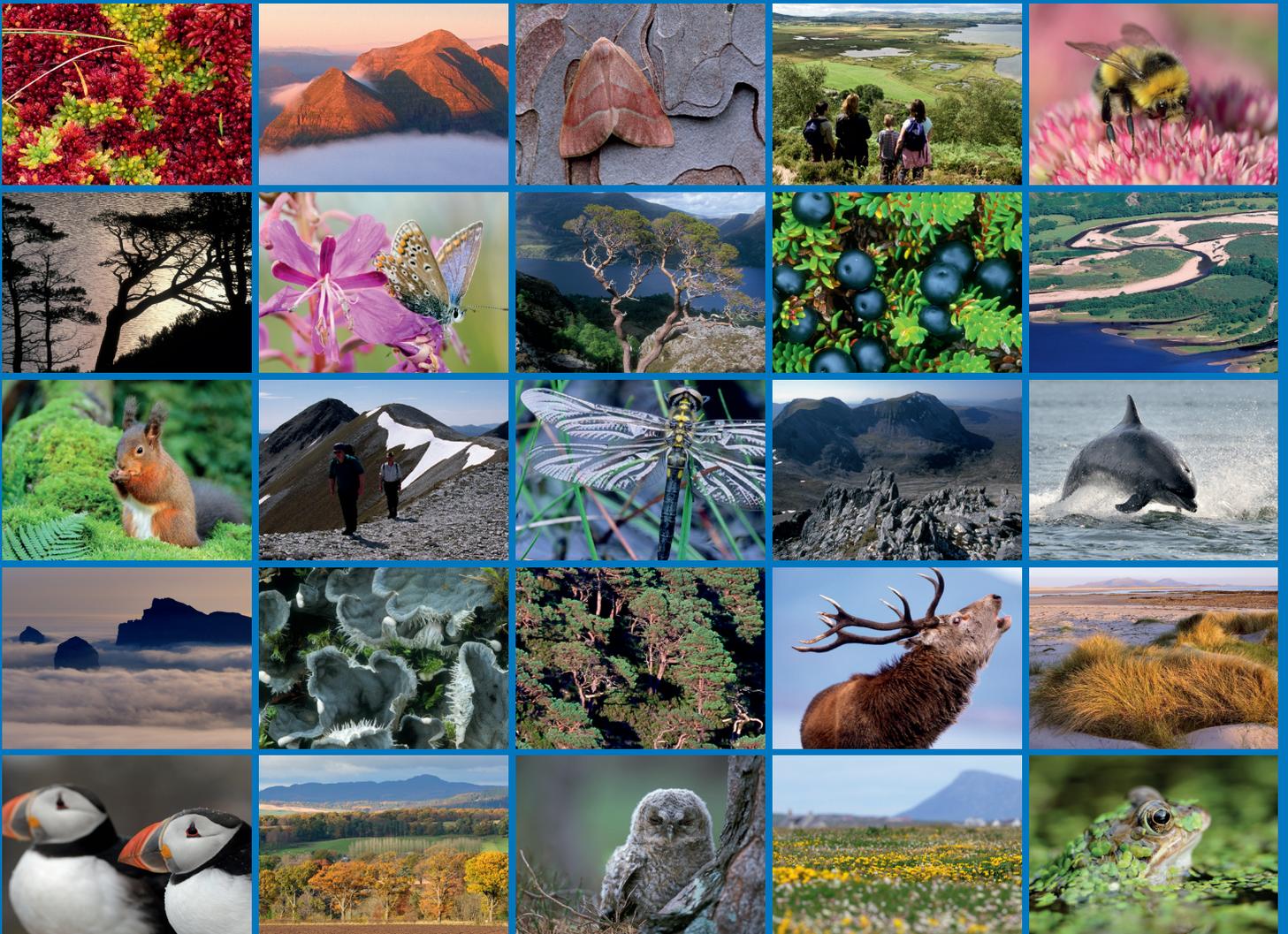


Planning for development – customer survey 2018 (inc. 2015-2018 summary)





Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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

RESEARCH REPORT

Research Report No. 1077

Planning for development – customer survey 2018 (inc. 2015-2018 summary)

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RESEARCH REPORT

Summary

Planning for development – customer survey 2018 (inc. 2015-2018 summary)

Research Report No. 1077
Project No: 016097
Contractor: Why Research
Year of publication: 2018

Keywords

Customer satisfaction; planning and development; advice; services; guidance; service statement; contact

Background

SNH commissioned Why Research to undertake the fourth annual customer satisfaction surveys covering its planning for development customers. The purpose was to gather evidence to inform SNH's judgements about service improvement and support SNH's commitment to continuous improvement.

Main findings

- The findings from the 2018 Customer Survey are positive:
 - Overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH remains high.
 - Most customers agree that SNH's approach to advice and guidance is enabling.
 - Awareness of the SNH Service Statement appears to be increasing.
 - Views on the guidance produced by SNH are positive.
- The main areas where respondents would like to see improvements are in consistency of advice within SNH as well as clarity and conciseness of guidance.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

SNH commissioned Why Research to carry out a fourth annual customer survey amongst its Planning for Development customers. The purpose was to gather evidence to inform SNH's judgements about service enhancement and support SNH's commitment to continuous improvement.

1.2 Comparison with previous surveys

The 2018 survey asked many similar questions to those used in the 2014, 2015 and 2016 surveys in order to gather consistent information on any changes in customer views.

However, in 2018, data protection issues meant that a much smaller sample of customers was invited to participate. The resulting 81 responses showed a markedly different profile to that seen in the previous surveys. In 2018, a far higher proportion of respondents was individual interests, or belonged to NGOs and special interest groups, compared with previous surveys.

In addition, sub-group differences could not be tracked between the previous surveys and the 2018 version. This was due to the very small base sizes in each group (for example, the planning authority base size in 2018 was 18, compared with 120 in 2016). As a result, direct comparisons with the previous years' surveys are not possible and any data relating to the 2018 survey should be taken as indicative only.

Key messages across the four surveys are included in the full report.

Top level findings from the 2018 survey are outlined below.

1.3 2018 Findings

1.3.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

The majority (76%) of respondents agree that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

1.3.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling

The main comment, albeit seen in only eight responses, was the need for SNH to comment on more planning applications, or be stronger in its objections to development proposals.

1.3.3 Contacting SNH

Almost three-quarters (72%) say it is easy to contact relevant SNH staff.

1.3.4 SNH's planning services

The planning services accessed by the greatest proportions of respondents are guidance relating to planning and development (accessed by 84%) and guidance relating to awareness of natural heritage assets (accessed by 80%).

Respondents were presented with a list of statements about SNH services and asked the extent to which they agree with each. Many more respondents agree than disagree with each statement, although significant proportions 'sit on the fence' and give a 'neither/nor' or 'don't know' response.

The statement with the highest proportions agreeing to some extent was: 'At Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, SNH's engagement is influential' (59% agree).

The statement with the highest proportions disagreeing to some extent was: 'SNH's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes' (16% disagree).

Respondents were also presented with a list of statements about advice provided by SNH. Views in relation to many of the statements were positive, although – as with the statements on service – significant proportions sit on the fence. However, for each of the statements, higher proportions agree to at least some extent than disagree.

The statement with the highest proportions agreeing to some extent was: 'SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process' (64% agree).

The statement with the highest proportions disagreeing to some extent was: 'SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies'. In this case, 28% agree to some extent and 22% disagree to some extent.

1.3.5 SNH's Service Statement

There is a good level of awareness of the SNH Service Statement. Well over half of respondents (64%) were aware of the Service Statement; this includes over a third (37%) who have read it. Overall, 36% were not aware of the Service Statement.

1.3.6 Guidance

Respondents were given a list of guidance documents and, for each, were asked to say whether they were aware of it, had read it, or were not aware of it.

A majority of respondents were aware of pieces of guidance relating to EIA, wind farm, scoping and pre-application, but there was less awareness of guidance on more specialised topics such as 'Large scale solar photovoltaic installations: Considering landscape, visual and ecological impacts (Jan 2016)'.

More respondents agree than disagree with a range of statements relating to guidance, although again a significant number of respondents neither agree nor disagree.

A majority of respondents consider the information provided by SNH relevant (75% agree), useful (74%), easy to find on the website (53%), well laid-out (53%) and lacking in any jargon (50%). However, fewer than half feel that guidance is concise (39% agree) or unambiguous (37%).

1.3.7 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. A large majority of respondents (85%) described this material as either very or quite useful. Only 9% said this was not useful to any extent.

When asked to make suggestions for improvements to guidance, one key suggestion was to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamlined.

1.3.8 Planning and Development e-newsletter

Most of those who were aware of the newsletter found it useful (86%).

When asked to say what else SNH could do to help other organisations consider natural heritage assets, the most popular suggestion was to host a programme of sharing good practice events.

1.3.9 Usefulness of SNH's responses on SEA

Respondents were asked to indicate how useful they have found SNH's responses on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) consultations. Higher proportions of respondents (41%) found this very or quite useful, compared with 5% who felt this was not useful.

1.3.10 SNH's focus

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of SNH's efforts in a range of areas and they identified pre-application discussion as the area on which most people would like to see SNH focus their efforts. Design frameworks, development briefs and master planning attracted least support.

1.3.11 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

A large majority agree that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed); 79% agree to some extent while 19% disagree.

1.3.12 Satisfaction

When asked about their overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH, respondents gave an average score of 6.61 out of a possible 10.

Those respondents who had not given a score of 10 out of 10 were asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10. The main theme, in 18% of responses, related to a need for SNH to safeguard or support the environment or natural heritage.

1.4 Key Messages

Looking at trends across the four surveys from 2014 to 2018, in many cases, where there are higher proportions of professional respondents, rather than individual-interest, ratings tend to be higher.

Many respondents from each of the surveys agree that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes. However, there are concerns about advice from staff being inconsistent, ambiguous or perceived as not constructive enough, particularly from people representing professional bodies, rather than individual-interest, respondents.

Views in relation to many of the statements relating to advice given by SNH were positive.

The statement with the highest proportions agreeing to some extent was: 'SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process'.

The statement with the highest proportions disagreeing to some extent was: 'SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies'.

The statement 'SNH's advice is unambiguous, clear and concise' shows higher scores in those surveys with higher proportions of professional respondents.

Views on SNH guidance are positive, especially in relation to usefulness and relevance. However, the statement: 'Guidance given is unambiguous' has consistently seen the lowest level of agreement. Once again, where there are higher proportions of professional respondents, support for the usefulness of SNH guidance is higher than in surveys with higher proportions of individual-interest respondents.

In comments made by respondents, the main theme which emerges is the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamlined.

While respondents agree that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed), once again the percentages agreeing increase in the surveys where there are higher proportions of professional respondents.

Similarly, overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH in general is also higher where there are higher proportions of professional respondents.

When asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10 out of 10, the main theme across all the four surveys was the need for more consistency within SNH.

2. INTRODUCTION

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) 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. The organisation promotes good practice widely and helps to care for local nature and landscapes which are of national and international significance. Its success depends on working with others.

2.1 A need to gather feedback and update information on customer satisfaction

Customer feedback plays an essential role in helping SNH provide an effective Planning for Development service. To gather this feedback, SNH has conducted several pieces of research among customers it works with via the Planning System and other development-related processes. These have included a [customer survey 2014](#), [customer survey 2015](#), [customer survey 2016](#), [research on SNH's influence on natural heritage outcomes](#) and [research on the effectiveness of its guidance](#).

In line with its commitment to continuous improvement, SNH appointed Why Research Ltd, an independent market research company based in Edinburgh, to undertake a customer survey in 2014. Why Research Ltd was appointed again to undertake three further annual customer surveys from 2015 to 2017/18. In October 2015 and 2016 the first two of these three online surveys were conducted.

In February 2018 the customer survey was repeated, although a number of amendments to the questions were made following feedback from respondents. These aimed to make the survey quicker and easier to complete.

2.2 Comparisons with previous surveys

As well as changes to the questionnaire, data protection requirements meant that the sample used to invite respondents to participate in 2018 was greatly reduced, resulting in 81 completed surveys (compared with 363 in 2016).

The 81 responses also showed a markedly different profile to what was seen in the previous surveys. In 2018, a far higher proportion of respondents were individual interests, or belonged to NGOs and special interest groups, compared with previous surveys.

In addition, sub-group differences could not be tracked between the previous surveys and the 2018 version. This was due to the very small base sizes in each group (for example, the planning authority base size in 2018 was 18, compared with 120 in 2016).

2.3 Respondent Profile information

As mentioned above, data protection issues meant that the sample used for this survey was greatly reduced. Invitations to participate were sent to 200 individuals and organisations that have had contact with SNH; this was a large reduction from the 2,796 invited to participate in 2016. In order to increase coverage, invitations were also issued via organisations such as Heads of Planning Scotland and RSPB Scotland.

A total of 81 responded to this survey. Although this is a very high response rate (40%), it was still very low in absolute numbers compared with previous years (for example, 363 responses in 2016).

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

The profile seen in 2018 is markedly different to that seen in 2016 and we suggest that this reflects the difference in the sample used to invite customers to participate. For example, the planning authority base size in 2018 was 18, compared with 120 in the 2016; in addition, only four developers replied in 2018, compared with 41 in 2016.

This does mean that direct comparisons with the previous years' surveys are not possible at a sub-group level and, in addition, any data from the total sample relating to the 2018 survey should be taken as indicative only.

2.4 Respondent groupings

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

Figure 1, overleaf, shows the respondent groupings.

Where possible, we have included 2014 data, although the groupings used were not exactly the same as in 2015 and 2016.

It should be noted that in 2014 there was a far higher proportion of 'individual' respondents than in any other year.

