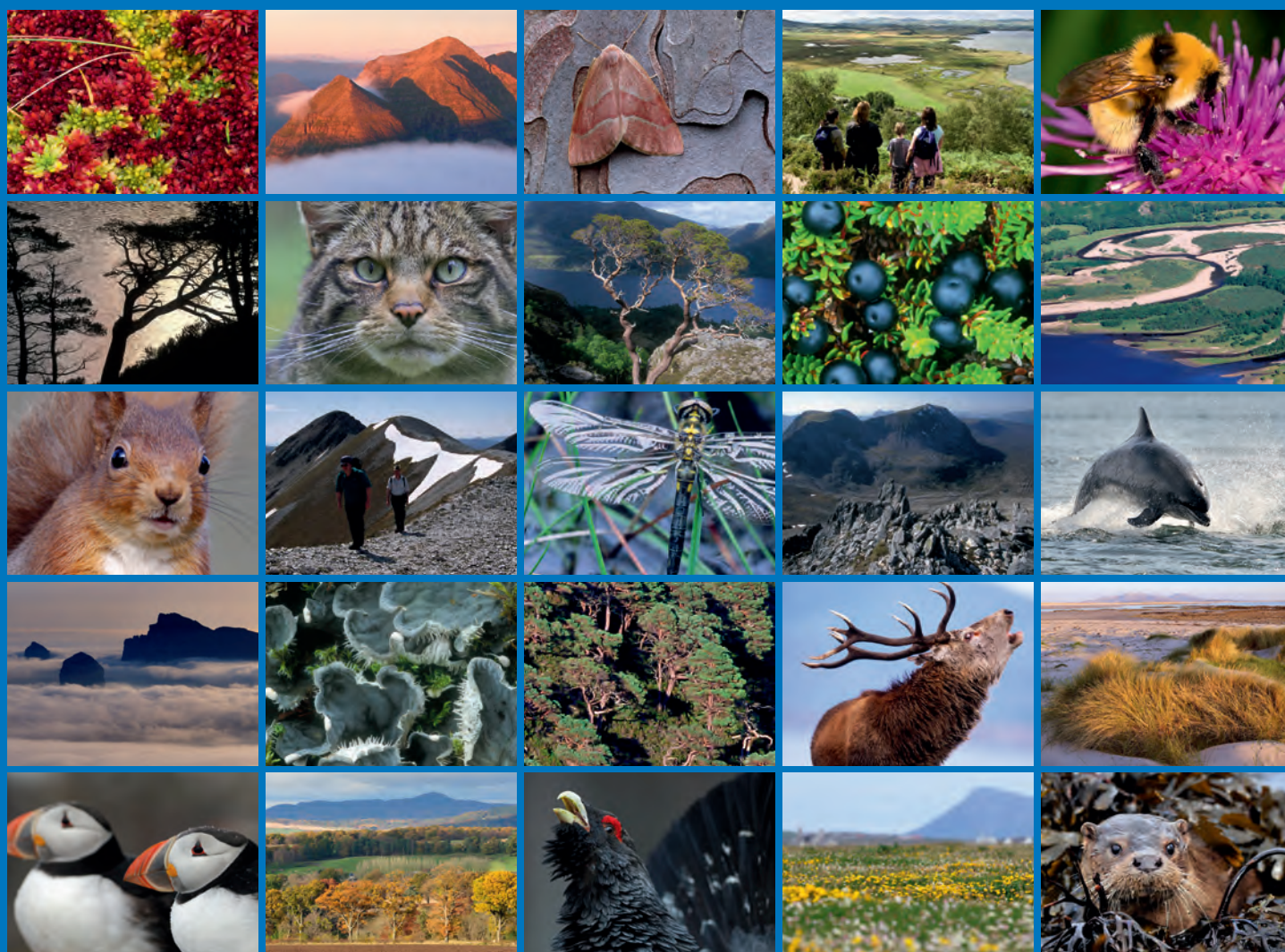


Planning for development – customer survey 2014





Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

COMMISSIONED REPORT

Commissioned Report No. 691

Planning for development – customer survey 2014

For further information on this report please contact:

Mareike Moeller-Holtkamp
Scottish Natural Heritage
The Beta Centre
STIRLING
FK9 4NF
Telephone: 01786 435392
E-mail: mareike.moeller-holtkamp@snh.gov.uk

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COMMISSIONED REPORT

Summary

Planning for development – customer survey 2014

Commissioned Report No. 691

Project No: 15537

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Keywords

Customer satisfaction; survey; planning and development; role; guidance; service statements.

Background

SNH commissioned Why Research to carry out a customer satisfaction survey covering the full range of planning and development customers. The purpose was to gather evidence to inform SNH's judgements about service improvement.

Main findings

The findings from this 2014 Customer Survey are broadly positive and SNH's role in planning appears to be well regarded by many.

- Views on the guidance produced by SNH are largely positive.
- Awareness of the two SNH planning and development-related Service Statements is relatively low and there are some clear differences between different customer groupings and the extent to which their views are positive about SNH's role in the planning process.
- While planners and developers are especially positive about SNH's service, it is clear that many individuals and communities do not have a clear understanding of SNH's role in the planning process.
- Feedback suggests room for improvement regarding: consistency of advice across the organisation; providing clear, concise and unambiguous advice; and achieving outcomes for landscape and nature on the ground.

For further information on this project contact:

Mareike Moeller-Holtkamp, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Beta Centre, Stirling, FK9 4NF.

Tel: 01786 435392 or mareike.moeller-holtkamp@snh.gov.uk

For further information on the SNH Research & Technical Support Programme contact:

Knowledge & Information Unit, Scottish Natural Heritage, Great Glen House, Inverness, IV3 8NW.

Tel: 01463 725000 or research@snh.gov.uk

Table of Contents **Page**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1.1 Key Overview	1
1.2 Contact with SNH	2
1.3 SNH Services	2
1.4 Service Statements	3
1.5 Service Levels	3
1.6 Guidance	3
2. INTRODUCTION	4
2.1 Service Statements	4
2.2 A need to gather views and update information on customer satisfaction	4
3. RESPONDENT PROFILE INFORMATION	5
3.1 Respondent groupings	5
3.2 Primary area of business or involvement	5
3.3 Area of involvement in renewables	6
4. SNH'S OVERALL ROLE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS	8
4.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process	8
5. CONTACT WITH SNH	9
5.1 Frequency of contact with SNH	9
5.2 Finding the most relevant person at SNH	10
5.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff	11
6. SNH'S PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES	12
6.1 SNH services used	12
6.2 Views on advice given by SNH	13
6.3 Views on interaction with SNH	14
6.4 Patterns of satisfaction or dissatisfaction	15
7. SERVICE STATEMENTS	16
7.1 Awareness of Service Statements	16
8. SNH'S ROLE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS	17
8.1 Understanding of SNH's role	17
9. GUIDANCE	21
9.1 Views on SNH guidance	21
9.2 Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH's website	22
9.3 Possible improvements to SNH guidance	23
9.4 Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA	25
10. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS	27
10.1 Possible improvements to SNH service	27
11. CHANGES OVER TIME	30
11.1 Comparison across years	30
12. CONCLUSION	32

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Key Overview

SNH commissioned Why Research to carry out a customer satisfaction survey covering the full range of planning and development customers. The purpose was to gather evidence to inform SNH's judgements about service improvement.

The findings from this 2014 Customer Survey are broadly positive, and SNH's role in planning appears to be well regarded. That said, there are some clear differences between different customer groupings and the extent to which their views are positive about SNH's role in the planning process.

Throughout this data, the views of those involved in planning or development, and government bodies, are most positive about the customer service offered by SNH. Conversely, respondents representing community interests and individuals are least positive about SNH's customer service. That said, around three quarters of respondents agree that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

Views on advice given by SNH are broadly positive, although responses to a series of statements show that there is room for improvement, particularly in relation to the consistency of advice across the organisation, and the advice SNH gives in comparison to other organisations. There is also the potential for improvement in relation to the outcomes for landscape and nature when dealing with development plans or other spatial strategies, as well as making advice clearer, more concise and less ambiguous. It was also suggested that SNH's requests for more information should be proportionate to the level of envisaged impact.

When we compare the results of this survey with those from a 2011 survey conducted among planners and developers, there is positive movement across most dimensions of customer service. This suggests that recent work undertaken by SNH to build and improve upon existing customer relationships is having a positive impact.

Although not directly comparable, a general comparison between this survey and a survey undertaken in 2011 with SEA practitioners shows that the rating given to the usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA remains at a very high level, particularly amongst planning authority respondents.

Again, although not directly comparable, a general comparison between this survey and one undertaken in 2012 shows that there remains a perception amongst 3rd parties involved in the planning system, such as individuals, that there is a conflict between SNH's role in looking after the natural environment and government requirements for economic development and especially renewable energy policy. SNH continues to be perceived as prioritising economic development over the natural environment, particularly in the case of wind farm developments.

Awareness of the two SNH planning and development-related Service Statements is relatively low. However, the data suggests that SNH staff need to point customers in the direction of these whenever possible.

Not all respondents have a clear understanding of SNH's role in the planning process as some are unable to comment on different areas of SNH's remit and others incorrectly identify different elements of SNH's remit.

Views on the guidance produced by SNH are largely positive, with this being seen as relevant, easy to find, well laid-out and lacking in jargon. A majority of respondents consider that information and / or guidance accessed through the SNH website is useful.

Top level findings from the survey questions are outlined below

1.2 Contact with SNH

Almost half of those responding to this survey contact SNH once a month or more frequently.

Of those contacting SNH in relation to planning specifically, around two in five have contact with SNH once a month or more frequently.

The data shows that the more frequent the contact, the greater the knowledge of SNH customer service. Most frequent contact is with government bodies, planning authorities and developers; least frequent contact is with individuals and those representing community interests.

While respondents use a number of different channels to find the most relevant person at SNH, existing contacts are the most important, particularly for developers and planners.

Around two thirds of respondents claim it is easy to contact SNH staff.

1.3 SNH Services

The services used by the greatest proportions of respondents are advice on planning and development, and guidance on planning and development.

Other key services used by respondents are species, habitats and / or site data and good practice guidance / case studies.

These services are used most by developers and planners.

Respondents are generally positive about different types of interaction with SNH staff, although planning authorities and developers are most positive about each of the different forms of interaction they have with SNH staff.

Direct comparisons can be made with some previous surveys which looked at awareness of, and satisfaction with, SNH's services and the planning process. When we compare the results of this year's customer survey with that conducted in 2011 among planners and developers, most dimensions of customer service show an increase in 2014 in the proportion of respondents who are positive about various aspects of SNH's customer service.

Although results from other surveys done in recent years cannot be directly compared to the results from this survey, as the questions were asked or worded differently, nevertheless we can compare general outcomes.

Results from a 2012 survey of 3rd parties involved in the planning system, compared with the individuals and other 3rd parties who responded to the current survey, show that there remains a disconnect between SNH's remit and the role these respondents would like to see them fill; i.e. respondents would like to see SNH object more to wind farm applications and to local applications and applications that are not just of national interest. They would also prefer that SNH always prioritise the environment over economic interests.

A general comparison between this survey and a survey undertaken in 2011 with SEA practitioners shows that the rating given to the usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA remains at a very high level, particularly amongst planning authority respondents.

1.4 Service Statements

There is relatively low awareness of the two SNH Service Statements, albeit that awareness is higher among those respondents likely to be accessing these two statements (developers and planning authorities).

1.5 Service Levels

Some groups of respondents show a lack of awareness of SNH's role or remit in relation to the planning process. For example, just over a third (36%) of all respondents correctly identified that 'It is the developer's responsibility to assess the potential natural heritage impacts; SNH will normally wish to avoid being consulted following scoping opinion, on drafts of Environmental Statements, or on any interim results of commissioned surveys'. However, while 68% of developers gave a correct identification, only 25% of individuals did so.

