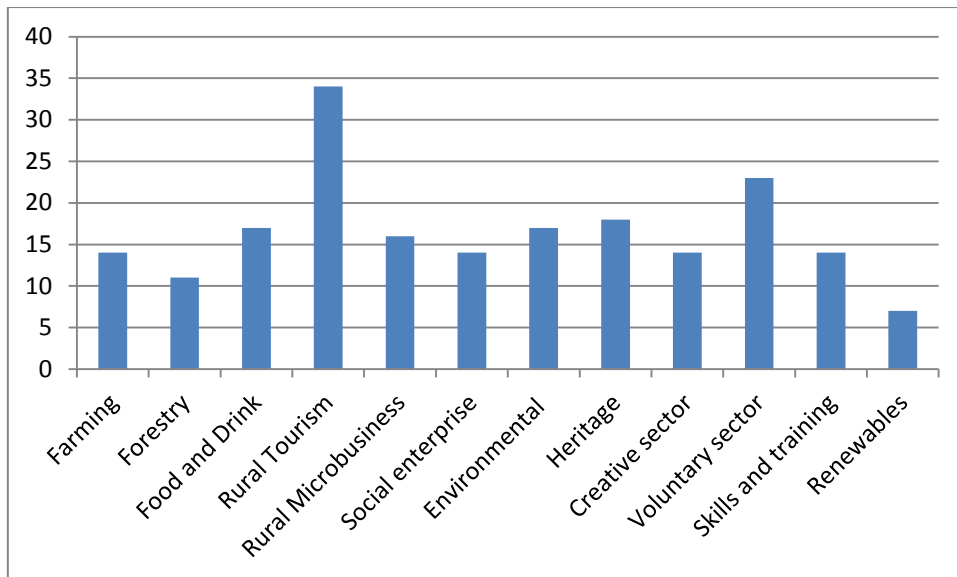
2014 consultation events

Between February and June, 20 consultation events focussing on specific sectors or areas were held; those were attended by 227 people. In addition, 5 externally organised events were attended where a further 100 were consulted.

These focussed discussions allowed MIL to explore in depth local knowledge and expertise and identify the key opportunities and challenges for each sector.

Questionnaires allowed MIL to record 157 individual responses and Project Register Cards provided 148 project ideas from these sessions.

Throughout the spring an online survey was available through the MIL website and this attracted a further 88 responses. People from 35 parishes out of the 77 in the old MIL area were represented plus some outside the area, including Talaton, Whimble, Clayhidon and Ilminster. 34% of respondents said they were willing to join a stakeholders group and 24% said they would consider it. The sectors represented in the online survey are as follows (people could group themselves within more than one sector):



A further 70 new project ideas were added via the online survey, making 246 potential projects in total. Most of the ideas for projects suggested via the online survey came from rural microbusinesses, tourism interests and the voluntary sector. Only a handful of projects in the farming and forestry sectors were suggested online, this is probably due to those sectors not being eligible to apply for Leader funds in the last programme, so not being as engaged with it as other sectors are. Such a situation emphasises the importance of good communications and building up relationships with these sectors to during the new programme to enable them to take up grants.

Responses to the questions we asked

What do you think is the main opportunity for your rural sector to grow over the next five years?

There were common themes that came through all the sector consultations which were:

- Huge potential to improve promotion of our outstanding landscape with better destination marketing.
- Do more to support small family businesses, especially the farms and food and drink producers in our area.
- Opportunities for job creation for young people; in many sectors there are jobs available but employers can't find the right staff. Using local connections, to develop the skills of local young people in a more targeted way to fit the work available in the area. Find ways to overcome the communications problem, where people don't know about jobs available up the road.



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The following opportunities were highlighted in the sector specific consultations:

Farming:

- Most farmers want to explore opportunities to improve efficiency in order to save labour and costs, rather than being able to expand the business. This was true of all dairy, beef and poultry sectors.
- Opportunities for processing closer to home and linking with other businesses in the processing chain nearby.
- Farmers also identified a need for more local networks for knowledge exchange.

Forestry:

- The forestry sector offers many opportunities in East Devon and the Blackdown Hills, which has a larger wooded area than most of the other AONBs in the country.
- Opportunities for small woodland workers to fill the gaps increasingly left by the bigger woodland harvesters.
- Wood fuel opportunities by linking up small woodlands and hedges on farms and estates.
- Many young people would like forestry as a career but are not best served by traditional college training so different approaches to training and mentoring may work well in this area.

Tourism:

In the online survey, tourism came out as one of the biggest opportunities for our area, with investments in this sector being seen as having a beneficial effect on food, drink and farming businesses.