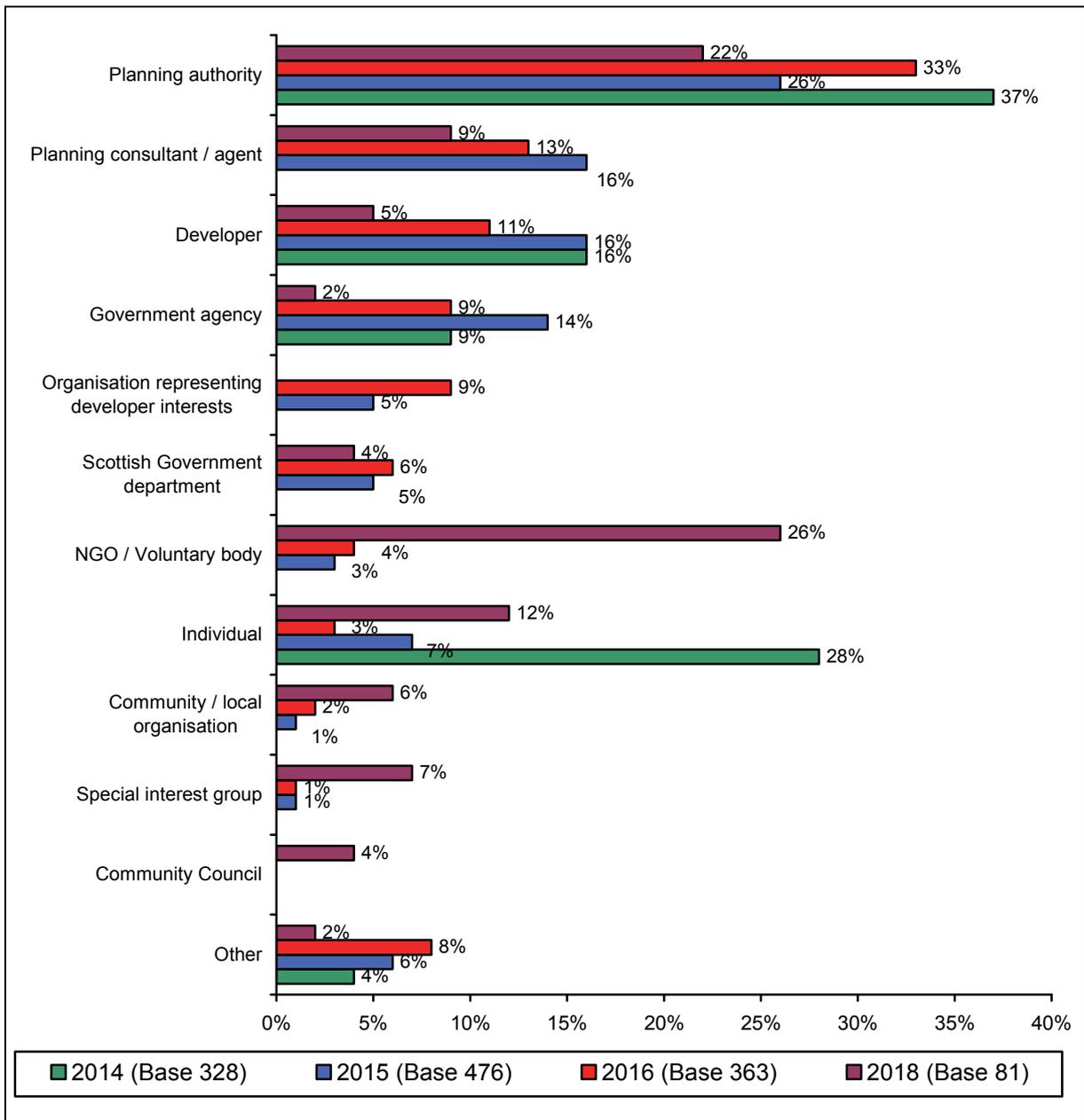


Figure 1. Respondent groupings (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

Source: Q1

As shown in Figure 1, the four groups with the highest proportions of respondents in 2018 were NGOs/Voluntary organisations (26%), planning authorities (22%), individuals (12%) and planning consultants or agents (9%).

This data is quite different to that seen in the 2016 survey, when the four groups with the highest proportions of respondents were planning authorities (33%), planning consultants or agents (13%), developers (11%) and government agencies (9%).

In the reports relating to the previous surveys, we looked at different types of respondents to ascertain whether or not there are differences in responses across different groups. However, given the small number of respondents in the 2018 survey, none of the subgroups have large enough base sizes for sensible comparison, so this analysis has not been included in this report.

2.5 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 mainly relates to. Respondents from the public sector (i.e. planning authorities, Scottish Government departments and government agencies) were not asked to provide this information, as their involvement covers many business sectors or aspects of the planning system.

Once again, the profile of respondents is quite different to that seen in 2016. As shown in Figure 2, while around two out of five respondents to the 2018 survey said they are involved in renewables (41% compared to 26% in 2016), over half said they were involved in nature conservation (51% compared to 12% in 2016).

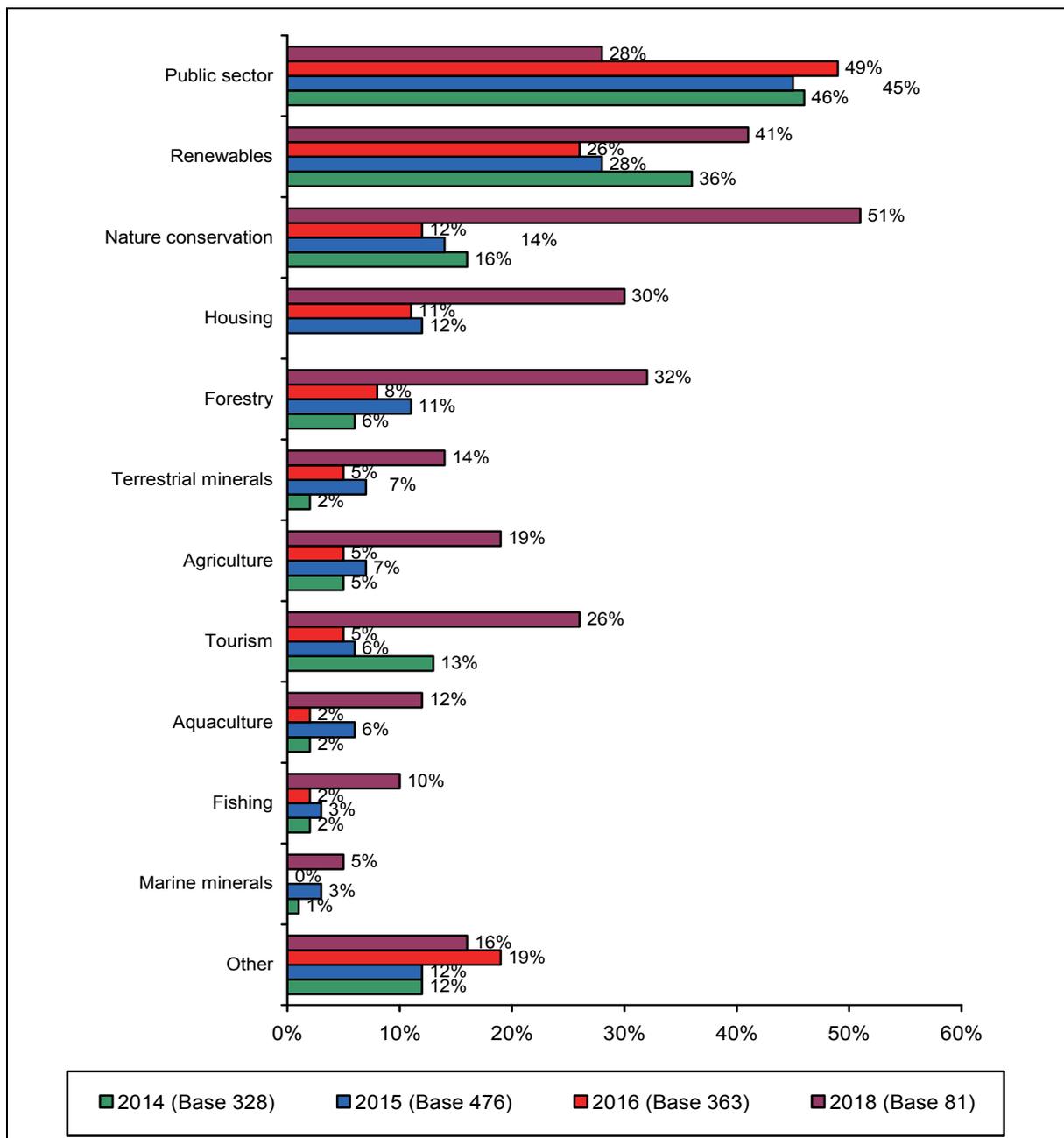


Figure 2. Primary area of business or involvement (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

Source: Q2a & Q2b

2.6 Area of involvement in renewables

Respondents were also asked to say in which area of renewables, if any, they were involved.

As Figure 3 demonstrates, onshore wind accounts for the greatest proportion of 2018 respondents (37% compared with 20% in 2016) and almost a quarter are involved in hydro (23% compared with 13% in 2016).

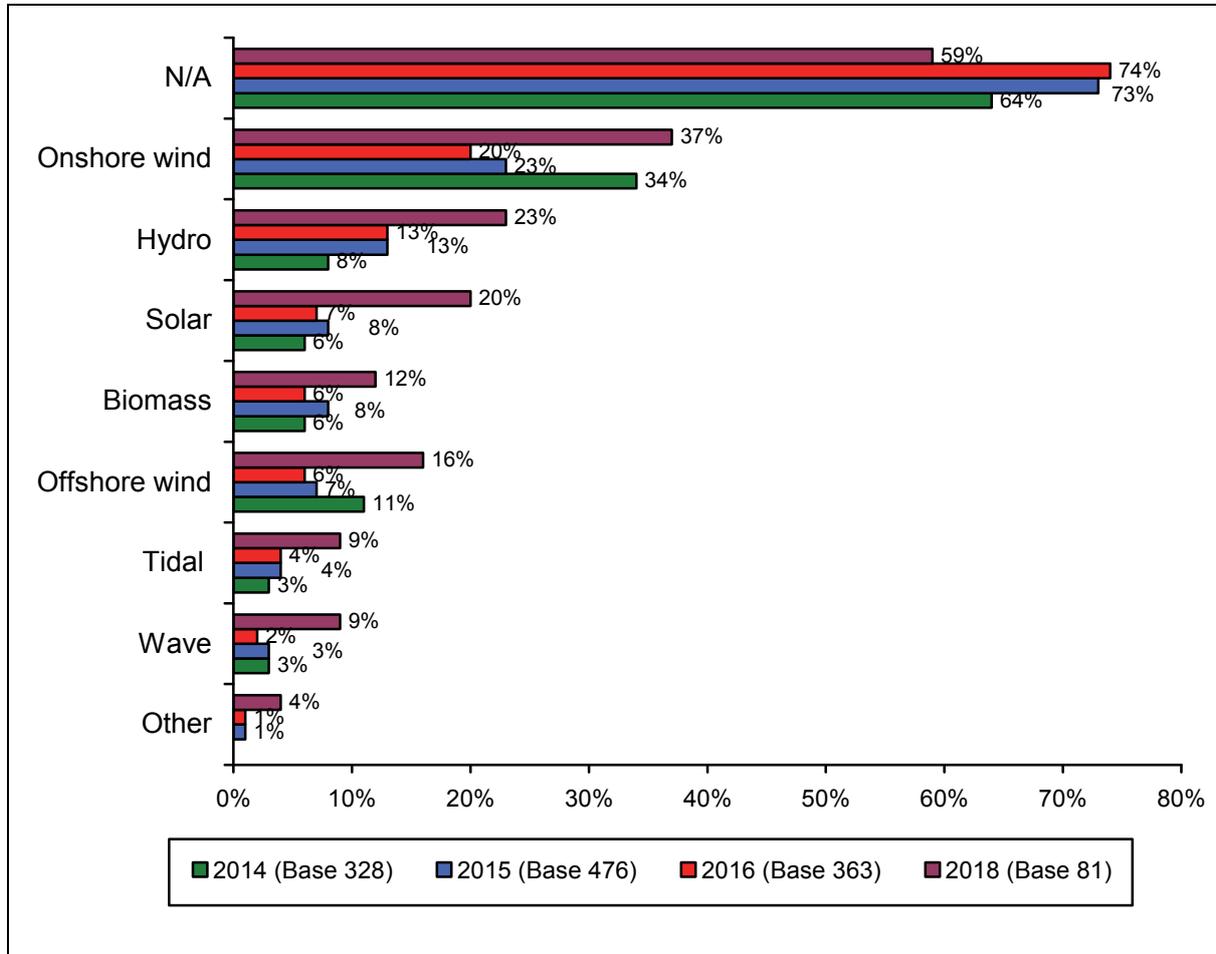


Figure 3. Area of involvement in renewables (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

Source: Q2ai & Q2bi

2.7 Involvement with Environmental Impact Assessment

Respondents were also asked: 'If you are involved with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), at which stages are you involved with SNH?'

As was the case in 2015 and 2016, most were involved at the Scoping stage or in the Environmental Statement. The 2018 figures are:

- Before Scoping (38%)
- Scoping (49%)
- Environmental Statement (48%)
- Other (16%)
- Not involved with EIA (40%)

3. FINDINGS FROM THE 2018 SURVEY

This chapter presents the findings from the 2018 survey.

3.1 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 agree or disagree that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

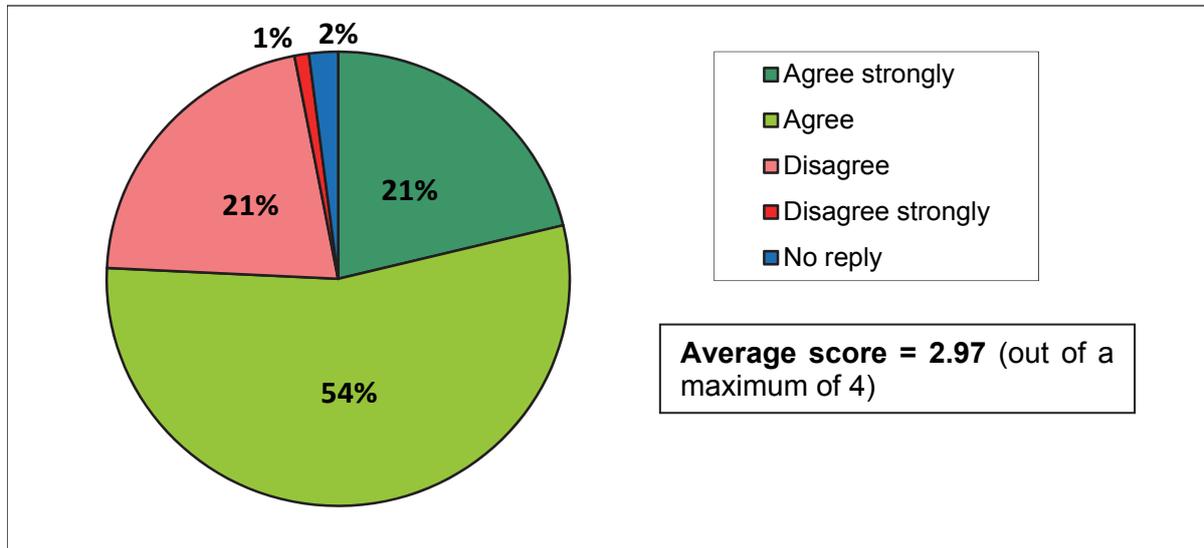


Figure 4. SNH's contribution to planning process 2018

Source: Q19a (Base=81)

As can be seen in Figure 4 above, results to this question are positive, with a majority (75%) agreeing that SNH makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

3.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling

A new question was added in 2016 and repeated in 2018: 'Please can you give any specific examples of where SNH could have been more enabling or made a more positive contribution to the planning system'. Comments were received from 36 respondents and the main themes noted in responses are outlined below.

General comments on the need for SNH to comment on more applications, or be stronger and clearer in their advice, were seen in eight responses, for example:

"By trying to be 'enabling', SNH can be the opposite. A clear message that development is not acceptable is often more enabling and preferable to developers, who can then move to more suitable sites to progress development with less conflict. SNH frequently try too hard to be sympathetic to development on sites which are plainly not suitable, giving developers false hope and prolonging the process" (NGO/Voluntary).