Again, it is developers and planning authorities and, to a slightly lesser extent, government bodies who have a clearer picture of SNH's remit in the planning process than respondents representing community interests or individuals; this finding is similar to the results from the 2012 survey of 3rd parties in the planning system.

1.6 Guidance

Views on the guidance produced by SNH are largely positive, with respondents considering the information provided by SNH relevant, easy to find, well laid-out and lacking in jargon; although around a quarter of respondents considers that guidance could be more concise or less ambiguous than at present.

A majority of respondents considers that information and / or guidance accessed through the SNH website is useful.

When asked to make suggestions for improvements to guidance, the one key suggestion, made by around 10% of the sample, was for a greater focus on the protection of the environment and habitats. There were also concerns noted by respondents over the impact of wind farms (onshore and offshore) on wildlife or habitats, although this comment does not relate specifically for improvements to guidance per se.

2. INTRODUCTION

Scottish Natural Heritage is the government's adviser on all aspects of nature and landscape across Scotland. Its role is to help people understand, value and enjoy Scotland's nature now and in the future. Its aspiration is for the natural heritage to be used and managed sustainably. It promotes good practice widely and helps to care for local nature and landscapes of national and international significance. Its success depends on working with others.

2.1 Service Statements

SNH has two Service Statements¹ that set out how it will deliver its responsibilities to support Planning and Development. The statements reflect SNH's commitment to Planning and Regulatory Reform and are designed to manage expectations with stakeholder and customer groups. The statements demonstrate that SNH aims to help deliver a faster planning process by focusing on development planning and the pre-application stage of development management, and by making data, information and guidance more easily available and comprehensive.

2.2 A need to gather views and update information on customer satisfaction

SNH has a commitment to continuous improvement in service delivery and currently utilises both informal and formal approaches to gathering feedback on this. In recent years, SNH has undertaken a number of customer surveys; two of which were work undertaken among developers and planners in 2011, and a survey among third parties in 2012. As part of this continuous improvement programme, in July 2014 SNH commissioned Why Research to gather structured feedback through a formal customer survey among the full range of planning and development customers. The aim of this was to build upon earlier work, provide baseline data for future surveys and where possible to provide comparisons with previous work.

The key objective of this survey was to provide SNH with an overarching customer satisfaction survey covering the full range of planning and development customers, and to provide evidence to inform judgements about service improvement.

¹ Service Statement for Planning and Development (June 2012) and Renewable Energy Service Level Statement (September 2013)

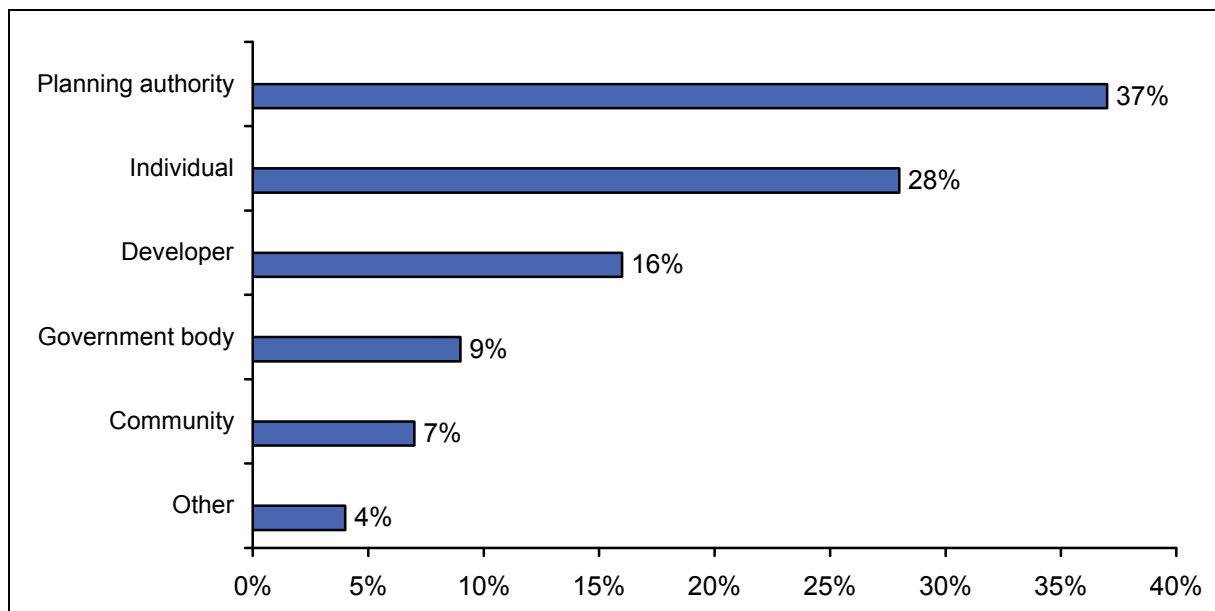
3. RESPONDENT PROFILE INFORMATION

Invitations to participate in this survey were sent to 823 individuals and organisations who have had contact with SNH on planning and development matters. A total of 328 responded to this survey. It is not possible to ascertain the response rate as some invited respondents chose to distribute this survey among colleagues or other interested parties. For example, the survey was drawn to the attention of members of Scotland Against Spin, a body campaigning against the effects of wind power on Scotland's landscapes. In contrast, other organisations with a number of staff in contact with SNH chose to collate their views and provide only a single response.

In order to set the findings in context, respondents were asked to provide some information relating to themselves or their organisations and these are discussed in the paragraphs below.

3.1 Respondent groupings

At the start of the online survey all respondents were asked to indicate what type of organisation, if applicable, they were responding on behalf of.



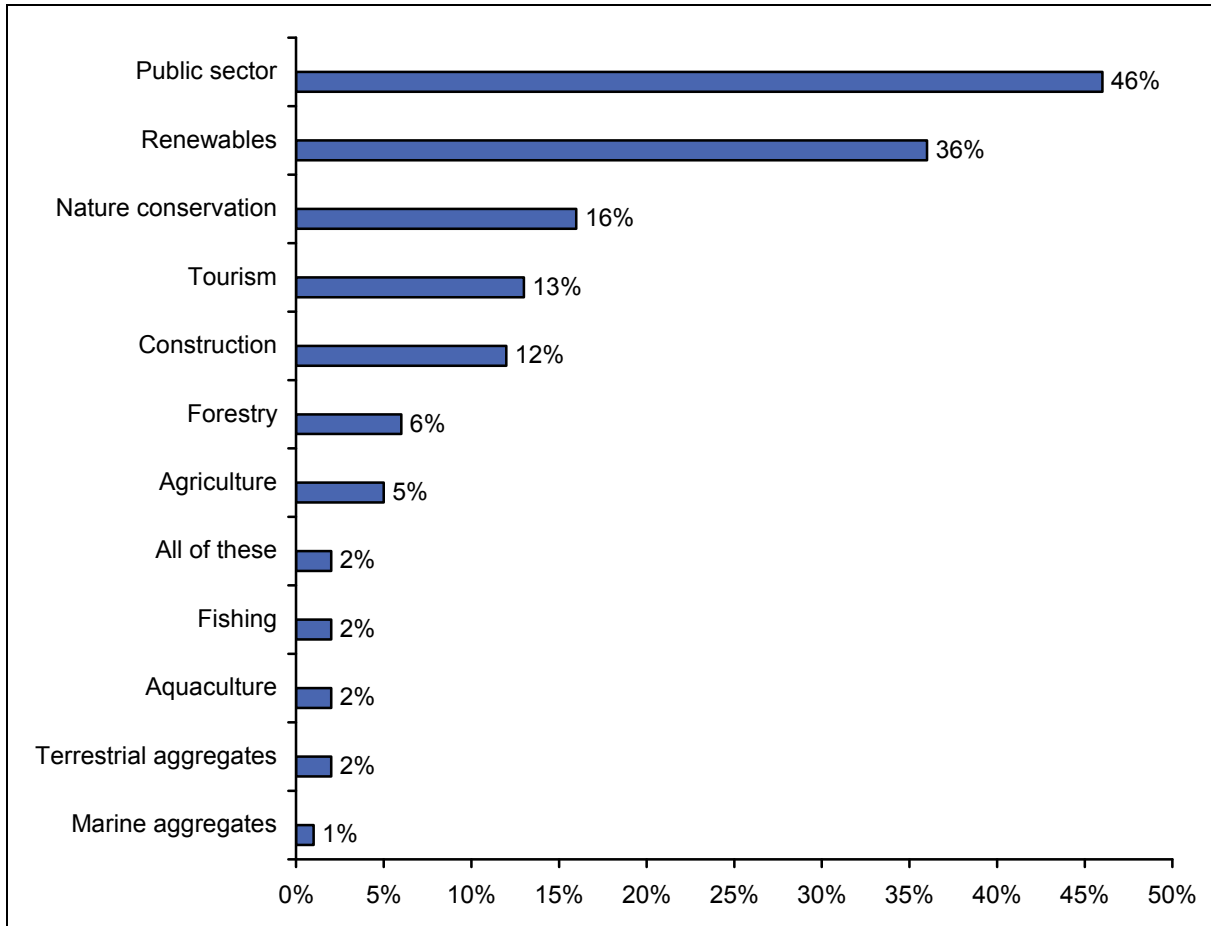
Source: Q1 (Base=328)

Figure 1. Respondent groupings

As shown in figure 1, the three groups with the highest numbers of respondents were planning authorities (37%), individuals (28%) and developers or those representing the interests of developers (16%). There were smaller numbers of respondents from government bodies or Scottish Government departments (9%), community councils or other community organisations (7%) and other organisations (4%).

3.2 Primary area of business or involvement

Respondents outwith the public sector were then asked to indicate their primary area of business or the area that their involvement in the planning system relates to. Respondents from the public sector; planning authorities, Scottish Government departments and government agencies were not asked to provide this information as their involvement covers many or all of these areas; 46% of respondents fell into the public sector category.



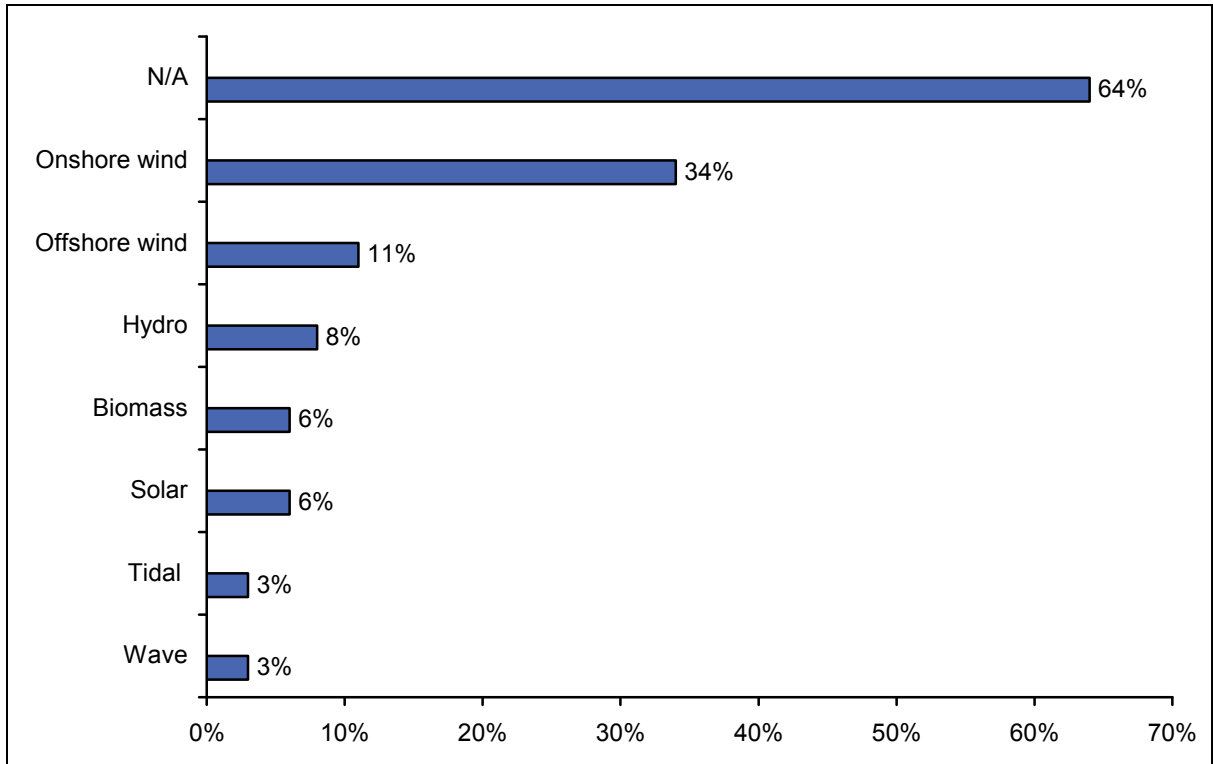
Source: Q2a & Q2b (Base=328)

Figure 2. Primary area of business or involvement

More than a third of respondents said that they are involved in renewables (36%), with smaller numbers involved in nature conservation (16%), tourism (13%) or construction (12%). Other sectors were noted in 6% or less of the sample.

