

# Planning for development – customer survey 2020



**NatureScot**

Scotland's Nature Agency  
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# RESEARCH REPORT

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**Research Report No. 1266**

## **Planning for development – customer survey 2020**

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## Planning for development – customer survey 2020

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### Keywords

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

### Background

NatureScot and Historic Environment Scotland (HES) commissioned Why Research to undertake a joint customer satisfaction survey covering their planning for development services. Note that at the time of the survey NatureScot was known as Scottish Natural Heritage, but has since been rebranded.

The purpose of the survey was to gather evidence to inform their judgements about service improvement and support their commitment to continuous improvement, while avoiding multiple surveys and providing for consistent reporting between two Key Agencies. This report presents the NatureScot findings.

### Main findings

- The findings from the survey are positive:
  - Overall satisfaction with the service received from NatureScot is high.
  - NatureScot is seen to make a positive contribution to the planning process.
  - A majority of respondents feel it is easy to contact relevant staff at NatureScot.
  - Views on the guidance and advice produced by NatureScot are positive.
  
- The main areas where respondents would like to see improvements are in consistency of advice within and across the organisation; clarity and conciseness of guidance; and greater collaboration with other agencies and those involved in the planning process.

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1.1 Introduction

NatureScot and HES commissioned Why Research to carry out a joint customer survey amongst Planning for Development customers. Note that at the time of the survey NatureScot was known as Scottish Natural Heritage, but has since been rebranded.

The purpose of the survey was to gather evidence to inform judgements about service enhancement and support their commitment to continuous improvement. It is the first time Key Agencies have undertaken a joint customer survey. This was in order to avoid multiple surveys and provide for consistent reporting. This report presents the findings in relation to NatureScot.

An invitation to complete the survey was issued directly to 121 potential participants. The survey was also publicised more widely by NatureScot and HES. A total of 59 responses were received; 46 of these answered questions about NatureScot (although some respondents chose not to answer all questions in each section). Given the relatively small number of responses received, it has not been possible to conduct analysis of responses by respondent sub-groups.

### 1.2 Key findings

#### 1.2.1 *Contribution to the planning process*

A majority of respondents agreed that NatureScot makes a positive contribution to the planning process (72%). There were a small number of suggestions as to ways in which NatureScot could be more enabling and key themes which emerged included the need for clear communication and engagement, access to key officers and clarity and depth in any information provided.

#### 1.2.2 *Ease of contacting relevant staff*

A majority of respondents agreed that it is easy to contact relevant staff at NatureScot (76%). Few respondents felt it is not easy to contact relevant staff (13%).

#### 1.2.3 *Services and advice used and views on these*

Numbers of respondents accessing NatureScot services were high with almost all services being accessed either directly or indirectly by half or more of respondents.

The services most used by respondents were guidance on planning and development matters and guidance on awareness of natural heritage assets. Least used were research findings and species licences, although these were still cited by 50% or more of respondents.

When presented with a list of positive statements about services provided by NatureScot and asked the extent to which they agreed with each, many more respondents agreed than disagreed with each statement, although significant proportions gave a 'neither/nor' or 'don't know' response.

The statement with the highest proportion who agreed to some extent was: '*At Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, NatureScot's engagement is influential*' (63% agreed). The statement with the highest proportion who disagreed to some extent was: '*The NatureScot staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed*' (18% disagreed).

Respondents were also presented with a list of positive statements about advice provided by NatureScot. Views in relation to many of the statements were positive, and for all of the statements, higher proportions agreed than disagreed, although – as with the statements on service – significant proportions were undecided or didn't know.

The statements with the highest proportions who agreed to some extent were: '*NatureScot's engagement in the planning system demonstrates an understanding of the role and priorities of other key agencies and a collaborative approach to addressing potential conflicts*' and '*NatureScot's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process*' (cited by 54% and 52% respectively). The statements with the highest proportions who disagreed to some extent were: '*Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all NatureScot departments / offices*' (24% disagreed) and '*NatureScot's engagement in the planning system demonstrates an understanding of the role and priorities of other key agencies and a collaborative approach to addressing potential conflicts*' (22% disagreed).

The data suggests that NatureScot needs to focus on ensuring their engagement in the planning system demonstrates an understanding of the role and priorities of other key agencies and a collaborative approach to addressing potential conflicts; that advice given is unambiguous, clear and concise; that advice on development proposals and development frameworks helps to improve outcomes for landscapes and nature; that they deal with development plans and spatial strategies to improve outcomes for landscape and nature; and that advice is consistent across all departments.

#### *1.2.4 Awareness of service statement*

A majority of respondents were aware of and / or had read NatureScot's 2018 Service Statement. Around a third of respondents were unaware of the statement.

#### *1.2.5 Awareness of guidance*

Awareness of guidance produced by NatureScot was relatively high, albeit that some guidance will not be of relevance and / or interest to all respondents. 50% or more of respondents were aware of four (out of seven) of the pieces of guidance they were asked about.

Views on the guidance and its accessibility were largely positive. High proportions of respondents agreed that information contained in guidance is relevant or useful or that guidance is easy to find on the website.