"... SNH facilitate development far too much in favour of the developer even where there is a potential risk to qualifying species, habitats and landscapes. I know that Scottish Government insist that development must proceed if at all possible, but things have gone too far in one direction, putting our heritage at undue risk" (NGO/Voluntary).

“The Declaration Statement has only led to frustration at local level, especially when officers request information or indeed ask SNH as a Statutory consultee to comment on important planning applications in our area. The public are told that they cannot help because of staffing levels. The impression they give is that they are comfortable sitting on the fence. Guidance is all very well but it is not advice, particularly as SNH have a better overview and are able to call on a range of experts. Local Authorities are not and will never be in that position. I have always been a great supporter of SNH but now I feel they have lost their way... very sad” (Planning authority).

Eight respondents commented on specific local issues or planning applications where, they felt, SNH could have provided more detail, been more robust in its involvement, or made objections. For example:

“A more robust follow up regarding licence application and discharge for Japanese knotweed at a housing development site in my community” (Community Council).

“Comments in local development consultations - specific example: additional site assessments for East Renfrewshire. For example here SNH comments say that some sites have ancient woodland on them but make no reference to how development on these sites is not acceptable/ there is a strong presumption against developing on ancient woodland” (NGO/Voluntary).

Five respondents felt that SNH should be less cautious in its support for some developments, or to reach a decision more quickly:

“There can be a tendency for SNH to be over-cautious about supporting a specific development, where there turns out after long discussions to be no adverse impact in the eyes of SNH, but it took a long time (too long?) for them to work that out. Seems that in quite a lot of cases, SNH spend a lot of time checking on detail despite the project being eventually agreed to be not damaging to environment” (Planning agent).

The need for closer engagement with and support for local communities and voluntary groups was mentioned by four respondents:

“SNH could be in touch with local people and/or groups in the places where changes in the natural landscape affecting plant, animal and human lives are being decided. The role of locals already disenfranchised by decision making being centralised is crucial to saving our greenspace and landscapes and all in them, for the future” (Local organisation).

Other comments included:

- The need for more or closer liaison with industry (two responses).
- The need for more, or more easily accessible, case officers (two responses).
- Being, or continuing to be, a strong advocate for the natural heritage – or specific aspects of the natural heritage (two responses).
- The need for clearer, practical advice – in general, or on specific issues such as wild land (two responses).
- Concern that SNH is influenced by the Scottish Government (one response).
- Concern over the weight given to ‘no comment’ responses from SNH (one response).
- The need for clarification where there is overlap with the role of the local authority (one response).
- The need to work more closely with other agencies such as Marine Scotland (one response).

3.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

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

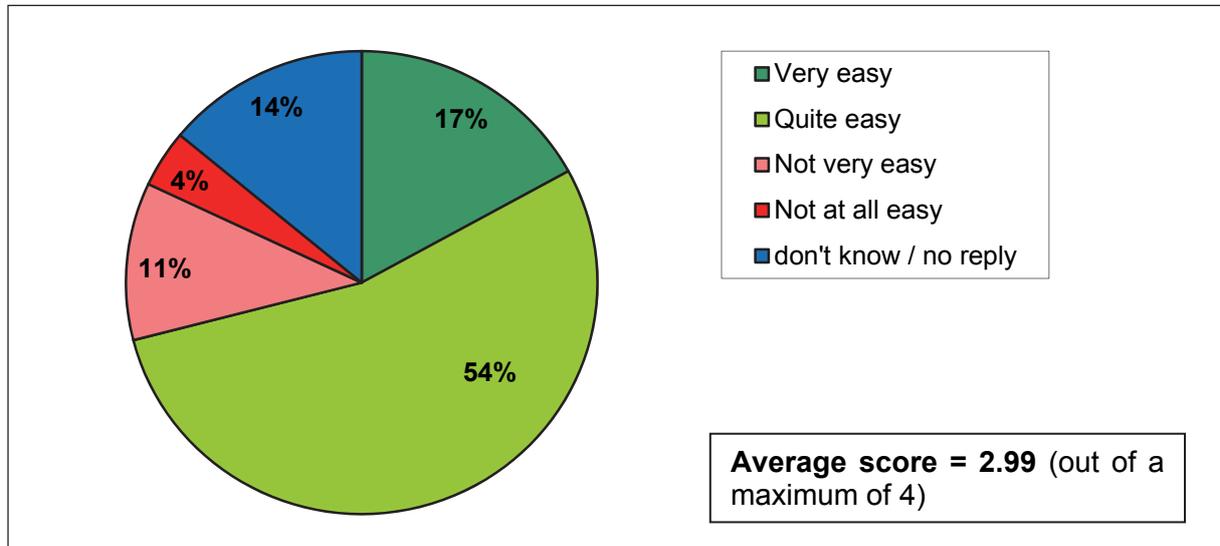


Figure 5. Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

Source: Q4 (Base=81)

As shown in Figure 5, views on contacting relevant staff at SNH are positive, with almost three quarters (72%) of respondents agreeing, to some extent, that it is easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH. This compares to only 15% who feel that it is not easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH.

3.4 SNH services used

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

Respondents were asked which services they had used and whether these had been mainly accessed directly (through SNH correspondence: by letter or email) or indirectly (through the SNH website).

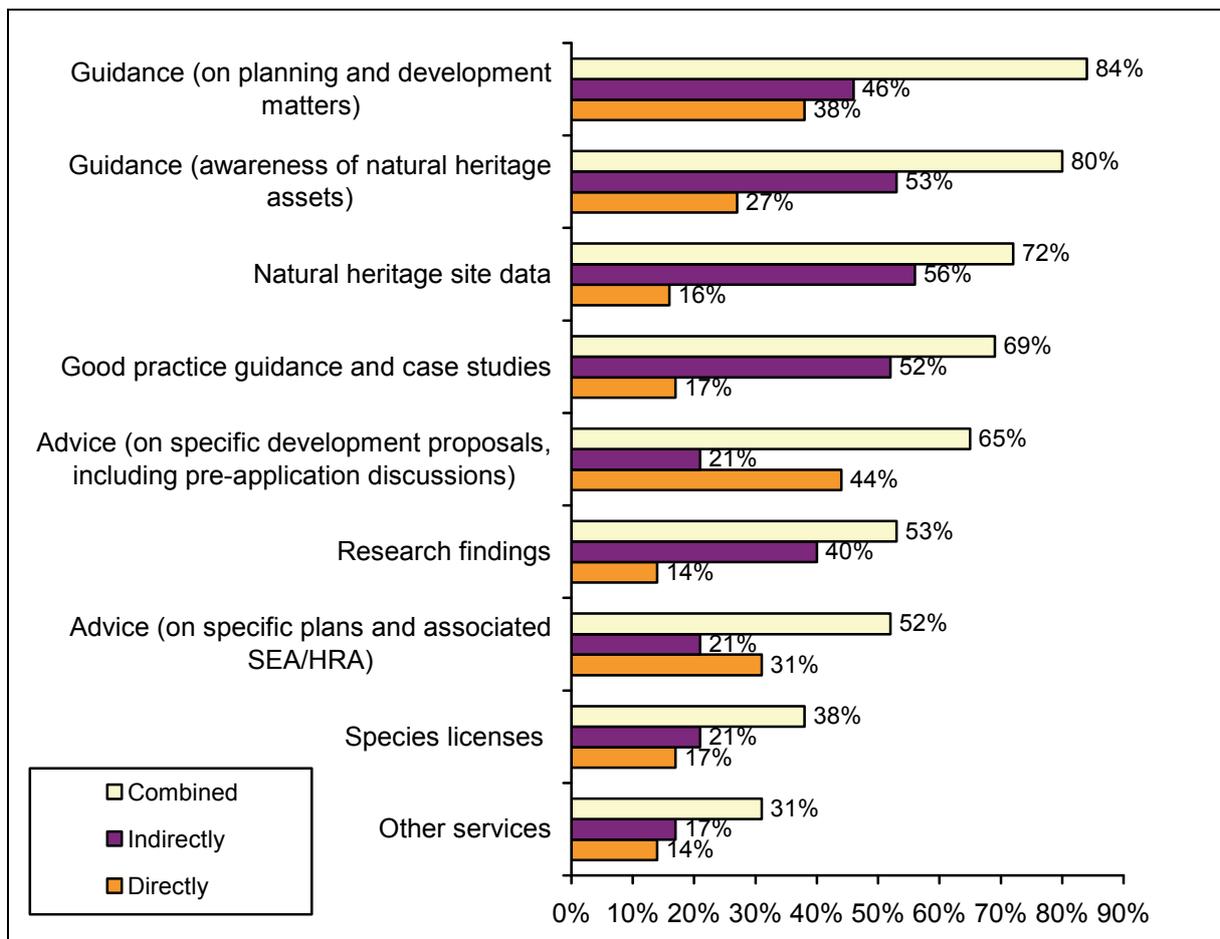


Figure 6. SNH services used

Source: Q11 (Base=81)

As Figure 6 demonstrates, numbers accessing SNH services are high, with over half having accessed most named services either directly or indirectly.

Looking at services accessed directly shows that advice on specific development proposals, including pre-application discussions, was made use of by 44% of respondents.

3.5 Views on SNH services

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. Seven of these statements related specifically to SNH services and eight related to advice provided by SNH. Figure 7 shows responses relating to views on SNH services.

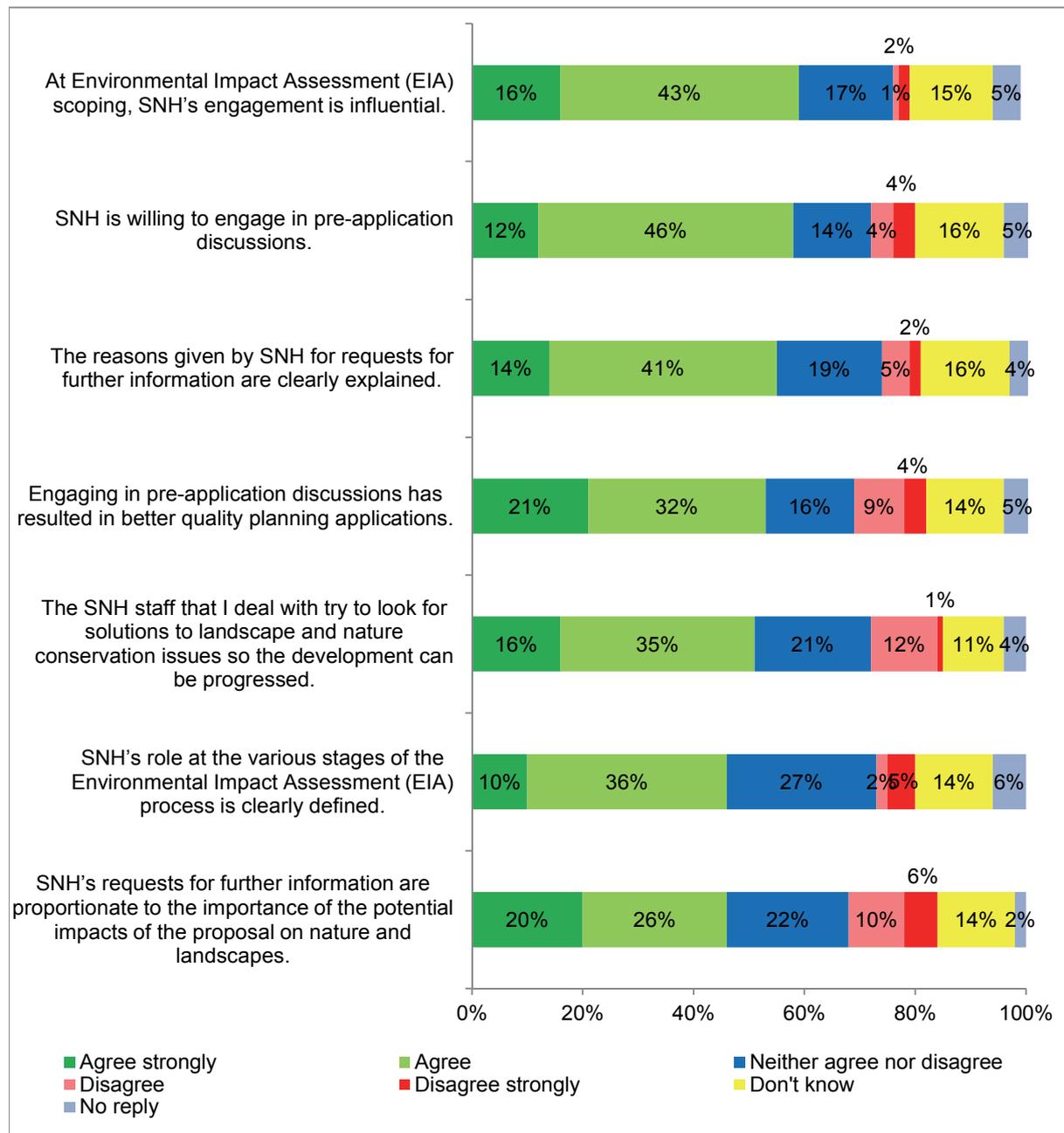


Figure 7. Views on SNH services

Source: Q12 (Base=81)

Figure 7 shows that views were positive. Many more respondents agree rather than disagree with each statement, although significant proportions give a neither/nor or don't know response.

In two of the statements, a majority did not agree – although numbers disagreeing were still very low: ‘SNH’s role at the various stages of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process is clearly defined’ (46% agree to some extent) and ‘SNH’s requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes’ (46% agree to some extent).

3.6 Views on advice given by SNH

Respondents were also asked for their agreement or disagreement with a range of statements on advice given by SNH. Figure 8 shows the findings.