3.3 Area of involvement in renewables

Respondents who selected renewables as their primary area of business or involvement were also asked to say in which area of renewables they were involved.



Source: Q2ai & Q2bi (Base=328)

Figure 3. Area of involvement in renewables

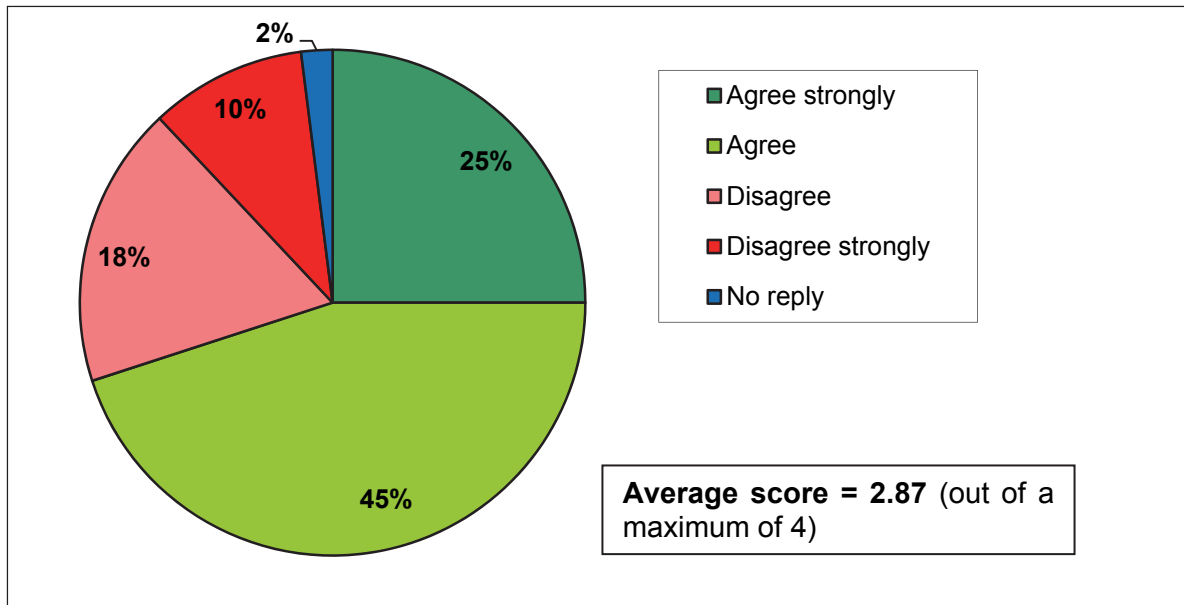
As figure 3 demonstrates, offshore and onshore wind account for the greatest numbers of respondents, with around a third (34%) involved in onshore wind, and 11% in offshore wind.

Other forms of renewables such as hydro, biomass, solar and so on were each mentioned by 8% or less of respondents.

4. SNH'S OVERALL ROLE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

4.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

To help put their views into context, all respondents were asked to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.



Source: Q11 (Base=328)

Figure 4. SNH's contribution to the planning process

As can be seen in figure 4 above, results to this question are positive, with almost three in four respondents (70%) agreeing to some extent that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process. Just over a quarter disagreed with this statement.

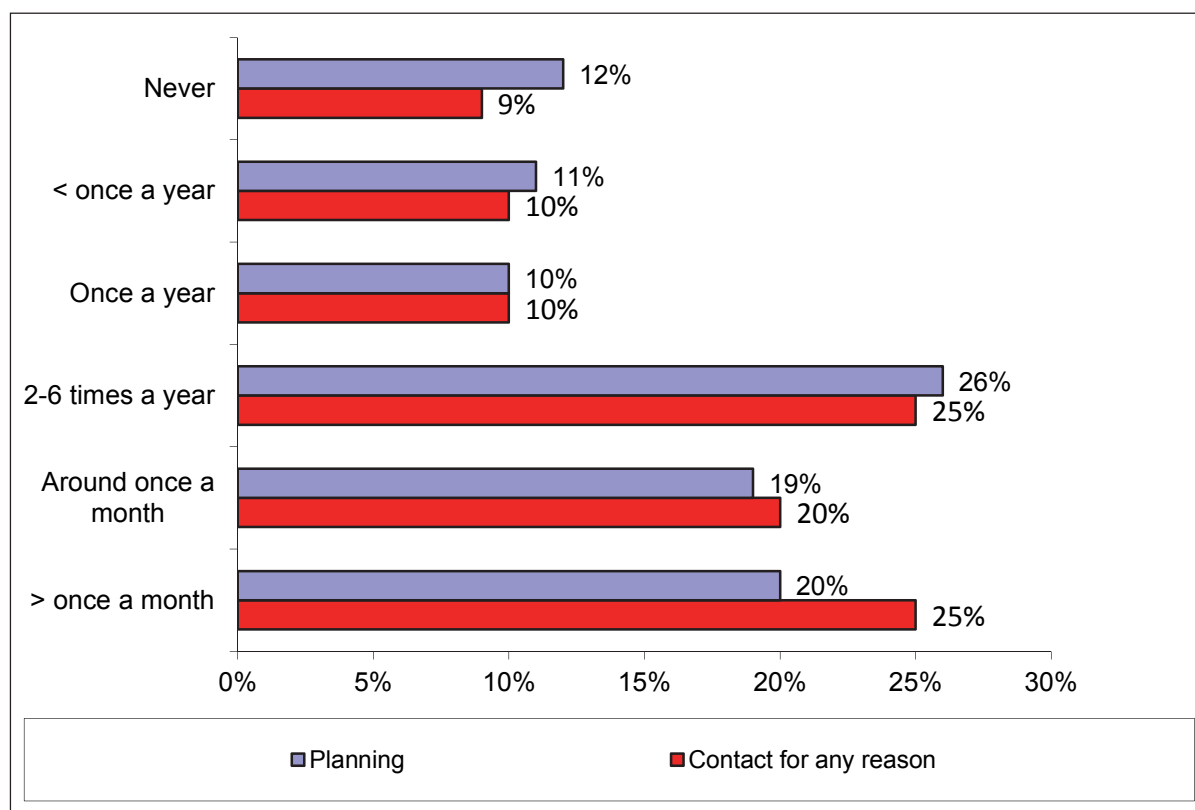
When we examine this data by sub-group, it is developers, planners and government bodies that are most positive (with 73%, 98% and 96% respectively agreeing that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process). Community interests and individuals agree to a lesser extent (noted by 55% and 28% respectively).

In the previous survey conducted among planners and developers only, 88% of respondents agreed to some extent with this statement. In this 2014 survey when we look at planners and developers only, this figure increases to 90%.

5. CONTACT WITH SNH

5.1 Frequency of contact with SNH

Having ascertained some basic profile information from each respondent, all were asked to indicate how often they have contact with SNH on average, for any reason, and then how often they have contact with SNH on average, specifically in relation to the Planning System.



Source: Q3a & Q3b (Base=328)

Figure 5. Frequency of contact with SNH

As figure 5 shows, a quarter of respondents have contact with SNH for any reason more than once a month, with slightly less having contact around once a month i.e. almost half the respondents contact SNH once a month or more frequently. A quarter have contact between 2-6 times a year and just under a third have contact once a year or less. The average number of contacts with SNH per year is 10.67.

In terms of having any contact with SNH in relation to the Planning System specifically, contact levels are slightly less, with around two fifths having contact with SNH once a month or more frequently; around a quarter having contact 2-6 times a year and around a third having contact once a year or less. The average number of contacts with SNH per year is 9.51.

When we examine sub-group data in relation to any contact with SNH, the most frequent contact is with Government organisations (an average of 16 times per year), planning authorities (average = 14) and developers (average = 12). Least contact is with community interests (average = 5), others (average = 4) or individuals (average = 3).

When we look at contact regarding the Planning System specifically, the most frequent contact is with planning authorities (average = 14 times per year), Government bodies

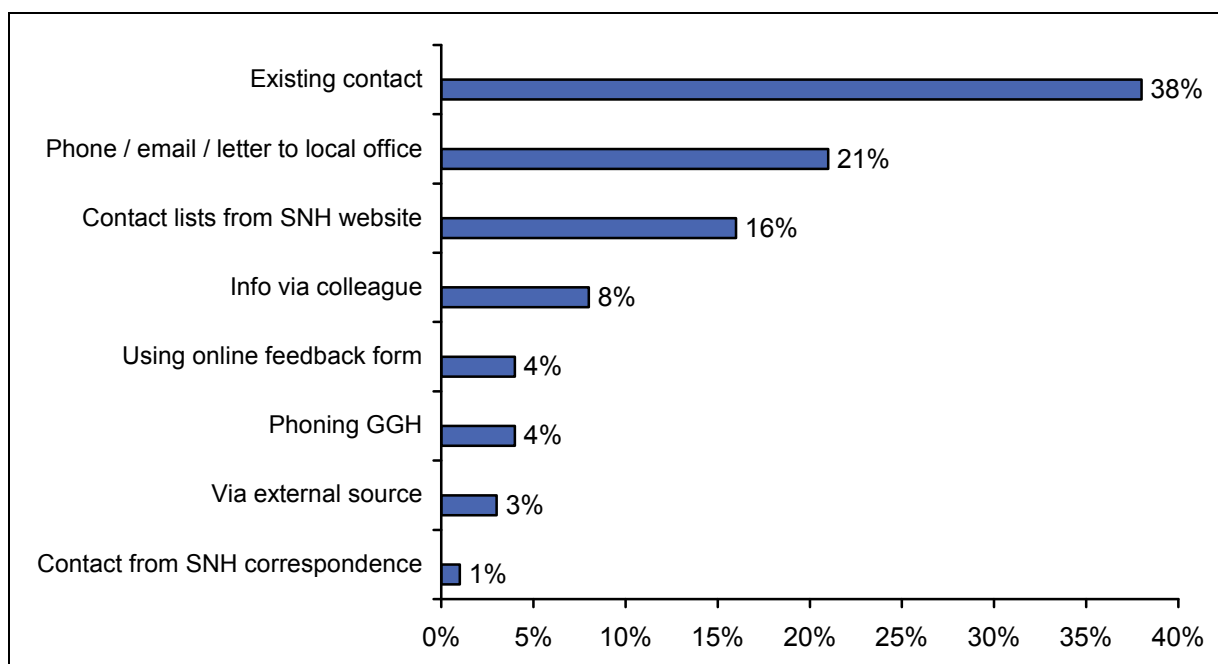
(average = 13) and developers (average = 10). Once again, least contact community interests (average = 4) or individuals (average = 2).