When asked to identify possible improvements that could be made to guidance, respondents' comments echoed those seen earlier with references to the need to make guidance less wordy and ambiguous and more concise or streamlined. There were also some references to the need for guidance to be more widely publicised and / or accessible or to set guidance in wider contexts such as climate disruption.

Respondents were prompted with a number of ways in which NatureScot could better support guidance produced to help other organisations to consider natural heritage assets. These suggestions were well received by respondents, although key were the delivery of a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals; the sharing of good practice events; and the delivery of capacity building and / or continued professional development training.

#### *1.2.6 Other NatureScot services*

Almost a third of NatureScot respondents have participated in NatureScot's Planning for Great Places webinars; all who had participated found these to be very or quite useful.

Almost all respondents (89%) found information and / or guidance accessed through NatureScot's website to be very or quite useful. Only 9% felt this was not useful.

Most respondents who were aware of NatureScot's Planning and Development e-newsletter and / or who have involvement in SEA, found it to be useful to some extent.

NatureScot's approach to guidance and advice is seen to be positive, with 68% agreeing this is the case, compared to only 20% who disagreed.

#### *1.2.7 Early engagement in the planning system*

When asked to rate the importance of efforts by NatureScot in a range of areas, respondents rated these highly. Views were particularly positive in relation to contributions made to pre-application discussions on development proposals. Respondents were positive about the organisation's advice on Habitats Regulations Appraisals.

#### *1.2.8 Satisfaction with the service received*

Overall satisfaction levels with the service received from NatureScot was positive, with an average score (out of 10) of 6.64 being awarded. When asked to identify what NatureScot could do to achieve a rating of 10, respondents referred to the need for increased / better engagement and collaboration with other organisations and a greater willingness to enter into dialogue; along with requests for information to be clear and concise.

## **2. SURVEY RESULTS**

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

Customer feedback plays an essential role in helping NatureScot provide an effective Planning for Development service, and is part of their commitment to continuous improvement. NatureScot has in previous years conducted its own customer survey, but in 2020 this was undertaken jointly with Historic Environment Scotland (HES). This was to avoid multiple surveys and provide for consistent reporting.

NatureScot and HES appointed Why Research Ltd, an independent market research company based in Edinburgh, to undertake the survey. This report presents the survey findings in relation to NatureScot.

### **2.2 Respondent profile information**

In line with GDPR restrictions, invitations to participate were sent to 121 individuals who have had contact with NatureScot and / or HES. In order to increase the sample size, the survey was promoted more widely by NatureScot and HES including invitations to participate to related organisations such as Heads of Planning Scotland.

A total of 59 individuals responded to the survey. The survey received 18 responses from the direct mailing of 121 individuals (15%) and a further 41 responses from individuals who had been invited to participate in this survey via other channels. Across all responses 46 respondents answered questions about NatureScot (although some respondents chose not to answer all questions in each section).

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.