- The Mil area has so much to offer sustainable tourism and we should capitalise on it but we need much better, more joined up, destination marketing and increased seasonal offers to spread tourism across the year.
- Opportunities to develop more circular walking routes and build on our identity as an area for active pursuits.
- The Pebblebed Heaths could be developed further for recreational tourism
- The Axe Estuary and coast around Seaton for wildlife tourism.
- High quality rural tourism can be developed throughout our area.
- Heritage has vast potential to bring about wider economic benefits for the area, with lots of small heritage organisations which would gain from working and grouping together.



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Rural micro-businesses:

- Investment and support for rural micro-businesses, particularly for food and drink businesses, was seen as critical to the area.
- Help and attention was particularly needed in marketing, websites and social media plus access to finance.
- Opportunities could be increased by collaborating more, particularly around market towns, rural areas or business sectors.
- There is no lack of business networks, but there is a problem of fragmentation and not knowing which network is of benefit to a particular business.
- The idea was raised of a virtual expertise hub and of using a micro-loans model, rather than grants.

Food and Drink sector:

- Food festivals and artisan markets work really well, raising the profile of a food or drink business and bringing customers back to businesses involved.
- A model of roving fine dining, developed by two local chefs, is giving rural community halls and local employment a real boost and has great potential to expand.
- Changing opening hours on a town-wide basis to encourage working shoppers was seen as an innovation worth trying.
- Some producers are already collaborating to offer more together than they could separately and this could be built on.
- Lots of cookery schools area beginning to appear in the area, responding to demand.

Rural parishes:

- It is particularly hard for young people to stay in our villages to work and bring up their families because so many villages are suffering from unaffordable housing. It was felt that this could be addressed through actively seeking “Live/Work” opportunities in parishes and improving the information about supply and demand for rural workspace.
- Opportunities to connect employers with rural young people on a very local level.
- There is a shift to village halls, shops, recreation grounds and sports facilities starting to function and think as social enterprises. Many can be developed more into hubs providing a number of different functions, especially now that the Localism Acts Community Right to Buy is starting to pick up.
- Community Energy Schemes should be looked at, such as investment in hydropower across the Blackdowns and East Devon.



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What do you think is the biggest challenge in your rural sector currently?

Numerous challenges were highlighted:

- Difficulties many are having with limited broadband access, especially those businesses that are trying to sell or promote themselves online.
- Competition with big retailers and businesses was difficult, making many people consider whether they should collaborate more to save costs and have more impact. Land prices in the area are pushed up for a number of reasons, notably by the demand from renewables companies, and this is having a big effect on farmers looking to grow their businesses.
- High house prices are preventing young people and working families from staying or settling in our villages. This is predominantly due to the demographic of the area, which attracts a lot of retirees and holiday accommodation.
- Steep terrain and poor access to many of the small woodland areas is a restriction.
- Poor skills in marketing and promotion amongst many businesses
- Difficulties around finding people with the right skills to fill vacancies
- Low incomes and people being unwilling or unable to pay higher prices for quality products.

How do you think this challenge could be addressed?

- Lots of very resourceful ideas have been suggested, particularly around collaborative marketing and better promotion of products.
- Opportunities to showcase local businesses were suggested, including farmers and artisan markets.
- Much better and more joined up marketing of our area as a destination for high quality tourism in a tranquil and outstandingly beautiful landscape was brought up frequently.
- Incentives for young people, such as low cost studio space, mentoring and apprenticeships, were seen as desirable.
- Improving sustainability has also been raised as a priority, including changing land management to mitigate extreme weather events and local generation of energy.
- Support on funding and advice, both to the business and community sector, were seen as important and could encompass marketing support and guidance.
- Improvements to the broadband speed in rural areas was regularly flagged up, in order to allow small businesses to thrive in the villages and more remote countryside. This would also enable farms to diversify their income streams and reduce isolation by providing rural workspace to other businesses.



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What local project or business idea would you most like to take forward during 2015 - 2020?

From a total of 246 projects registered with us, the following offer just a taster of the ideas that people would like to take forward to benefit the MIL area:

- *“An Aviation Heritage Centre at Dunkeswell Airfield, and similar at Culmhead. Light Aircraft Maintenance centre at Dunkeswell or Exeter, which can teach youngsters the skills through apprenticeship”*
- *“Skills events and learning opportunities to hear about woodland management from those that do it so well and use their output”*
- *“A joint workshop space that enables me to work in collaboration with others more.”*
- *“East Devon Local Food Coop”*
- *“Collaborative marketing opportunities. High end craft fairs with targeted marketing”*
- *“Incentives for young people (low cost studio space, mentoring, apprenticeships)”*
- *“Support for artisan food producers”*
- *“Tourism / food & drink trails”*
- *“Something that would pull together local food producers to get their info out there.*
- *“ Jurassic coast maritime links scheme”*
- *“Cycling - green, good for young people to engage in, cheap”*
- *“Farmers market promotion”*
- *“Continued promotion of East Devon and all that it has to offer”*
- *“Develop and implement a cohesive, sustainable web platform complete with long-term marketing strategy”*
- *“More small business, take on more young people on apprentice schemes”*
- *“Anything which promotes high quality tourism, supports SMEs and our hotels”*
- *“Investment in Connectivity, infrastructure, distinctiveness, skills improvement”*
- *“Final stage of Axminster Heritage project”*

What benefits do you think your project would bring?