If we look at this data by primary area of business / involvement, (based on sub-groups which have 39 or more respondents), respondents in renewables, construction and nature conservation have a slightly higher average rate of contact with SNH than those involved in tourism (average of 5 or 6 compared to 4).

Many of the differences noted above, particularly between the largest and smallest, are statistically significant.

5.2 Finding the most relevant person at SNH

Respondents were then asked to indicate how, when they wish to contact SNH, they tend to find the most relevant person.



Source: Q4a (Base=328)

Figure 6. Finding the most relevant person at SNH

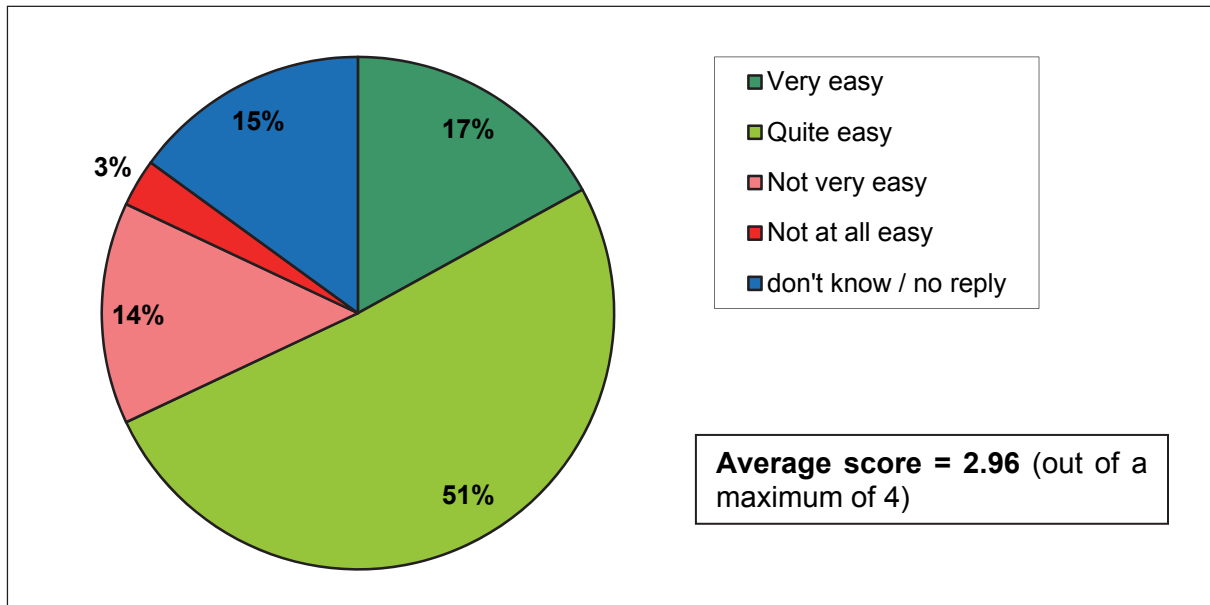
As figure 6 shows, existing contacts at SNH are clearly important, with almost four in ten respondents (38%) citing this contact method. Around one fifth (21%) referred to telephone, email or letter to their local SNH office; and 16% cited contact lists from the SNH website. Less than one in ten respondents used another form of contact to find the most relevant person at SNH.

When we examine this data by sub-group, it appears that planners, developers and government bodies use existing contacts at SNH as a key channel to contact SNH (cited by 58% of planning authority staff, 39% of those in government bodies and 38% of developers). Higher proportions of respondents in these groups also telephone, email or send letters to their local office.

Conversely, the sub-group data shows that community groups and individuals are less likely to have existing contacts at SNH, and greater proportions of these sub-groups use contact lists provided on the SNH website (cited by 23% and 25% respectively).

5.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

Respondents were also asked to indicate how easy it is to contact relevant staff at SNH.



Source: Q4b (Base=328)

Figure 7. Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

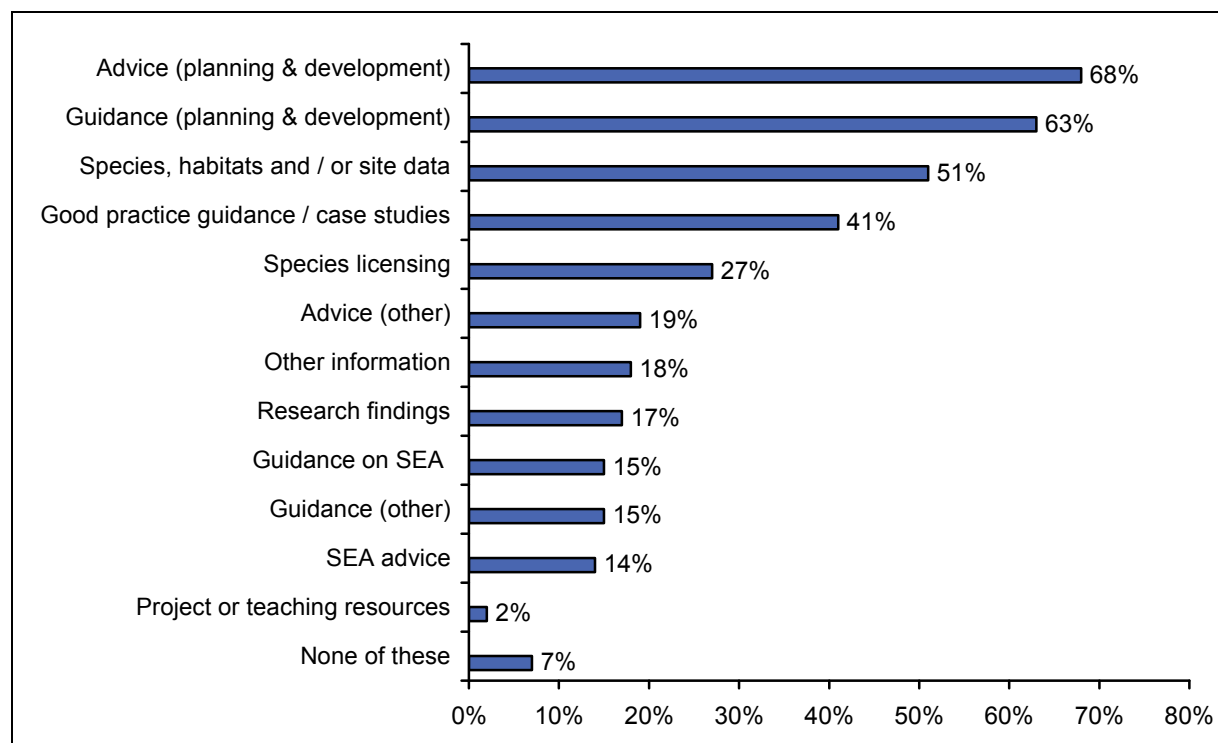
As shown in figure 7, around two in three (68%) respondents agree, to some extent, that it is easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH. Only 17% disagree.

The sub-groups where contact is seen as easiest are government bodies (89%), planning authorities (87%) and developers (77%). The sub-groups where lowest proportions of respondents agree to any extent that it is easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH are community groups and individuals.

6. SNH'S PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

6.1 SNH services used

SNH offers a wide range of services to organisations, communities and the general public as part of its overall Planning and Development Services. This part of the survey was designed to help understand which of these services have been used, and by whom.



Source: Q5 (Base=328)

Figure 8. SNH services used

As figure 8 demonstrates, the services used by greatest numbers of respondents were advice on specific planning and development proposals and guidance on planning and development (cited by 68% and 63% respectively). Information on species, habitats and / or site data is accessed by around half (51%) respondents, and good practice guidance / case studies by 41%. Around a quarter use services in relation to species licensing (27%). Smaller percentages use any of the other services offered by SNH such as research findings (18%), other guidance (15%) or SEA advice (14%); 2% said that they use project or teaching resources.

When we further examine the data to ascertain whether particular types of respondents are using services to a greater extent than others, higher proportions of developers and planning authorities tend to use each service than respondents with community interests, or individuals.

Table 1, below, is based on data for the four most popular services used by respondents but the pattern is similar across other less well used services.

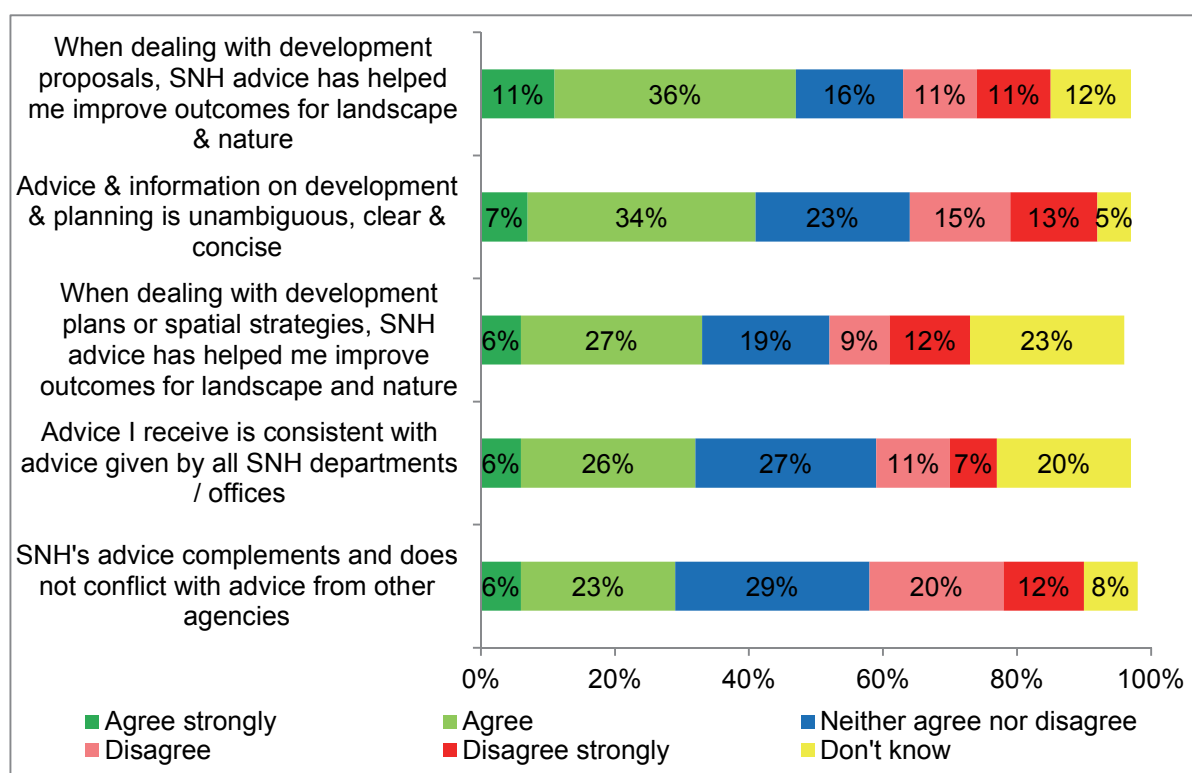
Table 1. Usage of most SNH services by sub-group

	Advice %	Guidance %	Species, habitat and/ or site data %	Good practice / case studies %
Developers (52)	92	88	65	69
Planning authorities (121)	86	81	60	50
Government bodies (28)	71	64	68	25
Community interests (22)	41	59	55	45
Individuals (93)	37	26	28	18
Other (12)	58	58	42	25

Source: Q5

6.2 Views on advice given by SNH

Having gathered information on which SNH services are used, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements about SNH services. Five of these statements related specifically to advice provided by SNH and four related specifically to interactions with SNH staff.