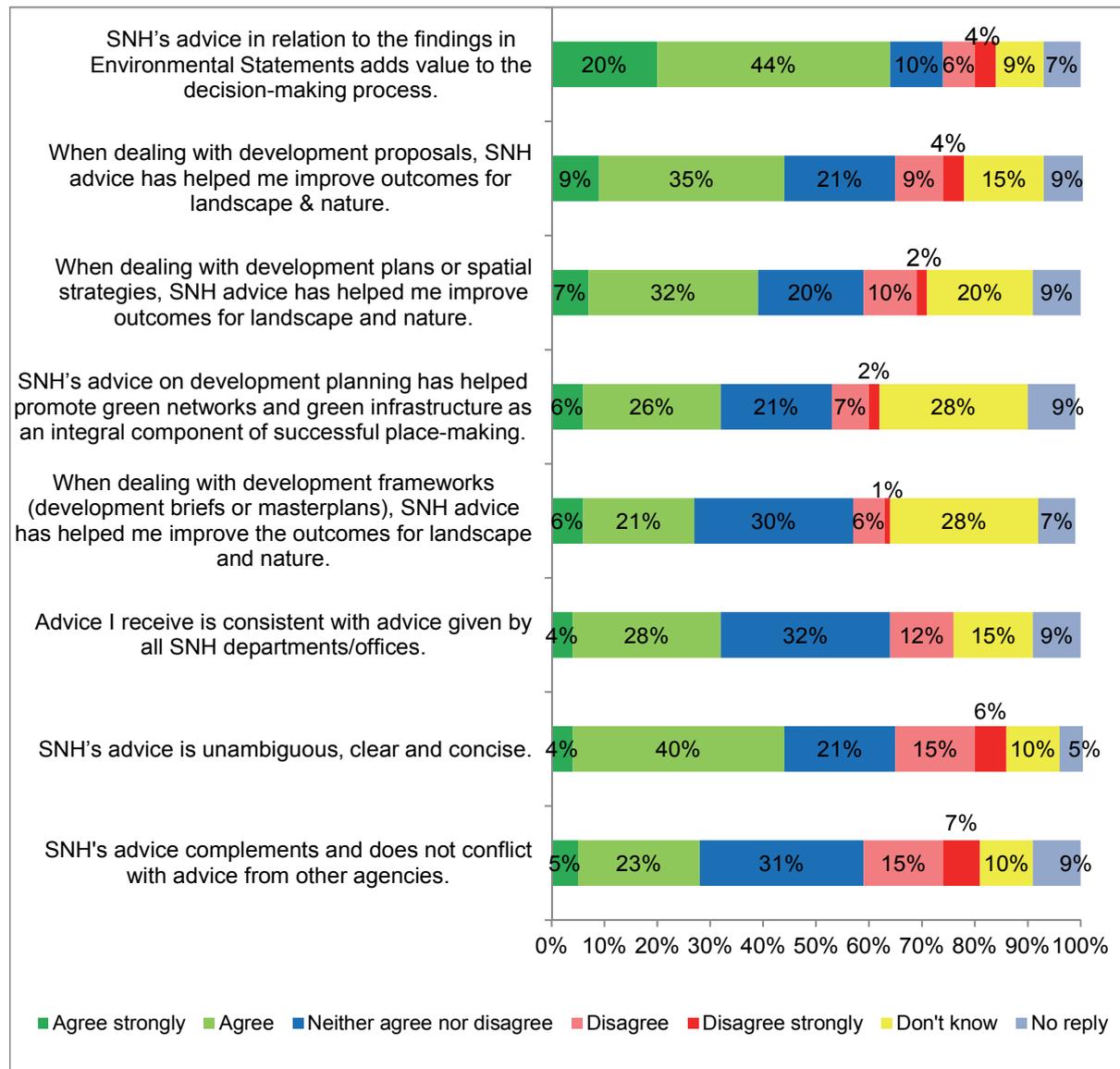


Figure 8. Views on advice given by SNH

Source: Q13 (Base=81)

As shown in Figure 8 above, views in relation to many of the statements were positive although, as with the statements on service, significant proportions give a neither/nor or don't know response. However, for each of the statements, higher proportions agree to some extent than disagree.

The statement with the highest proportions agreeing to some extent was: ‘SNH’s advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process’ (64%).

The statement with the highest proportions disagreeing to some extent was: ‘SNH’s advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies’; 28% agree to some extent while 22% disagree to some extent.

3.7 Examples of inconsistencies

Respondents who disagreed with the statements ‘SNH’s advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies’ or ‘Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all SNH departments/offices’ were invited to provide examples of inconsistencies in advice that they have experienced either between SNH departments or between SNH and other agencies – 13 respondents provided examples.

These respondents identified a range of agencies and NGOs where they felt there were inconsistencies, with no one body showing a large number of mentions.

3.8 Awareness of SNH Service Statement

As well as satisfaction, SNH is keen to know about levels of awareness around its Planning for Development Service Statement.

All respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of the SNH Service Statement and a link to ‘Planning for Development - Our Service Statement’ was provided within the survey for respondents to access.

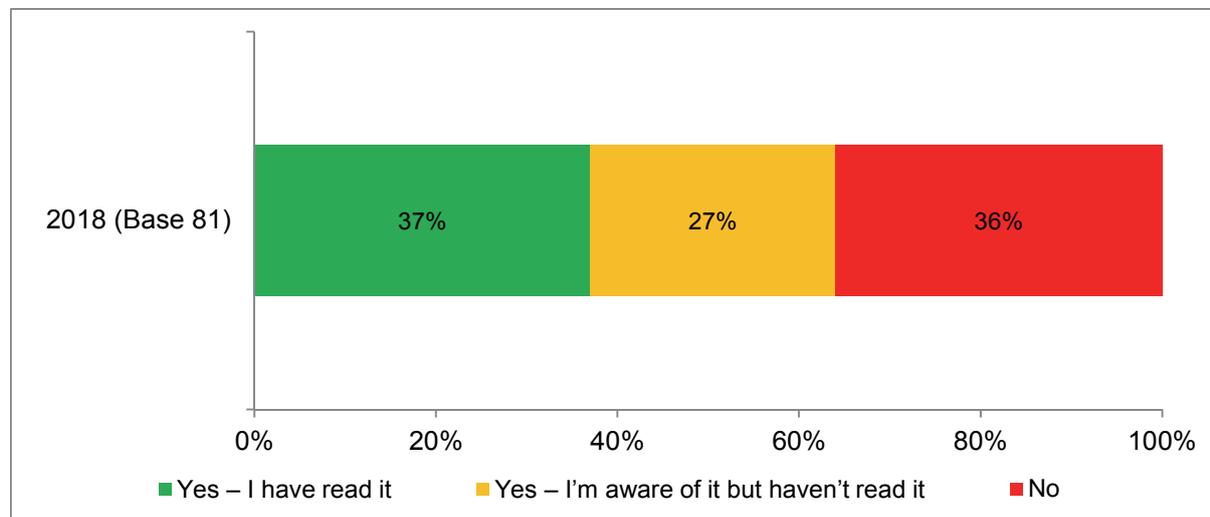


Figure 9. Awareness of Service Statement

Source: Q5

Figure 9 shows that views are positive, with well over half of respondents (64%) being aware of the Service Statement. This includes over a third (37%) who have read it.

Overall, 36% were not aware of the Service Statement.

3.9 Awareness of SNH guidance

SNH is keen to obtain views on the guidance it produces. It is integral to its 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 about to SNH guidance.

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of various pieces of guidance (available at <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/planning-and-development>) produced by SNH.

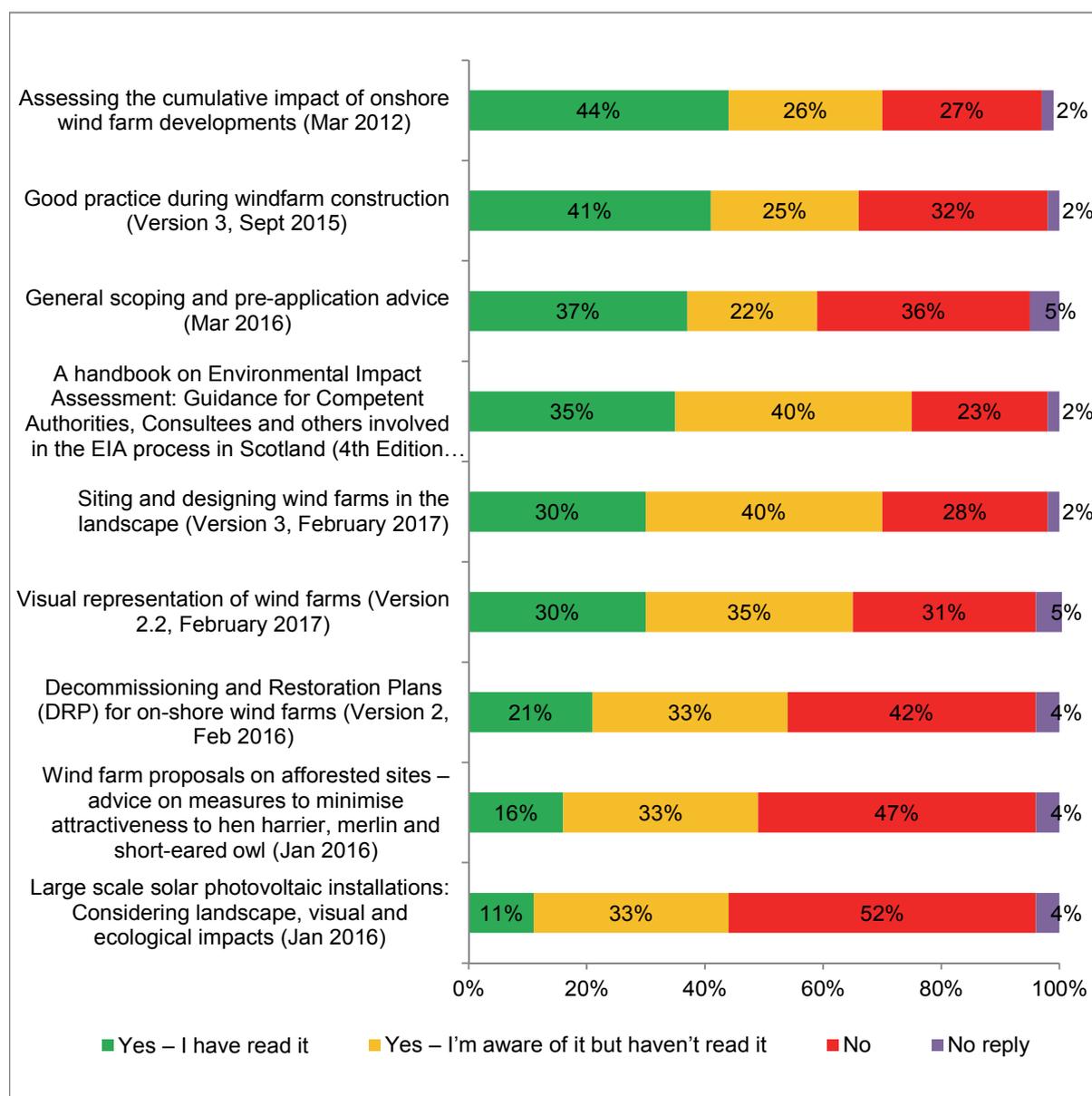


Figure 10. Awareness of SNH guidance

Source: Q6 (Base=81)

As can be seen in Figure 10, over half of respondents were aware of most of the guidance; 'Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind farm developments (Mar 2012)' had the highest level of respondents who had read the guidance (44%).

Fewer than half of respondents were aware of two of the more technical pieces of guidance:

- 'Large scale solar photovoltaic installations: Considering landscape, visual and ecological impacts (Jan 2016)' (44% aware).
- 'Wind farm proposals on afforested sites – advice on measures to minimise attractiveness to hen harrier, merlin and short-eared owl (Jan 2016)' (49% aware).

3.10 Views on SNH guidance

More respondents agree than disagree with a range of statements relating to guidance, although again a significant number of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, as Figure 11 demonstrates.

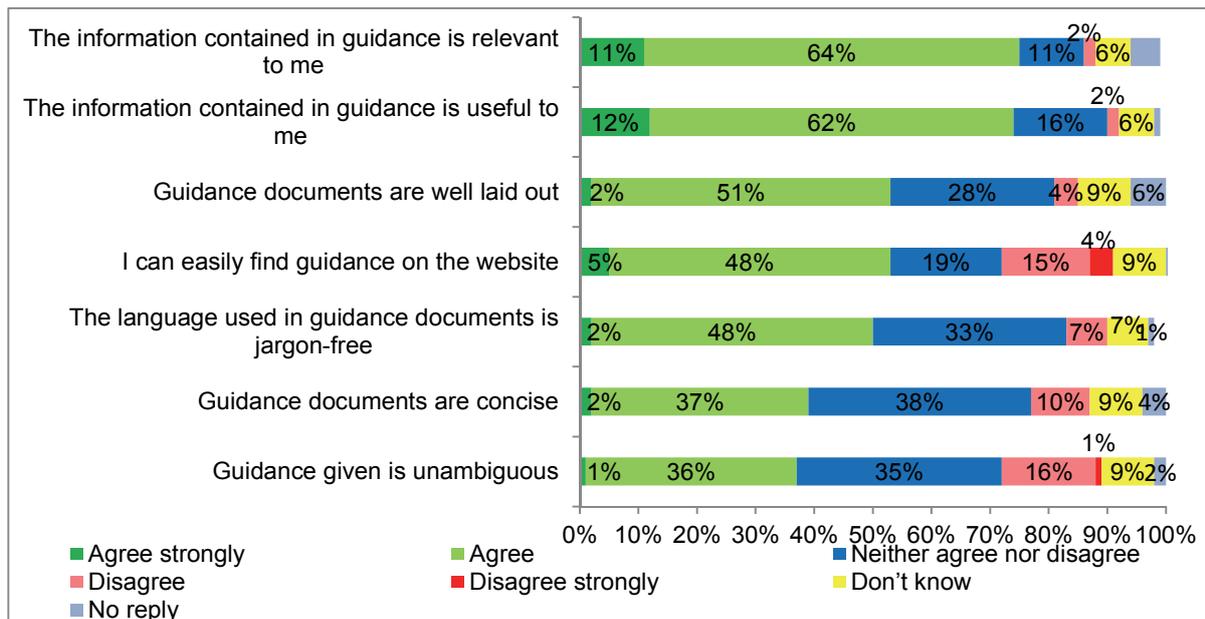


Figure 11. Views on SNH guidance

Source: Q7 (Base=81)

Views are relatively positive, with half or more of respondents agreeing with most of these statements. Importantly, high proportions of respondents agree that information contained in guidance is relevant or useful, and only very small proportions disagree with this:

- The information contained in guidance is relevant to me (75% agreeing compared with only 2% disagreeing).
- The information contained in guidance is useful to me (74% agreeing compared with only 2% disagreeing).
- Guidance documents are well laid-out (53% agreeing; 4% disagreeing).
- I can easily find guidance on the website. (53% agreeing; 19% disagreeing).
- The language used in guidance documents is jargon-free. (50% agreeing; 7% disagreeing).

The data suggests that there is a need for SNH to provide guidance that is concise and unambiguous given that the lowest levels of agreement are for these two statements. The data also points to the need for the website to clearly signpost respondents to guidance given that almost one in five respondents disagree that they can easily find guidance on the website.

3.11 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.