Most projects said they would bring multiple benefits, with many offering environmental, social and economic benefits. From the comments that people made in relation to this question, it was clear that their ambitions entirely reflect the LEADER approach of aspiring to achieve economic, social and environmental benefits in all initiatives.



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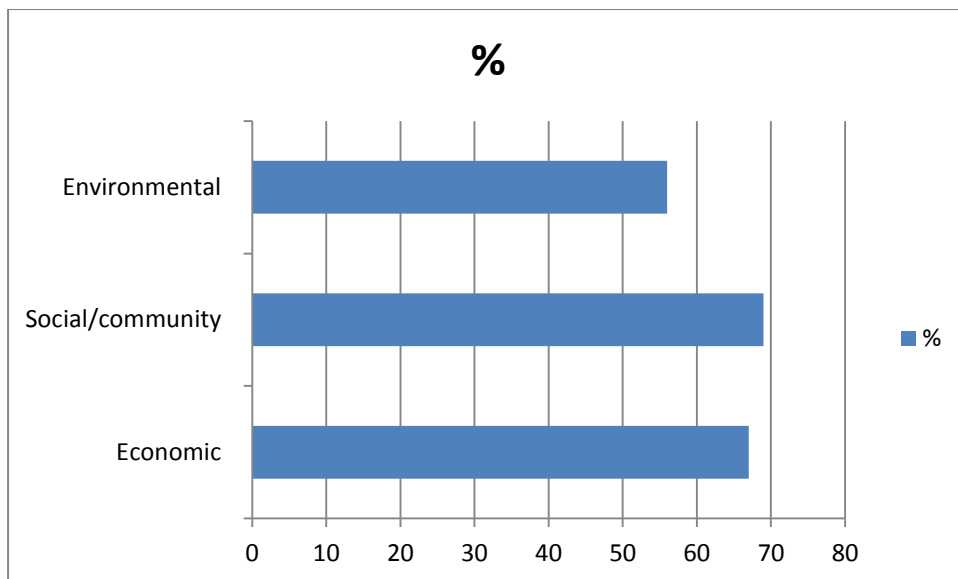
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Some of the benefits they highlighted were:

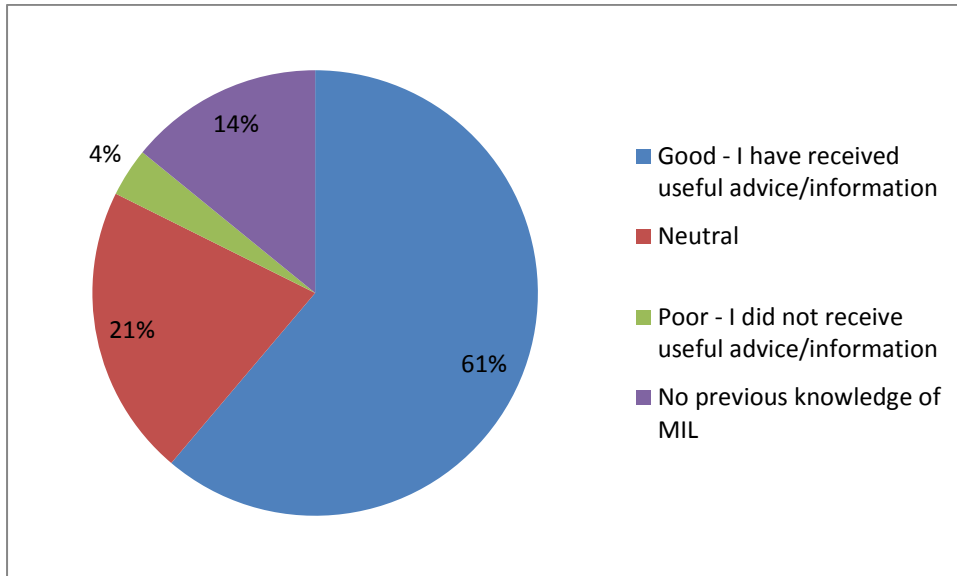
- *“Would provide employment, increase output and provide outlet and incentive for small farms to produce more, whilst encouraging low fossil fuel use and organic production wherever possible”*
- *“This project will be the first stage of the regeneration of Axminster town centre”*
- *“Our vision is a linked and holistic vision to deliver sustainable coastal development, investment and sustainable tourism income for the benefit of the whole community alongside tangible training and employment both directly and indirectly”*
- *“Our initiative is reducing food miles, cutting carbon use, improving connections between local producers and local people, innovating and creating sustainability in rural areas”*
- *“There are lots of small businesses that are family run or have small numbers and are busy carrying out basic day to day work and don't have the time to source better, closer, more competitive suppliers, if these companies can be easily connected it would allow growth, employment and money to be kept locally.”*
- *“Jobs in the renewables sector; investment in renewables schemes; a return to the community which will focus the community on what they want to develop; an opportunity to address fuel poverty if the community so wishes; energy resilience; carbon reduction.”*
- *“Our projects would all bring additional and much needed employment into the area and if we take a strategic approach could develop a career structure over time that would be appealing to younger people so that we retain the skill and energy of new generations in East Devon.”*