Source: Q6 (Base=328)

Figure 9. Views on advice given by SNH

Figure 9, above, shows that for most of the types of advice given by SNH, more respondents agree than disagree with each statement, although significant proportions 'sit on the fence' and give a neither / nor response.

The statements where higher proportions of respondents agree than disagree are:

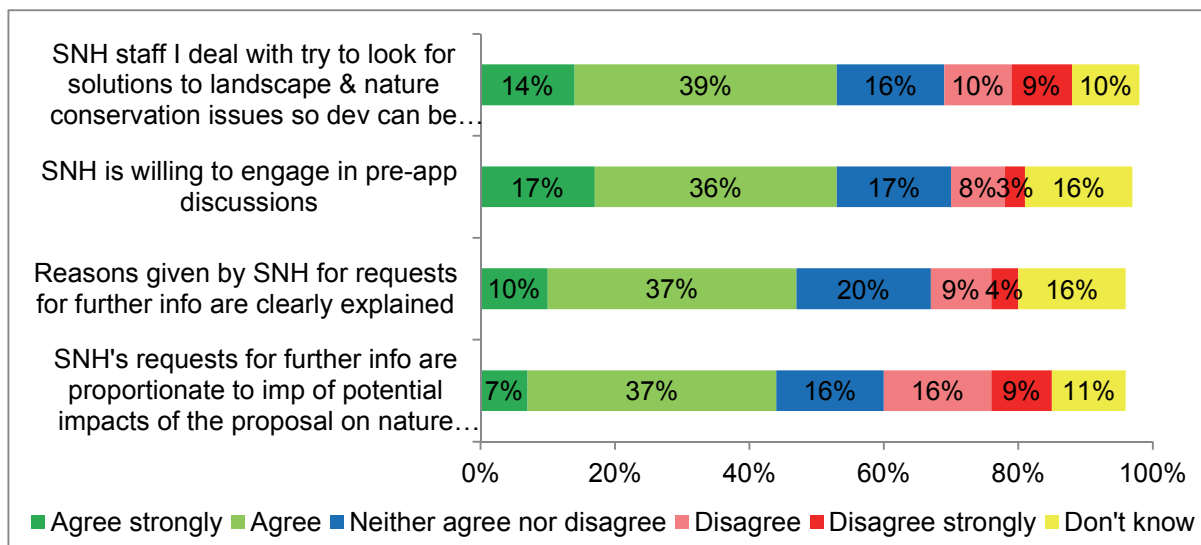
- When dealing with a development proposal, advice from SNH has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature (47% agree versus 22% who disagree).
- The advice I receive from SNH is consistent with advice given by all other SNH departments or offices (32% versus 18%).
- When dealing with development plans or other spatial strategies, advice from SNH has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature (33% versus 21%).
- The advice and information provided by SNH relating to development and planning is unambiguous, clear and concise (41% versus 28%).

The one statement where higher proportions of respondents disagree than agree is:

- SNH’s advice complements and does not conflict with other agencies (29% agree versus 32% who disagree).

6.3 Views on interaction with SNH

When we look at different types of interaction with SNH staff, views are generally positive about the SNH staff dealt with, their willingness to engage in pre-application discussions, the provision of clear reasons for requests and requests for further information.



Source: Q6 (Base=328)

Figure 10. Views on interaction with SNH

Figure 10 shows that, across each of these dimensions, greater proportions of respondents agreed than disagreed with each statement.

6.4 Patterns of satisfaction or dissatisfaction

Once again, when we look at this data by organisation type, it is clear there are differences in customer satisfaction with SNH's services by type of organisation and individuals responding to this survey. Tables 2 and 3 provide the average 'agreement' scores for each of these statements according to different sub-groups. This agreement is used to provide an indication of satisfaction with SNH's service.

We have provided a traffic light system to draw out patterns of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with SNH's service. The colours used are green (with an average score of 3.5 or more out of 5), which is interpreted as a good score and not an aspect of customer service in need of attention; amber (an average score of between 2.5 and 3.5 out of 5) which is interpreted as needing possible attention; and red (an average score of less than 2.5) needing attention as a priority.

Table 2. Average score by sub-group (statements on advice)

Base = 328	Total	Devel oper	PA	Govt body	Comm unity	Indiv	Other
When dealing with a development proposal, advice from SNH has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature	3.29	3.29	4.09	3.88	2.41	2.14	3.09
The advice I receive from SNH is consistent with advice given by all other SNH departments or offices	3.17	2.78	3.75	3.44	3.17	2.61	2.64
When dealing with development plans or other spatial strategies, advice from SNH has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature	3.11	3.21	3.84	3.74	2.60	2.16	2.82
The advice and information provided by SNH relating to development and planning is unambiguous, clear and concise	3.10	3.00	3.70	3.65	2.67	2.15	3.09
SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with other agencies	2.92	2.75	3.51	3.33	2.59	2.13	2.64

Table 3. Average score by sub-group (statements on interaction)

Base = 328	Total	Devel oper	PA	Govt body	Comm unity	Indiv	Other
SNH is willing to engage in pre-application discussions	3.70	3.90	4.04	4.50	3.00	2.94	3.55
The reasons given by SNH for requests for further information are clearly explained	3.52	3.39	4.06	3.96	3.00	2.72	3.40
The SNH staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed	3.47	3.29	4.06	3.96	3.16	2.62	2.91
SNH's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes	3.19	2.94	3.86	3.63	2.69	2.31	3.00

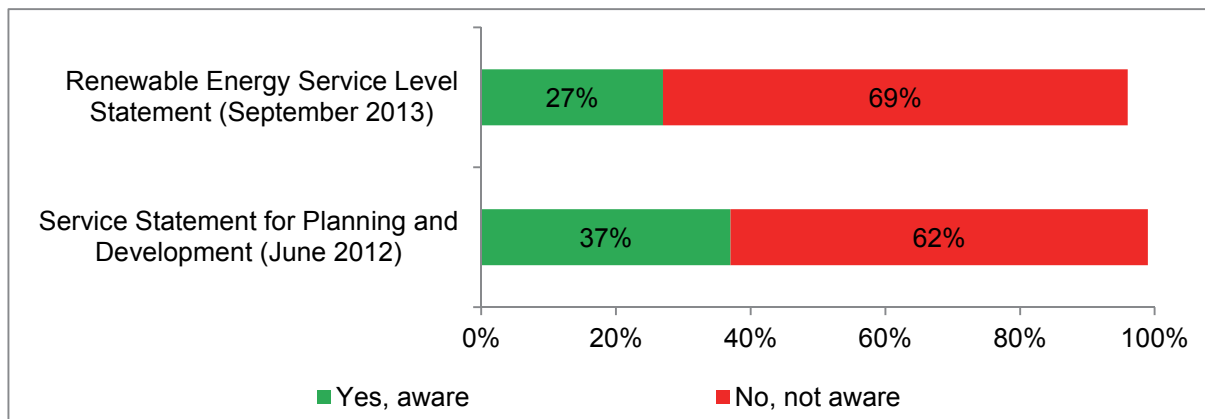
These two tables follow the trends already noted in this data, with planning authorities and government bodies being more positive about their interaction with SNH staff. Developers are not as positive as these two groups, although they are generally more positive than community groups or individuals. Many of the differences noted above are statistically significant.

7. SERVICE STATEMENTS

As well as satisfaction, SNH is keen to understand levels of both awareness and understanding of its two planning and development Service Statements. This is important for efficient partnership working between SNH and its customers.

7.1 Awareness of Service Statements

All respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of both Service Statements: A Service Statement for Planning and Development (issued in June 2012), and Renewable Energy Service Level Statement (issued in September 2013).



Source: Q7 (Base=328)

Figure 11. Awareness of Service Statements

Figure 11 shows that awareness is at a relatively low level, with over a third being aware of the Service Statement for Planning and Development, and just over a quarter of respondents aware of the Renewable Energy Service Level Statement.

When we examine sub-group data in relation to the Service Statement for Planning and Development, there is a correlation between contact with SNH and awareness of the Service Statement, with higher levels of awareness amongst more frequent contacts. The sub-group trends already noted continue here, with higher proportions of developers (50%) and planning authorities (55%) being aware of this statement in comparison to other respondent sub-groups (25% or less across all other groups). This pattern is similar for the Renewable Energy Service Level Statement, with higher proportions of developers (40%) being aware of this service level statement (27% or less for other sub-groups). Although the bases are small for each primary area of business / involvement, slightly higher proportions of those customers with an interest in renewables are aware of this service level statement than those with an interest in other areas of business / involvement.

8. SNH'S ROLE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

8.1 Understanding of SNH's role

Respondents were asked to indicate yes or no to a series of statements in relation to SNH's role in the planning process. This was designed to ascertain the extent to which respondents understand the role of SNH. Some of the statements included were deliberately incorrect to test respondents' knowledge. The findings of this specific question show that understanding of SNH's role in the planning process is limited to an extent. There are some relatively high levels of respondents saying 'don't know' to some of the statements at this question.

A large majority of respondents correctly identified that:

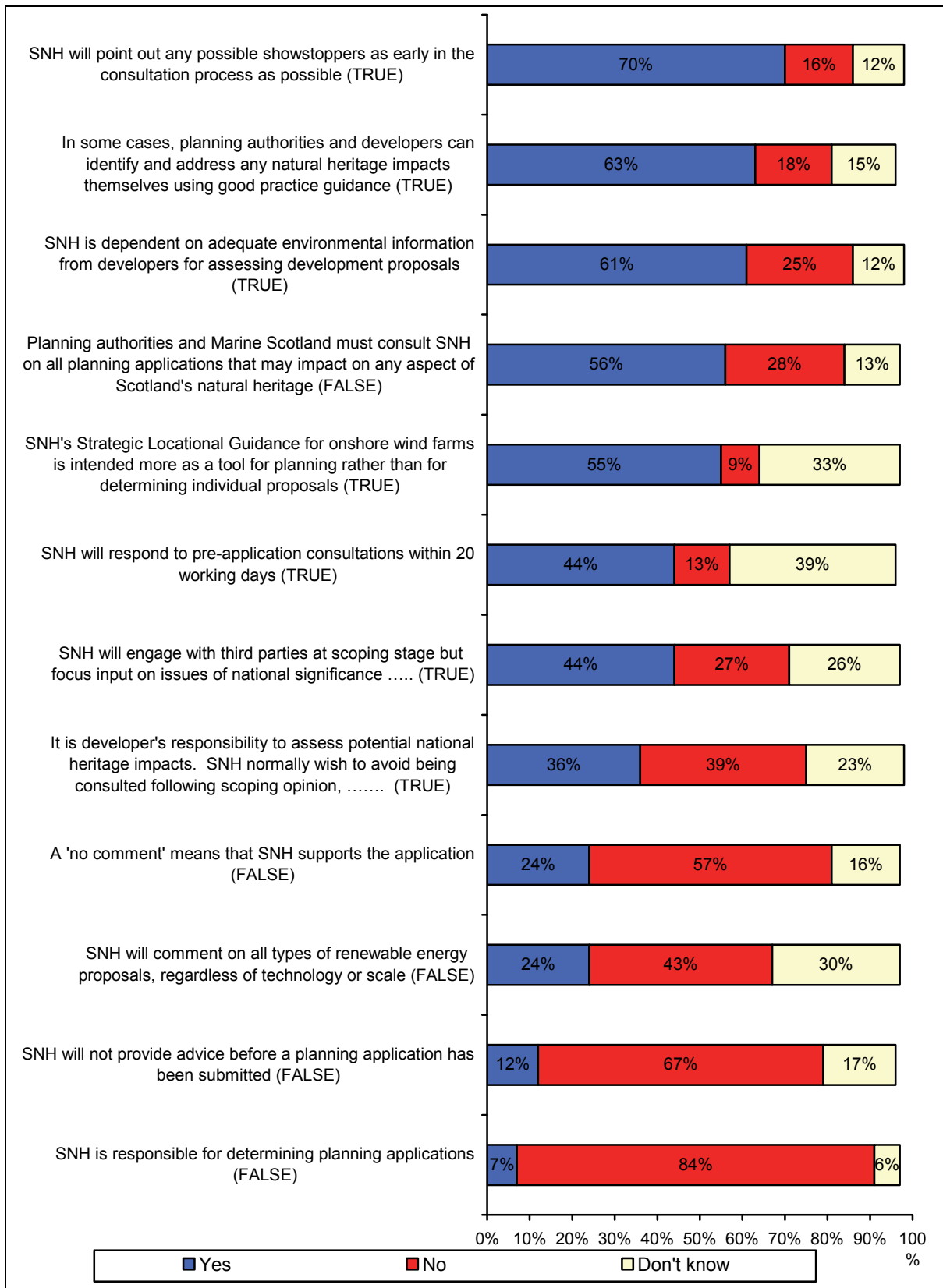
- SNH is not responsible for determining planning applications. (84% of respondents).
- SNH will point out any possible showstoppers as early in the consultation process as possible (70%).
- SNH will provide advice before a planning application has been submitted. (67%).