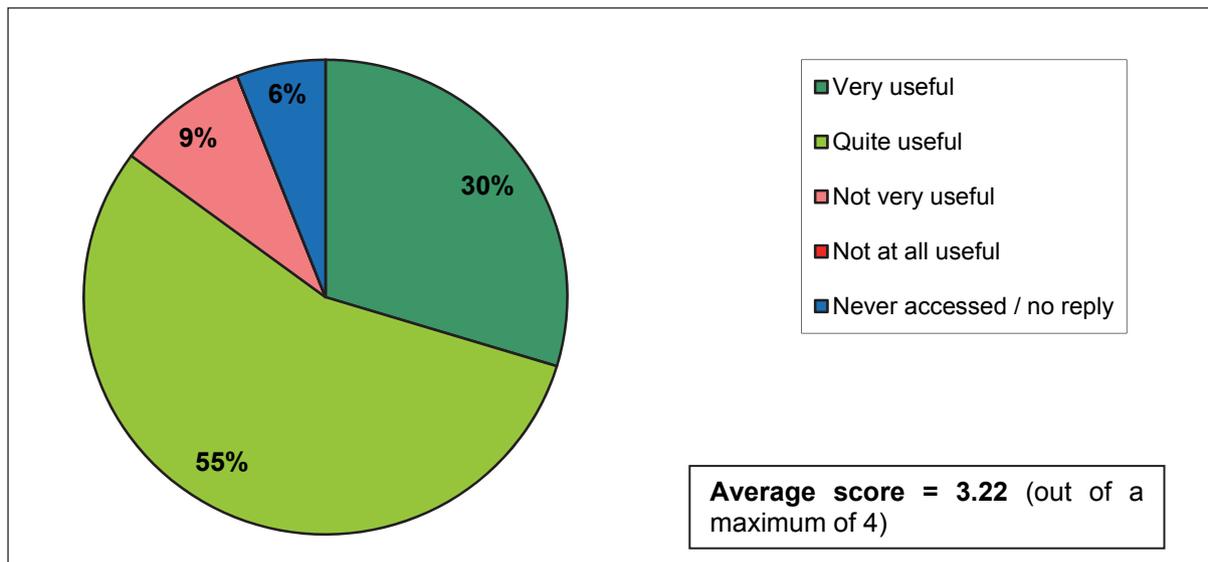


Figure 12. Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH's website

Source: Q15 (Base=81)

As shown in Figure 12 above, the response to this question is very positive with the majority of respondents (85%) describing the information and/or guidance they had accessed via the website as very or quite useful. Only 9% said this was not useful to any extent.

3.12 Possible improvements to SNH guidance

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further comment on what SNH could do to improve its guidance in order to help reduce impacts on the natural heritage – 54 people provided comments.

A number of key themes emerged, albeit that each was noted by relatively small numbers of respondents. These comments tended to echo themes emerging to earlier questions, with some respondents pointing to the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and unambiguous, and more concise or streamlined. We have already noted the importance of clear signposting on the website and it is perhaps not surprising that some respondents wanted to see guidance more widely publicised and / or accessible. There were also some requests for the provision of good practice and case studies. The following paragraphs highlight the number of respondents commenting on each theme and provide some verbatims to illustrate the points being made.

A main theme, mentioned in 9 responses, was the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamline. An example comment is:

“Greater structure and better summaries. Contact details of relevant people who can help should further queries arise” (Planning agent).

Eight respondents wanted to see guidance, or updated guidance, more widely publicised and accessible:

“Advertise their existence in wildlife magazines and local newspapers” (NGO/Voluntary).

“Better notification/advertisement when publishing new or updated guidance, ensuring that consultants and developers take account of all current guidance at the appropriate time” (Planning agent).

Eight respondents commented on the need for improvements to the website, or to e-communications:

“Improve the website and improve accessibility for members of the public” (NGO/Voluntary).

“Make it easier to find, since the new website I have really struggled to find information” (Scottish Government).

“I lately had an incidence of searching for SNH guidance online and the only guidance I came across was, unbeknownst to me, out of date and located on the old SNH web page. Luckily this came to light when I contacted SNH about a related matter and no real harm was done. However the revised guidance was not available online, and the old web page should definitely be taken down to ensure no such errors can occur” (Ecological consultant).

The need for less-ambiguous guidance (and more consistent application of guidance by SNH) was noted in six responses:

“I think that SNH guidance could be less ambiguous. In the context of planning this would help both those trying to conserve and enhance the environment, and also those trying to develop it. For example, giving developers guidance such as ‘there is a strong presumption against removal of ancient semi-natural woodland, [...]’ could be phrased to say that developments on ancient woodland are not acceptable under any circumstances so that it is clear for developers that they should not waste time with planning applications on areas with this irreplaceable habitat” (NGO/Voluntary).

There were comments on the need for SNH to engage more with local communities or planning staff; five respondents commented, with an example comment being:

“SNH really need to interact more with the local community and local people, in the way guidance is set out. Locals possibly know a lot more about their natural heritage and impact or possible impact from development, yet their evidence is not given up front by SNH or any other organisation. Guidance is so presented it really considers other groups before it thinks of locals. By taking more recognisance of local knowledge alongside that of LEA experts this could improve the guidance given” (Local organisation).

Five respondents suggested case studies or examples of good practice:

“Is there scope to include more references to case studies to illustrate good practice and allow further investigation to help with your own proposal” (Planning authority)

Other, more general, comments included:

- The need for SNH to take a stand against all damaging developments and/or not to be swayed by political concerns (4 mentions)
- The need for SNH to give advice on all, not just national, developments (3 mentions)
- That knowledge and advice is more valuable than guidance (2 mentions)

3.13 Planning and Development e-newsletter

In 2016, a new question was added asking respondents: ‘Did you find SNH’s Planning and Development e-newsletter useful?’ and this was repeated in 2018. Figure 13 shows that findings are relatively positive with most of those who were aware of the newsletter did find it useful (38% of the total or 86% of those aware of the e-newsletter) compared to only 6% who did not find this useful.

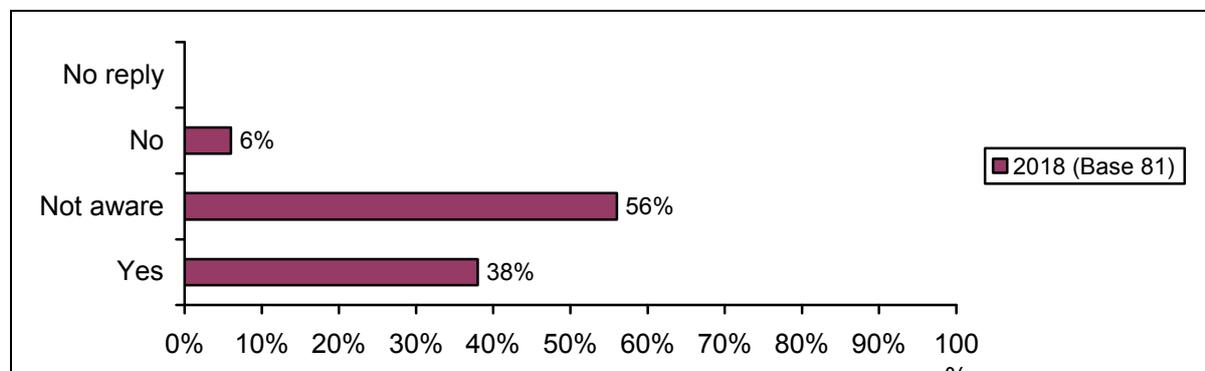


Figure 13. Usefulness of SNH’s Planning and Development e-newsletter

Source: Q10

3.14 What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

Respondents were also asked to say what else SNH could do in support of the guidance to better help other organisations consider natural heritage assets. The data suggests that face-to-face contact and opportunities to discuss issues are important, with hosting a programme of sharing good practice events providing the most popular suggestion, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

	2018 %
Host a programme of sharing good practice events	78
Deliver capacity building and/or continued professional development training	54
Develop online, interactive scenario-based eLearning activities	42
Deliver a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals	41
Develop video podcasts that demonstrate best practice and guidance in action	36
Other	20
Don’t know/no reply	2

Source: Q9

The main theme from those who selected ‘Other’ was the need for SNH to engage more with local communities as well as local planners and developers.

3.15 Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA

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

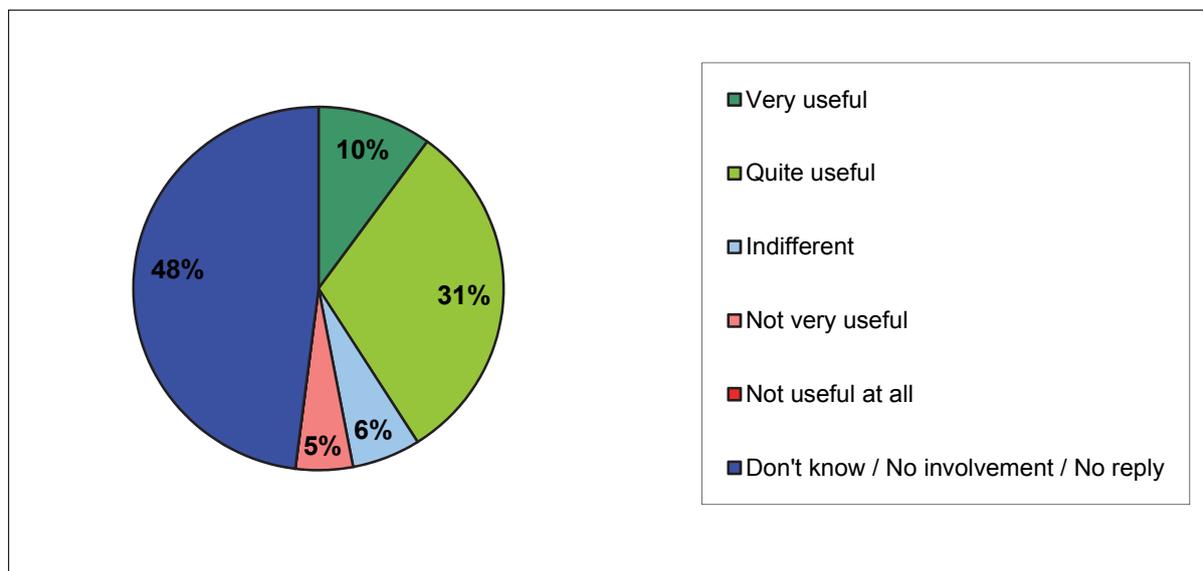


Figure 14. Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA

Source: Q16 (Base=81)

As can be seen in Figure 14, views on the usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA are positive with a greater proportion of respondents (41%) finding this very or quite useful, compared with only 5% who felt this was not useful. 48% replied 'don't know' or said that they had no involvement in SEA.

3.16 SNH's focus

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of SNH's efforts in a range of areas and table 2 shows that views were largely positive across each of these areas, The table below shows the average scores (out of a possible 10) for each area.

Table 2. Focus of SNH efforts

	Average 2018
Pre-application discussion	8.47
Strategic and Local Development Plans	8.45
Habitats Regulations Appraisal	8.38
Strategic Environmental Assessment	8.27
National plans	7.93
Building capacity in others through guidance and training (2015: Capacity building)	7.75
Design frameworks, development briefs, masterplanning	7.67

Source: Q17

3.17 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed).

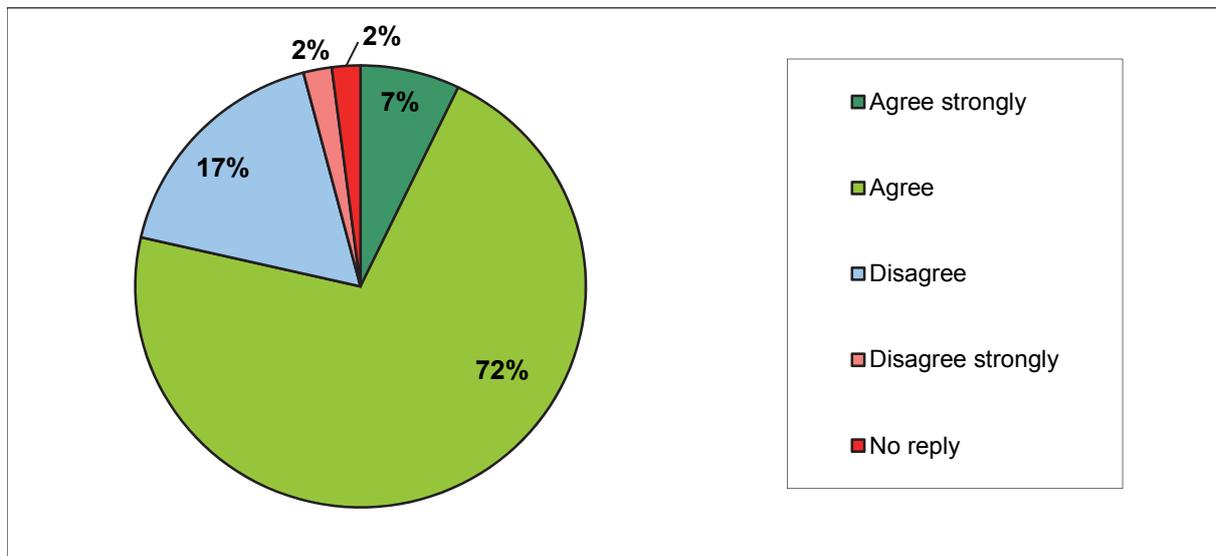


Figure 15. Whether SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling

Source: Q19 (Base=81)

As shown in Figure 15 above, views were positive, with most respondents agreeing that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling; 72% said they agree while 7% said they agree strongly. Just under one in five disagreed.

3.18 Satisfaction with SNH's service

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating highest satisfaction.

The average score for 2018 was 6.61 out of 10.

Looking at actual scores given by individual respondents:

- Only two respondents (one from the NGO/Voluntary grouping and one local organisation) said they were not at all satisfied
- 44 (54%) gave a score of 7, 8 or 9
- 3 (4%) respondents gave a score of 10 (completely satisfied); these came from the Planning Authority and Government Agency groupings.

3.19 Improvements to SNH's service

Finally, those respondents who had not given a score of 10 out of 10 were asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10.

51 respondents commented in response to this question; some of whom echoed themes already cited such as the need for SNH to safeguard the natural environment or the need for consistency from SNH staff.

Figure 16 shows the comments made by the largest numbers of respondents (6% and above).