What has your experience been of Making it Local so far?



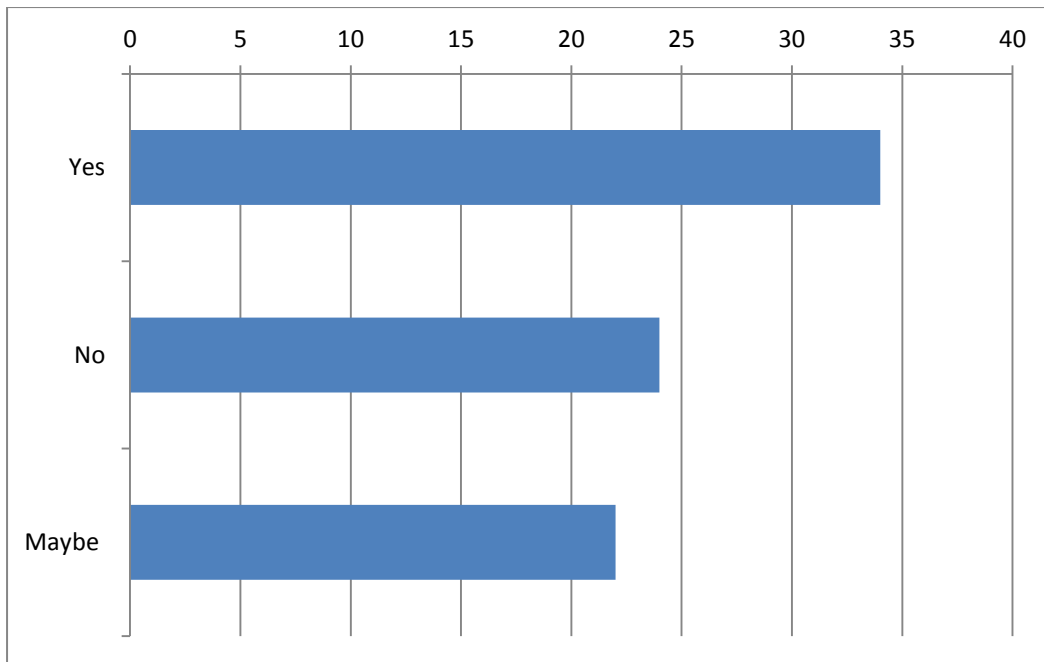
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- *“This initiative is key to providing seed-corn funding to benefit the community. We have used MIL funding to create a Heritage Centre at Smeatharpe which will soon need a larger volunteer team and even employees to operate it. Interest levels are growing both nationally and internationally as the brand takes off.”*
- *“I attended a very informative and well run first meeting at Kennaway House about this initiative, which provided a useful networking opportunity for different projects to learn about what each other is doing.”*
- *“Great to know there is a helping hand out there and really good to connect with people with similar goals.”*
- *“Really helpful advice and one that I would not hesitate to recommend to others”*
- *“Excellent and highly necessary business development support in the roles of Kate & Julie - without these roles, it will be a 'bidding process' only without the ability to meet strategic objectives that people have identified, e.g. retaining young people's expertise in local workforce etc. These roles make a huge & valuable contribution to Devon's ability to develop its business sector and other parts of the County Council's business could benefit from them.”*
- *“Please make the funding more accessible. At the present time any funding provided must be funded first by the individual or Group before receiving any funding award. This can be a difficult task especially if in the first instance, the request for funding is because they haven't any of their own funds to hand.”*
- *“A helpful and responsive team who seemed genuinely anxious to MAKE IT LOCAL”*

Would you be prepared to join our stakeholders group?



The response from online participants shows that over 50% would consider joining the MIL stakeholders' group and this represents good engagement with people on the ground.



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