The majority of respondents correctly identified that:

- In some cases, planning authorities and developers can identify and address any natural heritage impacts themselves using good practice guidance (63%).
- SNH is dependent on adequate environmental information from developers for assessing development proposals (61%).
- A 'no comment' response does not mean that SNH supports the application (57%).
- SNH's Strategic Locational Guidance for onshore wind farms' is intended more as a tool for planning rather than for determining individual proposals (55%).

A minority correctly identified that:

- SNH will engage with third parties at the scoping stage but will focus its input on issues that are of national significance and cannot enter into extensive dialogue on natural heritage issues of local importance (44%).
- SNH will respond to pre-application consultations within 20 working days (44%).
- SNH will not comment on all types of renewable energy proposals, regardless of technology or scale (43%).
- It is the developer's responsibility to assess the potential natural heritage impacts. SNH will normally wish to avoid being consulted following scoping opinion, on drafts of Environmental Statements, or on any interim results of commissioned surveys (36%).
- Planning authorities and Marine Scotland do not have to consult SNH on all planning applications that may impact on any aspect of Scotland's natural heritage (28%).



Source: Q8 (Base=328)

Figure 12. Understanding of SNH's role

Table 4 provides sub-group information in relation to those who correctly identified the statements.

Table 4. Understanding of SNH's role (by sub-group)

Base=328	Total (328) %	Dev (52) %	PA (121) %	Govt (28) %	Comm (22) %	Indiv (93) %
SNH is responsible for determining planning applications (FALSE)	84	92	93	89	82	68
SNH will point out any possible showstoppers as early in the consultation process as possible (TRUE)	70	71	91	89	55	41
SNH will not provide advice before a planning application has been submitted (FALSE)	67	77	83	79	55	41
In some cases, planning authorities and developers can identify and address any natural heritage impacts themselves using good practice guidance (TRUE)	63	75	85	86	32	33
SNH is dependent on adequate environmental information from developers for assessing development proposals (TRUE)	61	73	70	64	50	40
A 'no comment' response means that SNH supports the application (FALSE)	57	62	74	61	45	34
SNH's Strategic Locational Guidance for onshore wind farms' is intended more as a tool for planning rather than for determining individual proposals (TRUE)	55	65	62	46	45	42
SNH will respond to pre-application consultations within 20 working days (TRUE)	44	42	55	50	32	30
SNH will engage with third parties at the scoping stage but will focus its input on issues that are of national significance and cannot enter into extensive dialogue on natural heritage issues of local importance (TRUE)	44	44	56	50	14	33
SNH will comment on all types of renewable energy proposals, regardless of technology or scale (FALSE)	43	42	64	18	41	26
It is the developer's responsibility to assess the potential natural heritage impacts. SNH will normally wish to avoid being consulted following scoping opinion, on drafts of Environmental Statements, or on any interim results of commissioned surveys (TRUE)	36	52	36	50	27	25
Planning authorities and Marine Scotland must consult SNH on all planning applications that may impact on any aspect of Scotland's natural heritage (FALSE)	28	23	54	18	9	9

When we examine sub-group differences across this question, overall it is developers and planning authorities and, to a slightly lesser extent government bodies, who have a clearer picture of SNH's role in the planning process than respondents representing community interests or individuals.

That said, even among these groups there are still some respondents who incorrectly identify an aspect of SNH's role. For example, when we examine the (false) statement 'A 'no comment' response means that SNH supports the application', 15% of development interests and planning authorities said yes, and 29% of government bodies.

In relation to the statement 'SNH is responsible for determining planning applications; more than one in ten individuals (14%) thought that this is true and a similar number of individuals did not know or did not reply (18%). This may indicate a lower awareness of SNH's role when compared to those with a more professional involvement in the planning process.

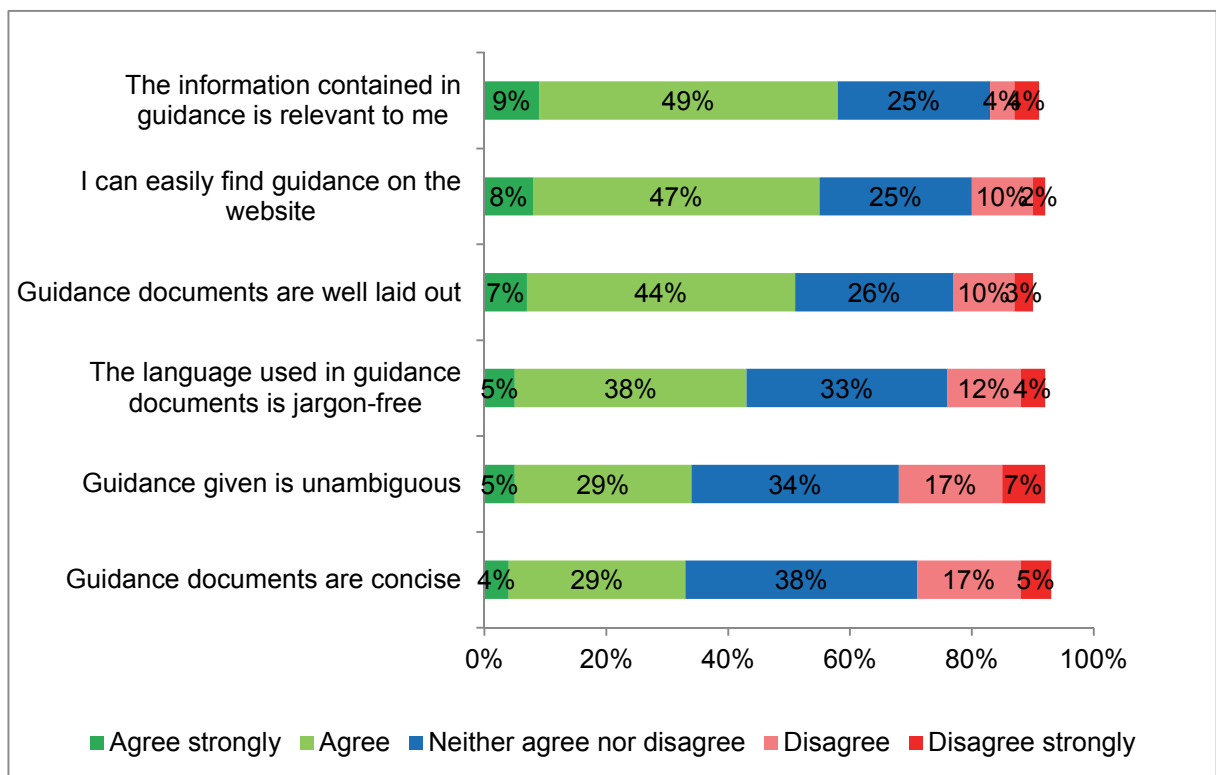
Once again, there is a correlation between contact with SNH and correct identification of SNH's role, with higher proportions of respondents who have more frequent contact with SNH (once a month or more often) correctly identifying whether these service statements are true or false.

9. GUIDANCE

SNH was keen to obtain views on the guidance they produce. It is integral to their efforts to influence development at the upstream end of the planning system and customers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements in relation to SNH guidance.

9.1 Views on SNH guidance

Across each of these statements, more respondents agree than disagree, although a significant number of respondents 'sit on the fence' and neither agree nor disagree (a quarter or more at each statement).



Source: Q9 (Base=328)

Figure 13. Views on SNH guidance

Encouragingly, over half the respondents agree that:

- The information contained in guidance is relevant to me (58% agreeing compared to only 8% disagreeing).
- I can easily find guidance on the website (55% agreeing compared to 12% disagreeing).
- Guidance documents are well laid out (51% agreeing; 13% disagreeing).

When we examine sub-group data by organisation type, it is once again planning authorities, government bodies and, to a slightly lesser extent, developers who are more positive about SNH guidance.

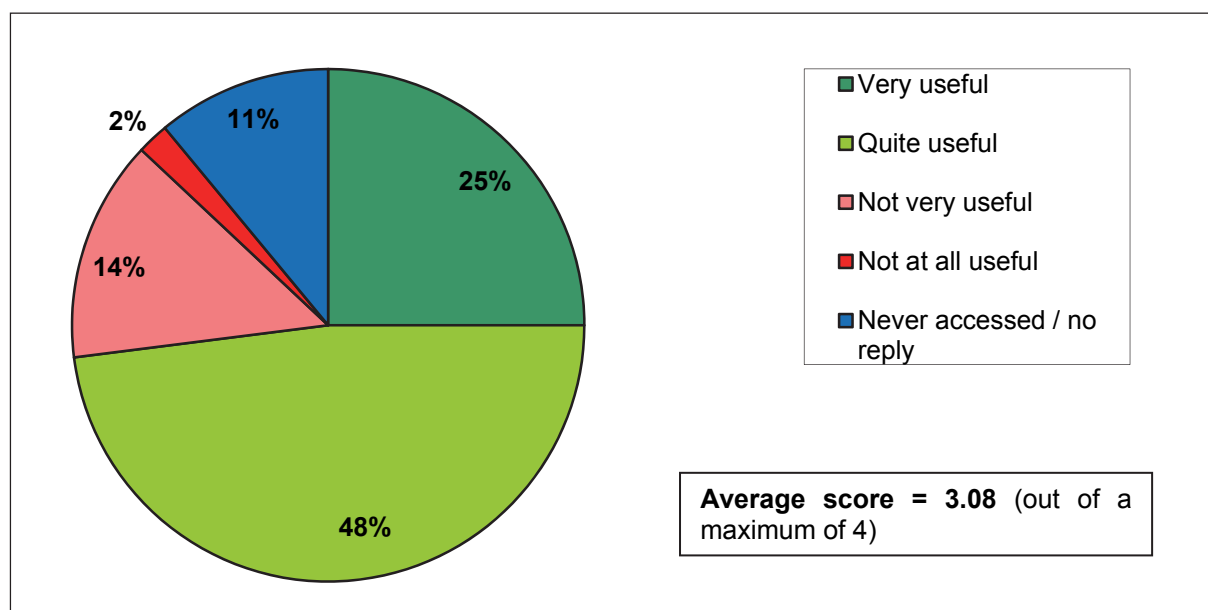
Again, the colours used are green (with an average score of 3.5 or more out of 5), which is interpreted as a good score and not an aspect related to guidance that is in need of attention; amber (an average score of between 2.5 and 3.5 out of 5) which is interpreted as needing possible attention; and red (an average score of less than 2.5) needing attention as a priority.