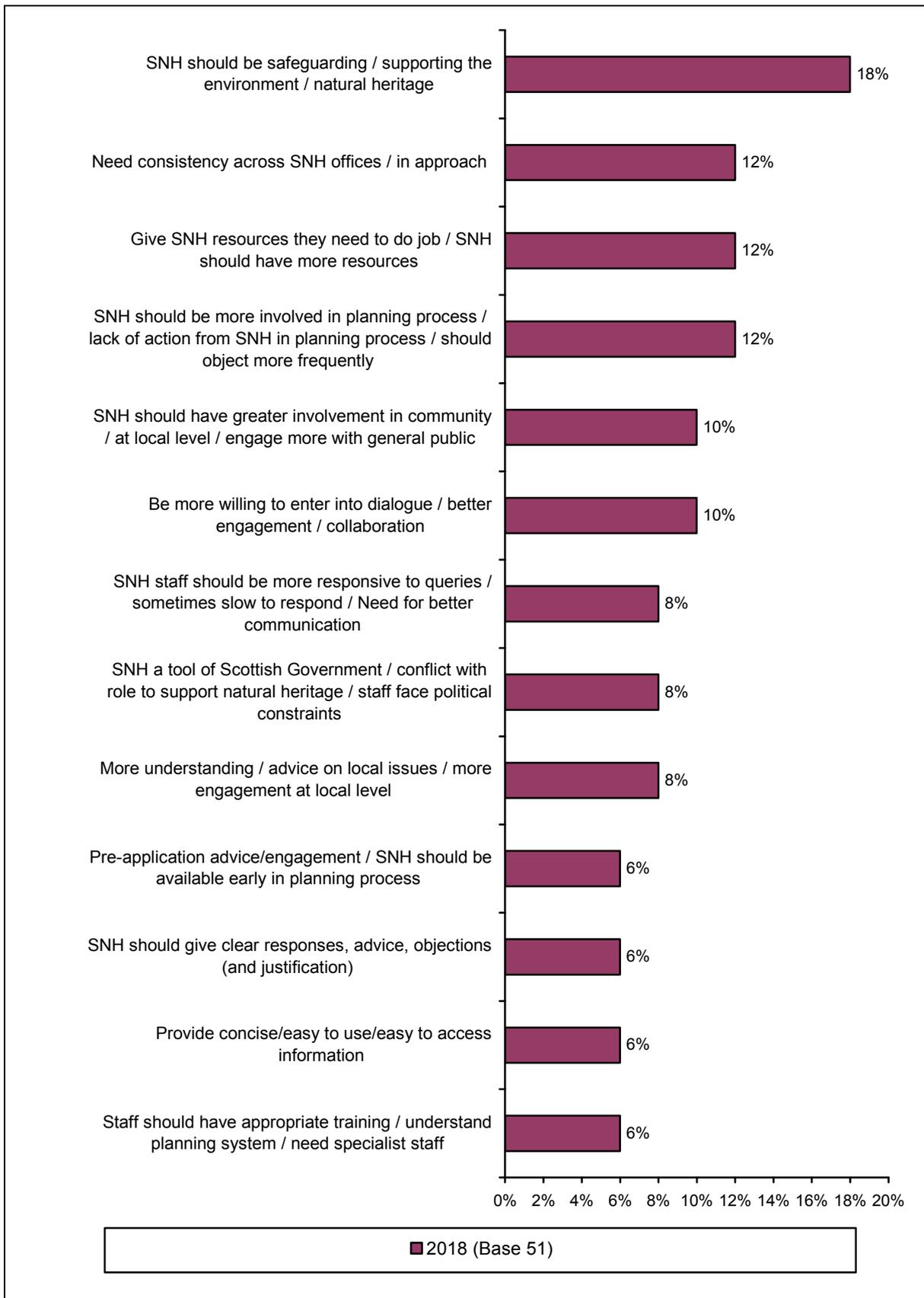


Figure 16. What SNH could do to achieve 10 out of 10

Source: Q20b

The main theme in 2018 was that SNH should be safeguarding or supporting the environment or natural heritage (18%, or 9 respondents).

Below are some typical quotes from the main themes (10% or over; 5+ respondents) in 2018:

That SNH should be safeguarding or supporting the environment or natural heritage:

- *“Be a stronger advocate for our natural heritage especially when under pressure”* (NGO/Voluntary).

The need for consistency across SNH offices or for consistency in approach:

- *“Offer a consistent answer, every time, within every area”* (Scottish Government).

Give SNH resources they need to do job/SNH should have more resources:

- *“We recognise the continual loss of funding from government and the impact on staff numbers which has led, and continues to do so, to SNH not having the time or staff to either monitor the planning system or comment on or take an active role in considering development or conservation issues in the way that it used to”* (Special interest group).

SNH should be more involved in planning process/lack of action from SNH in planning process/should object more frequently:

- *“Be more prepared to take a stance in planning related matters instead of always taking the backseat”* (Planning authority).

SNH should have greater involvement in community/at local level/engage more with general public:

- *“Make crucial changes in which LOCAL people have a say in what happens in their areas. Assist local people by training, events and educational opportunities relevant to their own areas. Answering queries promptly when a group or individual asks for assistance. Do more walk overs alongside local communities and less desk exercises. Allow communities to assist in the production of responses to planned developments and in reporting which affects planning. Each community will have within it great expertise and local knowledge which is crucial to FAIR PLANNING in the future”* (Local organisation).

Be more willing to enter into dialogue/better engagement/collaboration:

- *“Become a strong voice in the planning process that actually highlights impacts on natural heritage and objects / offers mitigation ideas accordingly”* (NGO/Voluntary).

4. DATA ACROSS THE FOUR SURVEYS

This chapter looks at the data collected across the 4 surveys.

As mentioned previously, data protection issues meant that the sample used for the 2018 survey was greatly reduced. Invitations to participate in this survey were sent to 200 individuals and organisations who have had contact with SNH. This was a large reduction from the 2,796 invited to participate in 2016. A total of 81 people responded to the 2018 survey. Although this is a very high response rate (40%), it is very low in absolute numbers compared with previous years (e.g. 363 responses in 2016).

In addition, the profile of respondent types seen in 2018 is markedly different to that seen in 2016. This reflects the difference in the sample used to invite customers to participate. For example, the number of planning authority respondents in 2018 was 18 (22% of the sample), compared with 120 (33%) in the 2016; four developers replied in 2018 (5%), compared with 41 (11%) in 2016.

This does mean that direct comparisons with the previous years' surveys are not possible, either overall or at a sub-group level.

However, to give a picture of the data collected in each year, this chapter shows the data from each of the surveys.

Given the smaller 2018 base size and the difference in respondent profile, it is difficult to say whether any changes shown here reflect a difference in respondent views or are caused by the difference in profile.

Where possible, we have included 2014 data, even although the groupings used were not exactly the same as in 2015 and 2016. In 2014, there was a far higher proportion of 'individual' respondents.

Hence, data from 2014 and 2018 should be taken as indicative only.

4.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

Figure 17 shows the results from a question asked in 2014 and 2015 (on agreement or disagreement that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes) and a similar question asked in 2016 and 2018 (Overall, do you agree or disagree that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes?).

At this question an average score was calculated to enable comparisons where:

- Strongly agree = 4
- Agree = 3
- Disagree = 2
- Strongly disagree = 1

Thus, the nearer to 4 the average score, the higher the level of agreement.

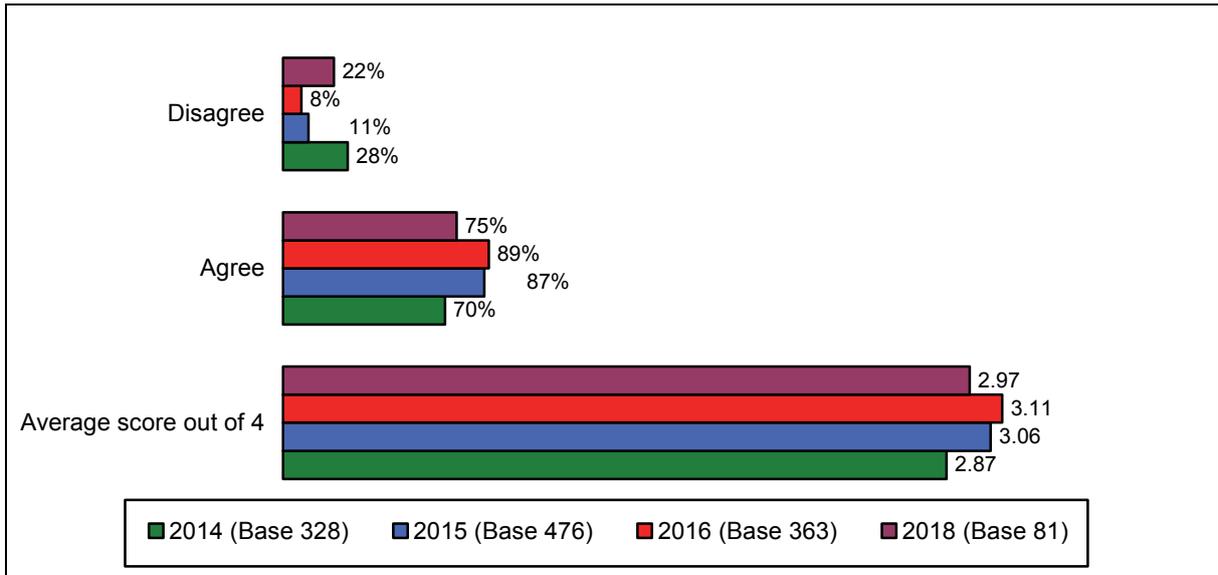


Figure 17. SNH's contribution to planning process (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

4.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling

A new question was added in 2016 and repeated in 2018: 'Please can you give any specific examples of where SNH could have been more enabling or made a more positive contribution to the planning system'.

The main themes seen in 2018 responses were:

- General views on the need for SNH to comment on more applications, to be stronger in its objections, or less pro-development.
- Specific local issues or planning applications where, respondents felt, SNH could have provided more detail, been more robust in its involvement, or made objections.

The main theme seen in 2016 was about advice from staff being inconsistent, ambiguous or perceived as not constructive enough. However, this was not noted in 2018 responses.

4.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

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

In 2018, views remain broadly positive, with almost three quarters (72%) of respondents agreeing, to some extent, that it is easy to contact the relevant staff at SNH. This is slightly lower than the figures from 2015 (79%) and 2016 (78%).

Figure 18 shows the changes since 2014.

Again, an average score was calculated to enable comparisons where:

- Very easy = 4
- Quite easy = 3
- Not very easy = 2
- Not at all easy = 1

Thus, the nearer to 4 the average score, the higher the perception of ease of contact.

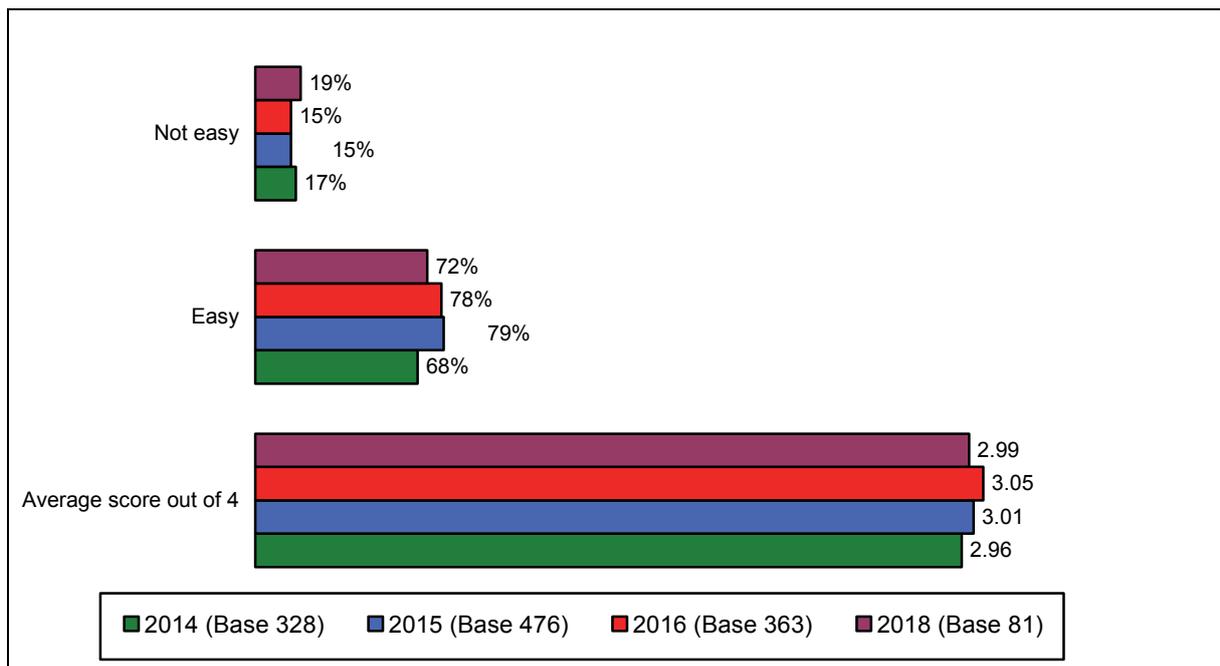


Figure 18. Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

4.4 SNH services used

SNH offers a wide range of services to organisations, communities and the general public as part of its overall planning services. This part of the survey was designed to help understand the scale of use of these services, and by whom.

Respondents were asked which services they had used and whether these had been mainly accessed directly (through SNH correspondence by letter or email) or indirectly (through the SNH website).

Figure 19 shows results from 2015, 2016 and 2018. Data from 2014 has also been included in the Figure. However, the list of services and specific names used changed somewhat between the 2014 and 2015 surveys and this, coupled with the much higher proportion of 'individual' respondents in 2014 probably explains the differences in results.

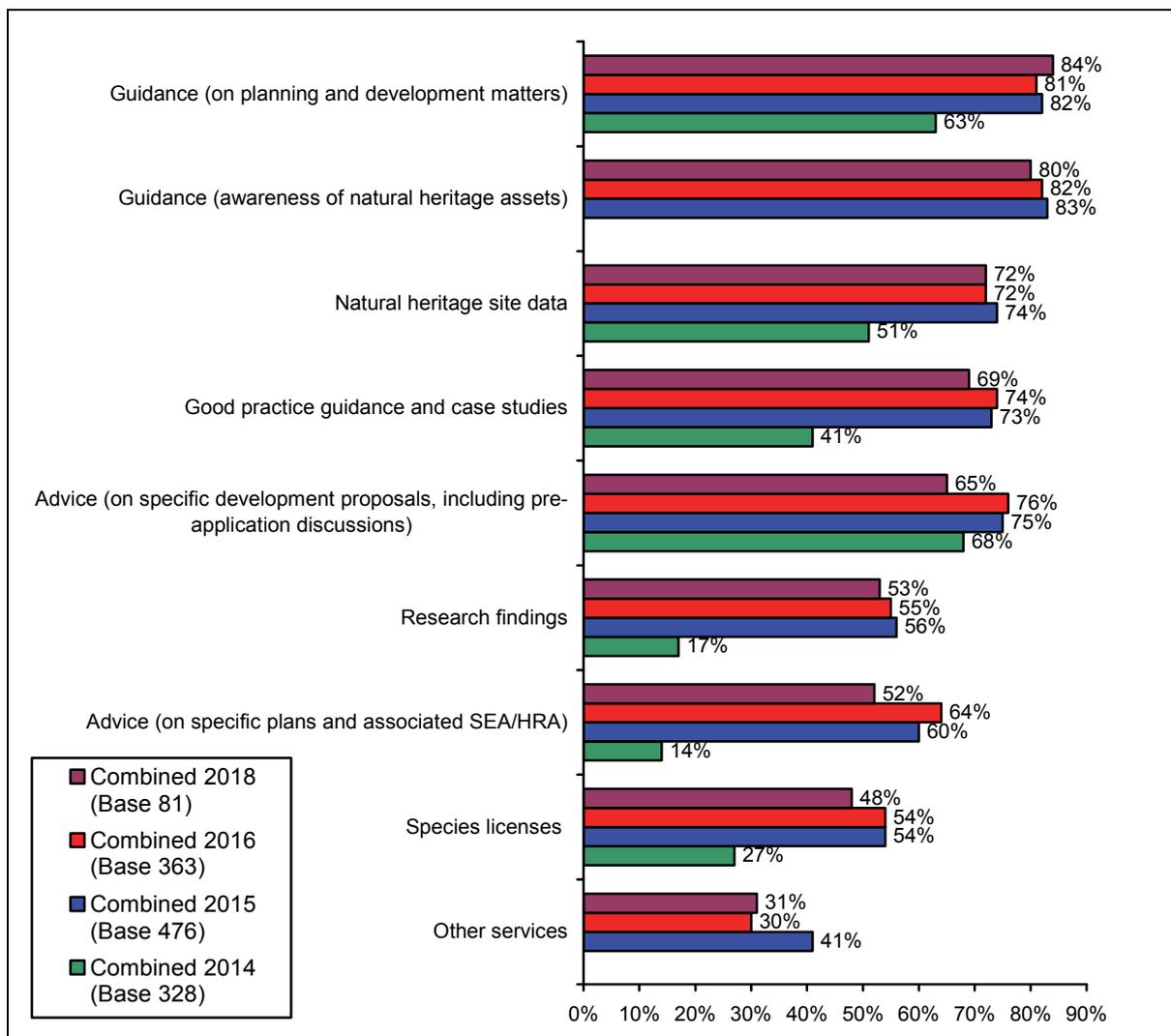


Figure 19. SNH services used (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

4.5 Views on SNH services

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. Seven of these statements related specifically to SNH services and eight related to advice provided by SNH.

The seven statements had also been asked in the 2015 survey and most had been asked in 2014. Table 3 shows the average scores (out of a potential 5) for the 2018, 2016 and 2015 surveys, for comparison between the years. Totals from the 2014 survey are also included for those questions which were asked in 2014.

Table 3. Views on SNH services (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 average scores)

	2018	2016	2015	2014
At Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, SNH's engagement is influential.	3.86	3.88	3.85	-
SNH is willing to engage in pre-application discussions.	3.75	3.89	3.85	3.70
The reasons given by SNH for requests for further information are clearly explained.	3.72	3.62	3.57	3.52
Engaging in pre-application discussions has resulted in better-quality planning applications.	3.71	3.85	3.88	-
The SNH staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed.	3.61	3.72	3.62	3.47
SNH's role at the various stages of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process is clearly defined.	3.54	3.49	3.47	-
SNH's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes.	3.51	3.61	3.48	3.19

4.6 Views on advice given by SNH

Respondents were also asked for their agreement or disagreement with a range of statements on advice given by SNH.

The average scores (out of a potential 5) for statements on advice from the 2018, 2016 and 2015 surveys are shown in table 4. Totals from the 2014 survey are also included for those questions which were asked in 2014.

Table 4. Views on SNH advice (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018 average scores)

	2018	2016	2015	2014
SNH's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process	3.84	3.74	3.76	
When dealing with development proposals, SNH advice has helped me improve outcomes for landscape & nature.	3.47	3.72	3.64	3.29
When dealing with development plans or spatial strategies, SNH advice has helped me improve outcomes for landscape and nature.	3.45	3.52	3.50	3.29
SNH's advice on development planning has helped promote green networks and green infrastructure as an integral component of successful place-making.	3.41	3.40	3.39	
When dealing with development frameworks (development briefs or masterplans), SNH advice has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature.	3.38	3.43	3.39	
Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all SNH departments/offices.	3.31	3.22	3.13	3.17
SNH's advice is unambiguous, clear and concise.	3.23	3.52	3.43	3.10
SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies.	3.05	3.12	3.08	2.92

4.7 Examples of inconsistencies

In 2016 and again in 2018, respondents who disagreed with the statements 'SNH's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies' or 'Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all SNH departments/offices' were invited to provide examples of inconsistencies in advice that they have experienced between SNH departments or between SNH and other agencies.

In 2018, respondents identified a range of agencies and NGOs where they felt there were inconsistencies, with no one body showing a large number of mentions. This is different from 2016, when the main area identified was within SNH; between regions and Areas or simply between SNH officers.

4.8 Awareness of SNH Service Statement

Figure 20 shows that well over half of 2018 respondents (64%) are aware of the Service Statement, an increase on the 58% seen in 2015, and 60% in 2016. The 2018 data includes over a third (37%) who have read it, an increase on the 25% who said they had read it in 2016. This increase may be caused by the difference in respondent profile in 2018.

Overall, 36% were not aware of the Service Statement, compared with 39% in 2016 and 42% in 2015.

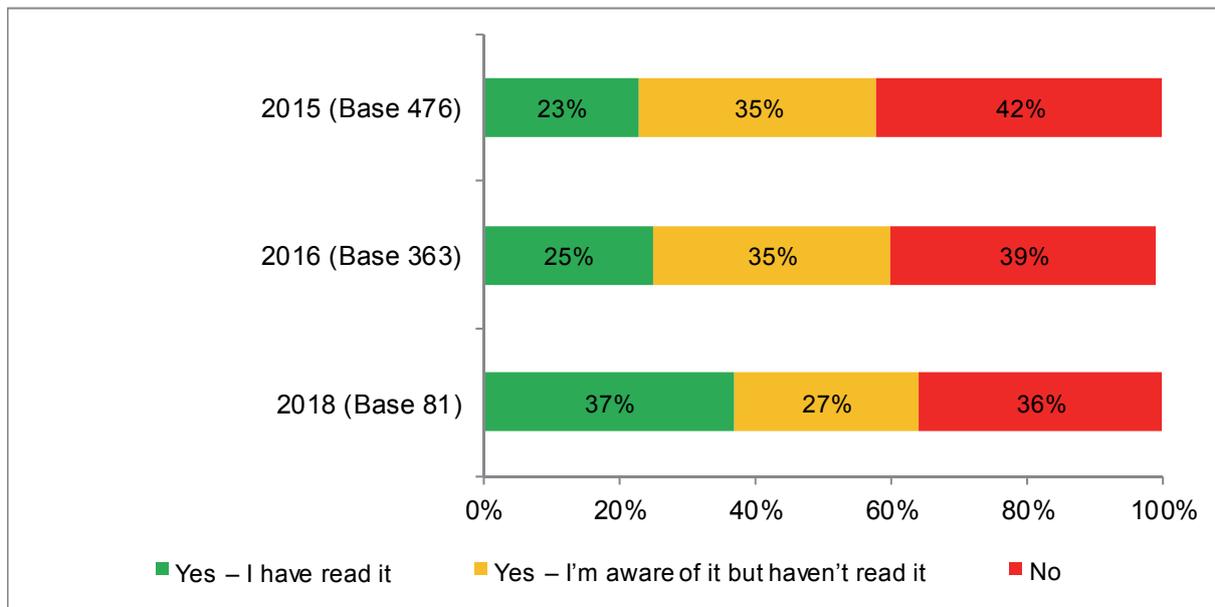


Figure 20. Awareness of Service Statement (2015, 2016 and 2018)

Source: Q5

4.9 Views on SNH guidance

SNH is keen to obtain views on the guidance it produces and respondents were asked to what extent they agree with a series of statements (from a score of 5 for 'agree strongly' to a 1 for 'disagree strongly'). The average scores for the 2018, 2016, 2015 and 2014 surveys are shown in Figure 21.

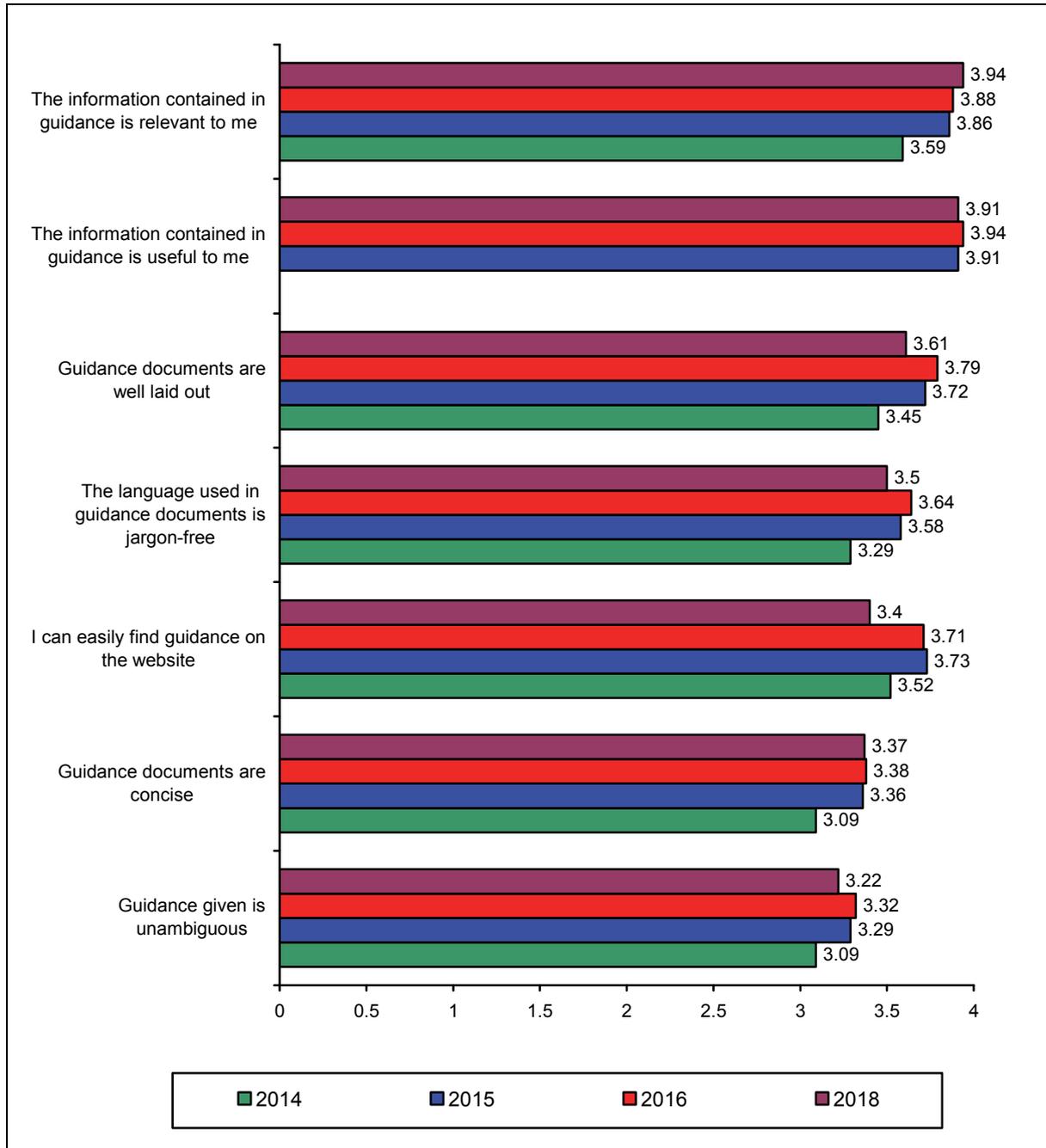


Figure 21. Views on SNH guidance (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

4.10 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.

Figure 22 shows the data from 2018, 2016, 2015 and 2014.

At this question an average score was calculated to enable comparisons where:

- Very useful = 4
- Quite useful = 3
- Not very useful = 2
- Not at all useful = 1

Thus, the nearer to 4 the average score, the higher the level of perceived usefulness.

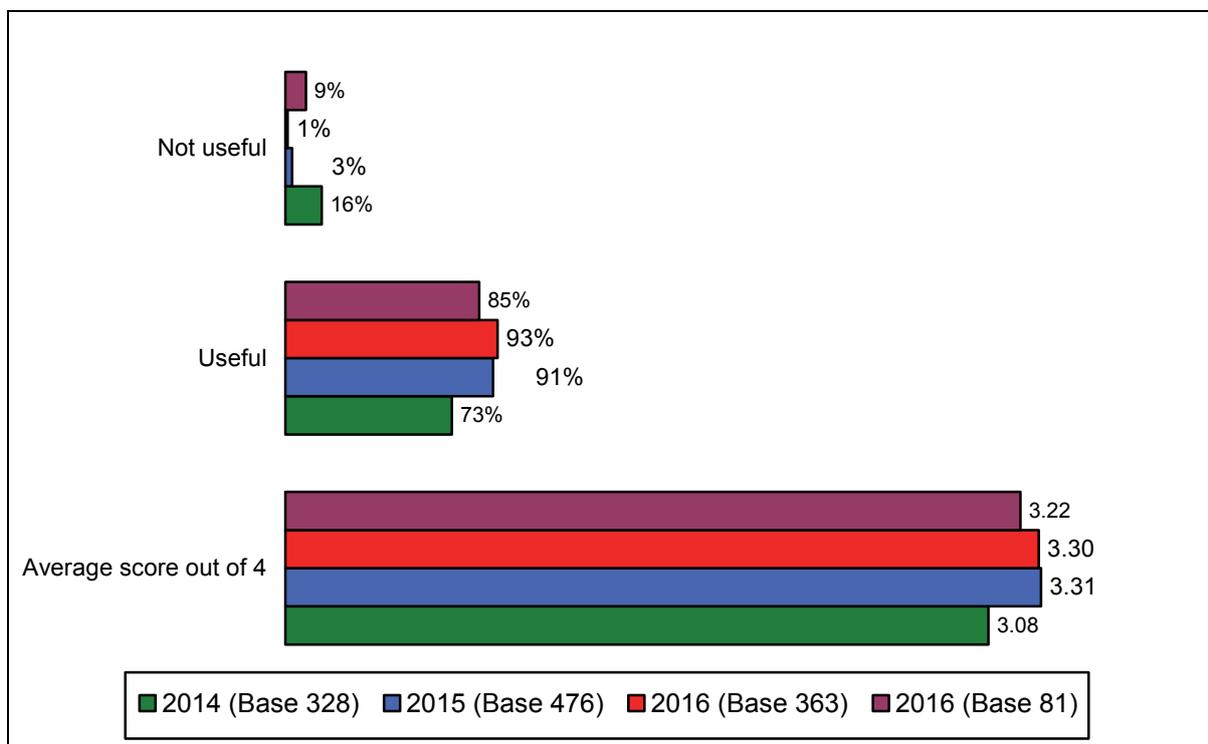


Figure 22. Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through SNH's website (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2018)

4.11 Possible improvements to SNH guidance

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further comment on what SNH could do to improve its guidance in order to help reduce impacts on the natural heritage.

In 2016, a main theme was the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamlined. This theme also emerged in 2018.

4.12 Planning and Development e-newsletter

In 2016, a new question was added asking respondents: ‘Did you find SNH’s Planning and Development e-newsletter useful?’ This was repeated in 2018. Figure 23 shows that there has been little change between 2016 and 2018.

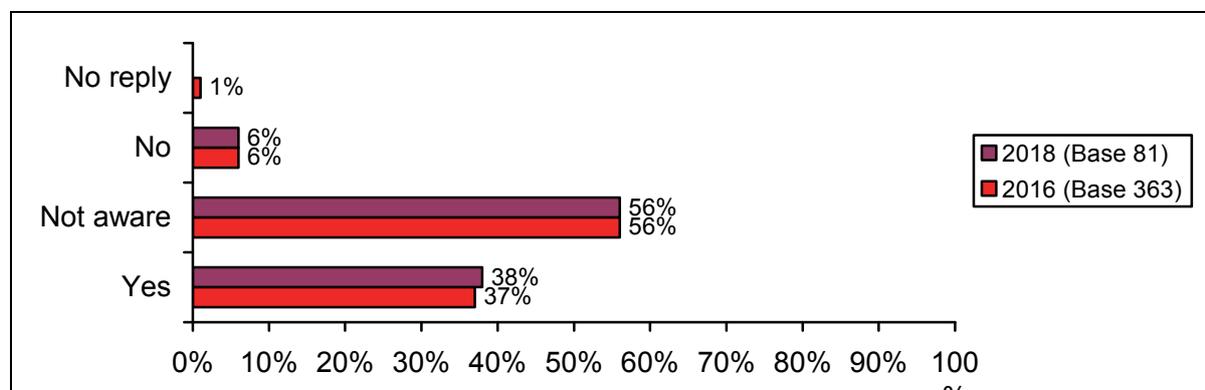


Figure 23. Usefulness of SNH’s Planning and Development e-newsletter

Source: Q10

4.13 What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

Respondents were also asked to say what else SNH could do in support of the guidance to better help other organisations consider natural heritage assets. As in 2016, hosting a programme of sharing good practice events proved the most popular suggestion, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

	2018 %	2016 %
Host a programme of sharing good practice events	78	65
Deliver capacity-building and/or continued professional development training	54	55
Deliver a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals	41	37
Develop online, interactive scenario-based eLearning activities	42	36
Develop video podcasts that demonstrate best practice and guidance in action	36	33
Other	20	6
Don't know/no reply	3	13

Source: Q9

4.14 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).