Table 5. Average score by sub-group (statements on guidance)

Base = 328 Average score (from maximum of 5)	Total	Devel oper	PA	Govt body	Comm unity	Indiv	Other
The information contained in guidance is relevant to me	3.59	3.82	3.92	3.88	3.06	3.00	3.60
I can easily find guidance on the website	3.52	3.63	3.78	3.88	3.42	2.91	3.92
Guidance documents are well laid out	3.45	3.55	3.85	3.81	3.26	2.72	3.58
The language used in guidance documents is jargon-free	3.29	3.39	3.60	3.65	3.21	2.66	3.33
Guidance given is unambiguous	3.09	2.98	3.52	3.65	2.94	2.41	2.91
Guidance documents are concise	3.09	3.22	3.36	3.42	2.89	2.53	3.36

9.2 Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH’s website

Respondents were also asked to indicate how useful they found the information and / or guidance that they have accessed through the SNH website.



Source: Q12 (Base=328)

Figure 14. Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH’s website

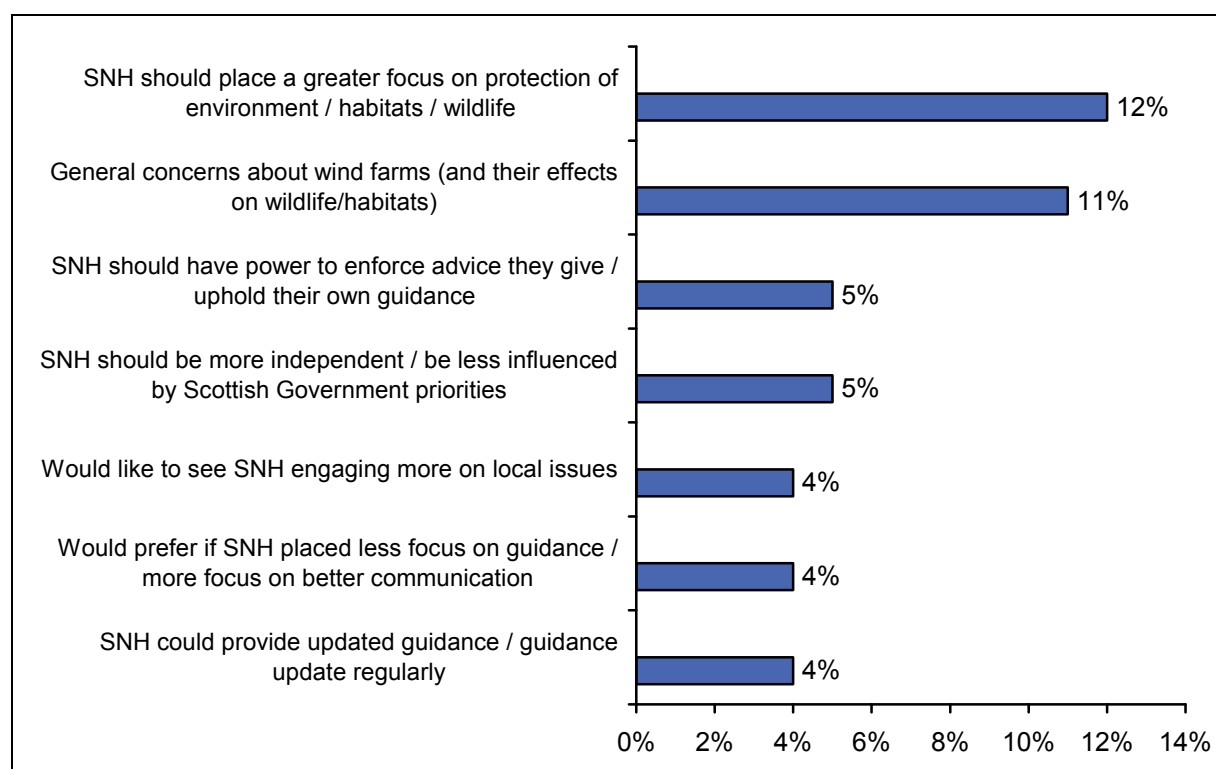
As shown in figure 14, the response to this question is very positive, with almost three quarters of respondents describing the information and / or guidance they had accessed via the website as ‘very’ or ‘quite’ useful. While 16% said this was not useful to any extent, looking at sub-group data shows that the respondents giving a ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ useful rating were predominantly from the individuals (39% said very or not at all useful),

community councils (29%) or community groups (27%). In addition, these ratings were given particularly by those respondents who have infrequent contact with SNH.

Once again, when we look at sub-group differences, higher proportions of planning authorities (94%), and government bodies and developers (both 85%) agreed that the information and / or guidance accessed through the SNH website are useful to some extent.

9.3 Possible improvements to SNH guidance

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further comment on what SNH could do to improve their guidance in order to help reduce impacts on the natural heritage. Just under half of the respondents (49%) did not provide any further commentary; and most comments were made by very small numbers of respondents (3% or fewer). The figure below shows the comments made by the largest numbers of respondents (4% and above).



Source: Q10 (Base=328)

Figure 15. Possible improvements to SNH guidance

Many of the comments made at this question related to concerns over wind farm development in general, or SNH's approach to wind farm developments.

The main suggestion was for SNH to place a greater focus on the protection of the environment, wildlife or habitats, and, in particular, that these should be prioritised over wind farm developments. Indeed, general concern over wind farm development was the theme mentioned by the next highest proportion of respondents (11%). In addition, 5% commented that SNH should be more independent or less influenced by Scottish Government priorities; again these comments related mainly to respondents' (mainly individuals) desire to see SNH object to wind farm development. There were also concerns over interpretations of a 'no comment' response from SNH, predominantly from individuals and community councils and groups. The following are typical examples:

“Try to convey some sense that SNH is actually interested in reducing impacts on natural heritage.” (individual)

“I have been disappointed in how supportive SNH have been towards wind turbines. SNH appear to show little support for preserving the beauty of our land which is being destroyed by these monstrosities. Like many organisations, the people of Scotland are not being listened to, only the government grants and businesses are driving these wholly inappropriate developments. We are rapidly losing our beautiful countryside and to no gain for those who live here.” (individual)

“Remember that all landscapes, not only the grand, majestic, towering mountains and deep mysterious lochs, but also the gentle, open agricultural landforms, are equally precious to both visitors and residents. Industrialisation of our rural areas must not be permitted to despoil what most Scots hold most dear - our precious land.” (individual)

“The question asked in the survey: ‘A ‘no comment’ response means that SNH supports the application’ is VERY relevant. Even though most people know that a ‘NO COMMENT’ statement from SNH doesn’t mean support the developers refer to it as such, even more-so when the comment is ‘SNH does not object to this development’, even after in their report they list time and time again ‘we have Serious concerns, ‘ we do not agree with the developers arguments. These kind of comments can be viewed as an overwhelming damning of the application, but still the final comments is ‘We do not object to this application. The developers, despite probably indicating in this survey, that they understand that ‘No Comment’ doesn’t mean approval they clearly try to convince Councillors and the public that it does. They even convey this interpretation in the media where it is never disputed” (individual)

The need for guidance produced by SNH to be enforceable was mentioned in 5% of responses, for example a community council respondent commented:

“It is a disgrace that SNH do not comment on smaller onshore wind developments, rely on developer’s EIAs, allow their own guidance to be ignored, cannot object unless the impact is deemed to be nationally significant (or some such qualification), allow themselves to be railroaded by developers so that initial objections get watered down into “concerns”, do not take legal action or otherwise protest when SNH objections are ignored by Ministers, and cannot produce relevant guidance that is binding and up-to-date.”

4% wanted to see SNH engaging more with local issues, rather than commenting only on those of national significance or other comments on this subject. Examples included:

“SNH should and could respond to issues of regional or significant local impact. The national interest is too high a barrier to their involvement on many developments.” (community council)

“Since SNH seem to have a hands off policy when it comes to small scale (individual) wind turbines they should at least provide guidance as to what a “no comment” response really means. Developers and planners currently interpret a “no comment” as support for a development resulting in unacceptable cumulative impact effects.” (individual)

4% said they would like to see SNH communicating more information or putting more of a focus on communications, rather than simply producing guidance. Examples include:

“Provide information to Community Councils (and hence local communities) on a) their (SNHs) responsibilities and powers relating to developments (e.g. wind farms) b) Provide best practise guidance about potential impacts of wind farms - and other large scale developments - relevant documents should be automatically be sent to Community Councils - because often Community Councils do not know what they should be reading/which documents are useful and which are not when navigating the planning mire.” (community council)

“It is sometimes frustrating to have to wait until an SNH Officer returns from leave to discuss an issue. Developers often require a quick response and it would be helpful if cover was provided. In one exceptional case I had to wait four weeks to speak to an individual. This said, the response is generally quick and invariably helpful” (planning consultant or agent)

Comments on the need for updated guidance appeared in 4% of responses. Examples included:

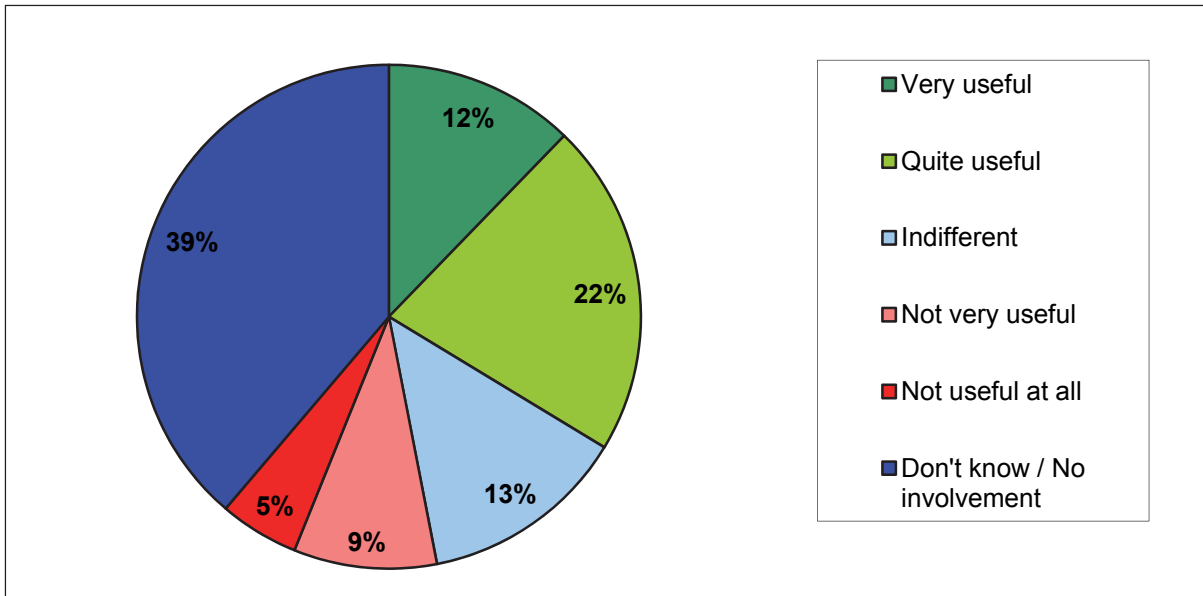
“Ensure that regular updates to guidance is provided and arrange best practice events on topical issues.” (planning authority)

“Updated guidance more frequently to take into account new issues” (developer)

Many of the comments made reflect the type of involvement that respondents have. For example, the highest proportions of those requesting more engagement at a local level were from community interests. Comments on the need for SNH to be more independent of Government, requests for a greater focus on protection of the environment / habitats and wildlife, and concern about wind farm developments came from higher proportions of respondents with community interests, individuals and other organisations.

9.4 Usefulness of SNH’s responses in relation to SEA

Customers were also asked to indicate how useful they have found SNH’s responses in relation to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).



Source: Q13 (Base=328)

Figure 16. Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA

As can be seen in the table above, higher proportions of respondents (34%) found this very or quite useful, compared to only 14% who claimed this was not useful. Sub-group data shows that higher proportions of planning authorities (50%) found this useful in comparison to 39% or less across all other sub-groups. The highest proportion of respondents claiming SNH's responses in relation to SEA are not useful, were individuals (35% compared to 17% or less across all other groups).

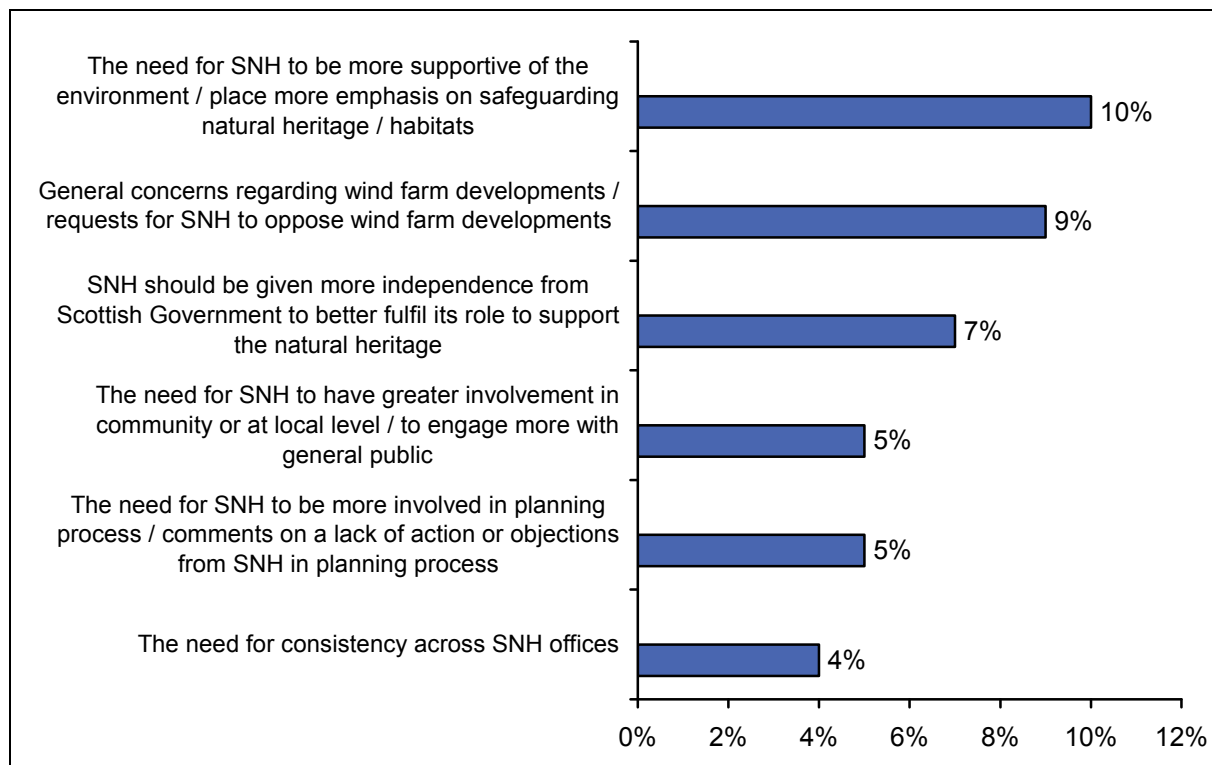
Taking out those who said don't know/no involvement (presumably due to SEA being quite a specialist aspect of the planning process) shows 56% of those who gave a rating said very or quite useful. This figure rises to 87% amongst planning authorities and 64% amongst developers.

Although direct comparisons are not possible, as questions were not asked in exactly the same way, looking at findings from a survey from 2011, the Scottish Strategic Environmental Assessment Review shows that over 80% of SEA practitioners said the Consultation Authorities (SNH, SEPA and Historic Scotland) provide useful or very useful SEA consultation services.

10. SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

10.1 Possible improvements to SNH service

Customers were asked in which ways SNH could improve its planning and development service to them.



Source: Q14 (Base=328)

Figure 17. Possible improvements to SNH service

Over half respondents (59%) chose not to respond to this question. Of the respondents who did answer, only small numbers cited any specific issue; thus indicating that there is no one area where SNH is doing badly. The points in the figure above represent answers from 4% or more of respondents; many of the points made are similar to those seen in relation to question 10.

The theme noted in the highest percentage of responses (10%) was the need for SNH to be more proactive about reporting breaches of planning conditions or to place more emphasis on safeguarding the environment, natural heritage, wildlife or habitats. For example:

“Take action where breaches of planning consent involve destruction of wildlife and habitat.” (individual)

“Serve the natural heritage and improve the quality of service to the benefit of the countryside not developers.” (individual)

Once again there were general comments opposing wind farm developments (9%), comments on the need for SNH to be independent (7%) or for SNH to object more in relation especially to wind farm developments (5%). Most of these comments were similar to those seen at question 10 (i.e. expressing concerns about SNH supporting wind farm development too much). For example:

“By becoming a body that responds to all natural heritage related issues regardless of scale and providing simple / straightforward responses. Somehow overcome the feeling that the body has been compromised by the Governments pressure to permit wind energy development regardless of its effect on natural heritage.” (planning authority)

“I cannot comment on other work that SNH does (I'm sure there are positives) but in relation to wind energy, SNH has failed to protect the wildlife, the landscape and local communities.” (individual)

A very small number of respondents had an opposite view, commenting that SNH is not as supportive of wind farm developments as it could be. For example:

“Take climate change more seriously as a threat to habitats and species. Be more flexible and proportionate on renewable energy impacts. Be less negative towards wind, particularly in relation to 'wild land', and generally less 'obsessive' towards wind energy as a threat to Scotland, picking over every minute issue. See the wood from the trees.” (developer)

5% commented on the need for SNH to have a greater involvement in or engagement with communities, the general public or at local level and comments included the following examples:

“Greater and more visual involvement and engagement with community.” (planning authority)

“Engage with the public, we know the local area, take our suggestions for viewpoints seriously.” (community/local organisation)

“Avoid seeing the developer as its 'customer'. SNH's true customer is the public.” (individual)

“More people on the ground so that local issues are better understood.” (community/local organisation)

However, several respondents (3%) did report that they have a good relationship with SNH or with their local office or that they are satisfied with the service received from SNH, for example:

“Generally satisfied with interactions I have with area office staff in relation to forestry practice & development.” (government agency)

“I have had very good working relationships with SNH staff who have been helpful, even when there are differing views.” (planning consultant or agent)

The need for consistency across SNH offices featured in 4% of responses and examples included:

“Ensure that advice given by area officers and policy and advice officers is consistent and joined up.” (planning authority)

“Chiefly, consistency in approach, advice and consultation responses. Currently, responses are strongly influenced by officers' personal knowledge, experience and priorities - leading to some inconsistent and confusing advice, even in relation to Natura sites.” (planning consultant or agent)

Many of these comments echoed those noted earlier in relation to improvements to guidance. In general, key comments relating to a need for consistency across SNH offices came primarily from developers. More respondents from within community organisations commented on the need for greater involvement in the community or safeguarding the environment. Comments in relation to SNH being a tool of the Scottish Government, needing to safeguard the environment, needing to be more involved in the planning process and a general opposition to wind farms came mainly from individuals.

11. CHANGES OVER TIME

SNH is keen to understand whether there have been improvements in customer service over time. Some of the statements on service levels were asked in the same way in 2014 as in the previous 2011 online survey among developers and planners, whilst there is similarity with questions asked in the SEA survey of 2011 and the 3rd Parties Survey of 2012.

11.1 Comparison across years

This chapter of the report compares data from this 2014 survey against data from previous customer surveys.

To allow direct comparison with the 2011 Planning and Developers survey, each of the statements is detailed below. As the previous survey only included developers and planners, we have recalculated the 2014 figures solely on the same two audiences to obtain a true comparison.

Table 6. Comparison across years

Base = 328	Difference	Agree Strongly	Agree	Neither Nor	Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Don't know
The reasons given by SNH for requests for further information are clearly explained							
2014	+4%	16	53	9	6	3	10
Previous survey		7	58	11	12	2	10
SNH's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes							
2014	+7%	11	53	12	11	6	6
Previous survey		8	49	16	13	4	11
The advice and information provided by SNH relating to development and planning is unambiguous, clear and concise							
2014	+7%	12	47	22	10	6	2
Previous survey		5	47	21	21	3	3
When dealing with a development proposal, advice from SNH has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature							
2014	+12%	18	49	14	6	3	9
Previous survey		7	48	30	7	2	5
The SNH staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed							
2014	+12%	20	50	14	7	3	5
Previous survey		13	43	17	19	3	1
SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with the advice from other agencies							
2014	+9%	9	35	29	16	6	5
Previous survey		4	31	31	22	7	5
SNH is willing to engage in pre-application discussions'							
2014	-6%	23	46	13	5	-	12
Previous survey		27	48	11	6	-	7

Table 6 shows there has been a positive movement across most of these statements. The only exception is in relation to SNH's willingness to engage in pre-application discussions which has seen a slight decrease in agreement of 6% in 2014.

Overall, it is clear that there has been an increase in respondents' satisfaction. In all bar one of the 'agreement' statements on service, the responses suggest that work undertaken by SNH in recent years to improve upon customer services levels is having a positive impact.

Also in this survey, respondents were asked to indicate how useful they found information and / or guidance accessed through the SNH website. This question also appeared in the previous online survey amongst planners and developers when 96% said they found the information and / or guidance quite or very useful. When we recalculate this year's survey to include only developers and planning authorities, this figure shows a very slight decline to 92% claiming the guidance and / or information is useful to some extent.

We also looked at results from a 2012 survey of 3rd parties involved in the planning system, compared with the individuals and other 3rd parties who responded to the current survey. These results show that respondents continue to feel that SNH guidance should be statutory. In the previous survey criticism was levelled less in relation to the information contained in guidance or the way it is presented, and more in relation to the fact that it is only guidance, which can be ignored by those who wish to ignore it. Similarly in this survey, 5% overall and 12% and above of 3rd parties commented that SNH should have the power to enforce the advice they give or uphold their guidance. This again is an indication that some respondents, particularly individuals, may be misunderstanding, or are dissatisfied, with SNH's role in the planning system.

The small number of respondents in the current survey who have been involved in Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) are largely positive about the usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA. Again, although not directly comparable, a review of strategic environmental assessment (SEA) practitioners; the Scottish Strategic Environmental Assessment Review (2011); concluded that "Over 80% of practitioners consider the consultation authorities (CAs) provide useful or very useful SEA consultation services" (SEPA, SNH and Historic Scotland are designated statutory Consultation Authorities). In the current survey, 87% of planning authority respondents gave SNH a rating of very or quite useful in relation to the usefulness of their responses in relation to SEA.

12. CONCLUSION

This survey of planning and development customers has allowed SNH to identify which areas of its work are functioning well in terms of customer satisfaction. The main messages from the survey are:

- Feedback is broadly positive, with SNH's role in the planning process being well regarded.
- Awareness of the two SNH planning and development-related Service Statements is relatively low and there are some clear differences between different customer groupings and the extent to which their views are positive about SNH's role in the planning process.
- While planners and developers are especially positive, it is clear that many individuals and communities do not understand or agree with SNH's role.
- Feedback suggests room for improvement regarding: consistency of advice across the organisation; providing clear, concise and unambiguous advice; and achieving outcomes for landscape and nature on the ground.

Some of the areas for improvement are already being tackled through SNH's Casework Improvement Initiative and its current research assessing the added value of guidance. However, other areas for improvement require further thought and consideration alongside its partners. For example, SNH needs to manage expectations by increasing awareness of its role in the planning process and our service level statements, and explain why there is some inconsistency with advice from other agencies.

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Policy and Advice Directorate, Great Glen House,
Leachkin Road, Inverness IV3 8NW
T: 01463 725000

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