In 2018, 41% of respondents found this very or quite useful (an increase from the 35% seen in 2016). This compares with 5% who claimed this was not useful (an increase from 1% in 2016). As in 2016, the majority (48%) replied ‘don’t know’ or that they had no involvement in SEA.

4.15 SNH's focus

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of SNH's efforts in a range of areas of its work and table 6, below, shows the average scores (out of a possible 10) for each area. 2018 has seen an increase across all areas in terms of the importance of SNH's efforts.

In 2015, respondents had identified Strategic and Local Development Plans as the area most would like to see SNH focus its efforts. In 2016, a new option was added: 'pre-application discussion' and this received the highest average score in both 2016 and again in 2018.

Table 6. Focus of SNH efforts

	Average 2018	Average 2016	Average 2015
Pre-application discussion	8.47	8.32	n/a
Strategic and Local Development Plans	8.45	7.98	7.91
Habitats Regulations Appraisal	8.38	8.02	7.85
Strategic Environmental Assessment	8.27	7.55	7.48
National plans	7.93	7.29	7.53
Building capacity in others through guidance and training (2015: Capacity building)	7.75	7.54	6.93
Design frameworks, development briefs, masterplanning	7.67	7.12	6.98

Source: Q17

4.16 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed).

Figure 24 shows the data from 2015, 2016 and 2018.

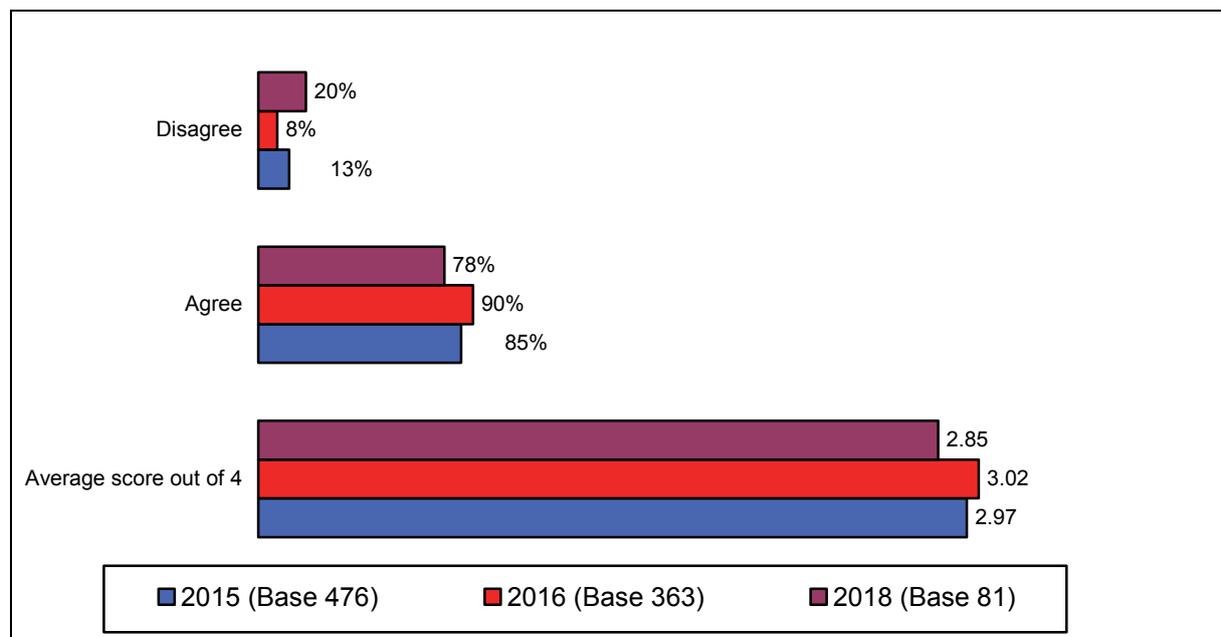


Figure 24. Whether SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling 2015, 2016 and 2018

4.17 Satisfaction with SNH’s service

Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 indicating highest levels of satisfaction.

Table 7. Overall satisfaction with the service received from SNH

	Average Score
2018	6.61
2016	7.59
2015	7.39

Source: Q20a

4.18 Improvements to SNH’s service

Finally, those respondents who had not given a score of 10 out of 10 were asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10.

The main themes in 2018 are rather different from those seen in 2016 and 2015. As mentioned earlier, this is possibly due to the smaller sample size and the difference in respondent profile in 2018 compared with earlier surveys.

One main theme that did appear across the three surveys was the need for more consistency within SNH (13% in 2015, 10% in 2016, 12% in 2018).

Figure 25 shows the comments made by the largest numbers of respondents in 2018 (6% and above) along with the percentage giving the same type of response in 2015 and 2016.

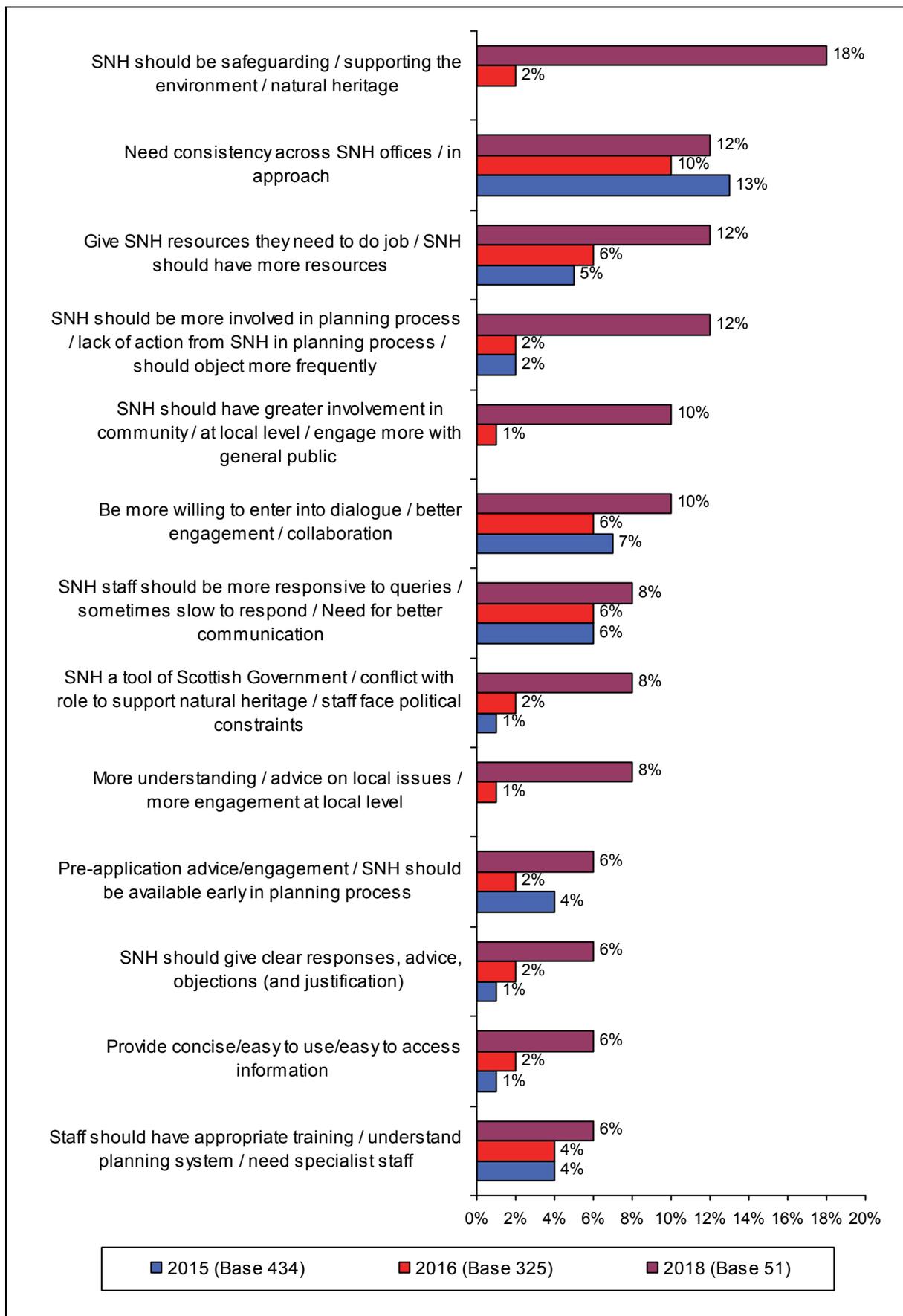


Figure 25. What SNH could do to achieve 10 out of 10

Source: Q20b

5. KEY MESSAGES ACROSS THE FOUR SURVEYS

Although not all four annual surveys are directly comparable, for the reasons outlined earlier, there are some recurring themes and key messages for SNH to consider.

Looking at trends and messages from across the four surveys shows that, in many cases, where there are higher proportions of individual-interest, rather than professional, respondents, ratings tend to be lower.

The following paragraphs outline some of the recurring themes and messages from the four surveys.

No trends or key messages were noted in relation to one of the question areas: 'Usefulness of SNH's responses in relation to SEA' (which was asked only in the 2016 and 2018 surveys).

5.1 SNH's contribution to the planning process

Respondents across each of the surveys agree that SNH makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes. Views on SNH's contribution to the planning process have not changed hugely over the last four years, although the small increases seen in 2015 and 2016 have not been sustained, with the figure for 2018 being similar to that seen in 2014.

Although overall satisfaction levels were high in all surveys, there are ongoing concerns about advice being inconsistent or ambiguous, or (particularly from developers) about it not being constructive enough. On the other hand, particularly in the 2018 survey, some individual-interest respondents perceive staff as being too accommodating for development.

5.2 Examples of where SNH could have been more enabling

While views of SNH's contribution to the planning process are largely positive, for here are some respondents who feel that SNH to be more strident in its support for the natural environment, for example, by providing more objections or a clearer communication of what the natural heritage constraints are. The data also suggests a preference for closer engagement and involvement with local communities on issues relating to planning applications.

5.3 Ease of contacting relevant SNH staff

While a majority of respondents in each of the surveys feel it is easy to make contact with relevant staff, this is less the case for individual-interest respondents.

5.4 SNH services used

In all surveys, guidance emerged as the most used service provided by SNH. This includes guidance relating to awareness of natural heritage assets and guidance relating to planning and development matters.

5.5 Views on SNH services

Scores for agreement with each statement across the surveys were fairly consistent.

The view that SNH's engagement at Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, is influential' was very strong in each year the statement was included.

There was less support for the view that SNH's role at the various stages of the EIA process is clearly defined and that SNH's requests for further information are proportionate.

There seems to be a correlation between higher levels of satisfaction and direct contact with SNH. For example, where there is less direct contact, there are slightly lower levels of agreement that SNH is willing to engage in pre-applications discussions, that engaging in pre-application discussions has resulted in better quality planning applications or that SNH staff respondents deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so a development can be progressed. This correlation aligns to comments on the importance of opportunities for interaction with SNH staff such as sharing good practice events or the provision of training.

5.6 Views on advice given by SNH

SNH's advice on Environmental statements is the type of advice that is most valued by customers.

Despite the majority of respondents being happy with SNH advice, there are still concerns regarding consistency of advice within the organisation and consistency with other stakeholder organisations.

5.7 Examples of inconsistencies

Those surveys with higher proportions of professional respondents mentioned inconsistencies within SNH – between regions and Areas, or simply between SNH officers. In 2018, which saw higher proportions of individual-interest respondents, inconsistencies between a range of agencies and NGOs were also identified.

5.8 Awareness of SNH Service Statement

Awareness of the SNH Service Statement has risen consistently since 2015.

The majority of respondents across surveys are aware of the Service Statement and have read it.

5.9 Views on SNH guidance

Views on SNH guidance are positive, especially in relation to usefulness and relevance. In particular the statement: 'The information contained in guidance is relevant to me' has shown a steady increase in agreement across the surveys. The statement: 'The information contained in guidance is useful to me' has shown a steady, high rate of agreement.

However, some concerns regarding the clarity have been raised.

The findings from this question point to the need for greater clarity in documentation produced, for guidance to be clearly signposted on the SNH website and for conciseness and a lack of jargon.

5.10 Usefulness of information and/or guidance accessed through SNH's website

Ratings for the usefulness of information and/or advice accessed through SNH's website have been consistently high across the surveys.

Once again, where there are higher proportions of professional respondents, the perceived usefulness of SNH guidance is higher than in surveys with higher proportions of individual-interest respondents.

While the website is important as a repository of guidance, the data also demonstrates the importance of direct contact for customers if they wish to discuss a specific issue. This is particularly important given that many local authority planning departments may have lost specialist staff and will be looking increasingly to SNH as the experts who can provide the expertise they no longer have.

5.11 Possible improvements to SNH guidance

In comments made by respondents across all surveys, the need for SNH to make guidance less wordy and more concise or streamlined has emerged as a main theme.

5.12 Planning and Development e-newsletter

SNH's Planning and Development e-newsletter is seen as useful by those who are aware of it, although more than half of respondents in all surveys are not aware of it.

5.13 What else could SNH do in support of their guidance

This question was asked in the last two surveys and respondents to both would like to see SNH hosting a programme of 'Sharing Good Practice' events in support of their guidance.

5.14 SNH's focus

Respondents would particularly like to see SNH focus their efforts on input into pre-application discussions and Strategic and Local Development Plans; less so into design frameworks, development briefs and master planning.

5.15 SNH's approach to guidance and advice

While the majority of respondents across surveys agree that SNH's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed), this opinion is less strong in non-professional respondents.

5.16 Satisfaction with SNH's service

Overall satisfaction with the service provided by SNH has remained high across the four surveys.

However, the findings from 2018 show a slight decline from previous years. The researchers would hypothesise that the decrease in 2018 may be due to the difference in respondent profile as several of the individual respondents had highlighted concerns about SNH's response to specific developments in their areas.

5.17 Improvements to SNH's service

When asked to say what SNH could do to achieve a rating of 10 out of 10, one main theme across surveys was the need for more consistency within SNH and across all offices.

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