### **2.3 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 shows the respondent groupings.

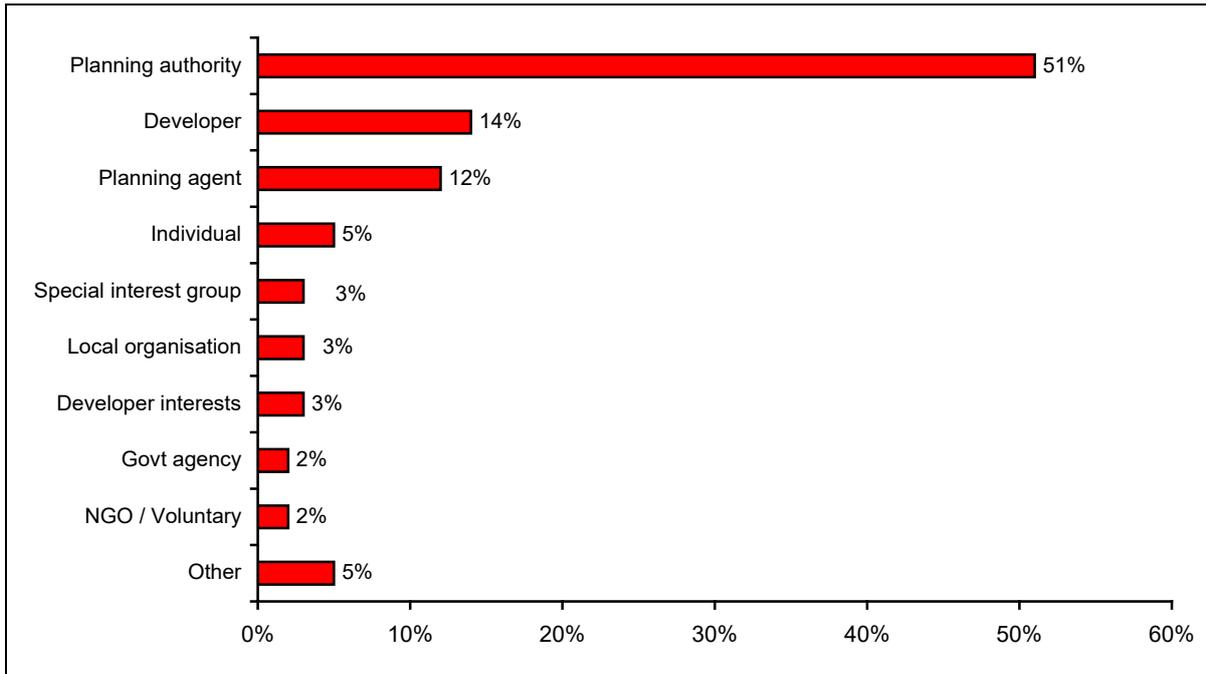


Figure 1. Respondent groupings

Source: Q1

As shown in Figure 1, the group with the highest proportion of respondents was planning authorities (51%), with smaller proportions of respondents who were developers (14%) or planning agents (12%). Other respondent groups were cited by 5% or less of respondents.

A majority of these respondents (35) had contact with both NatureScot and HES; only 11 had contact solely with NatureScot.

#### 2.4 Primary area of business or involvement

Respondents were then asked to indicate their primary area of business. 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.

As shown in Figure 2, around two out of five respondents not in the public sector, were involved in renewables (43%), almost a third were involved in nature conservation (29%), around one out of five respondents were involved in housing (21%) or tourism (18%); and other areas were cited by less than 10% of respondents.

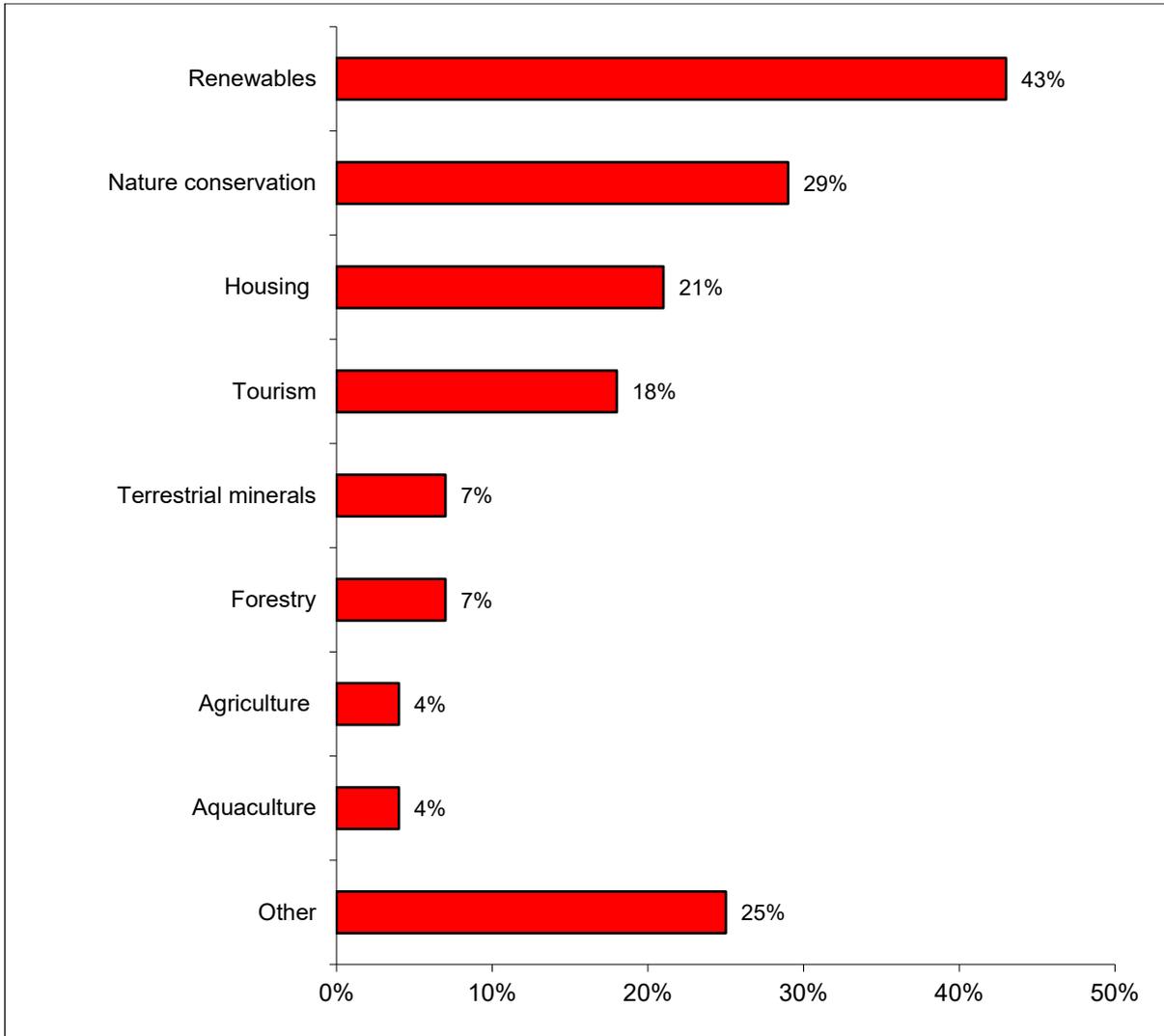


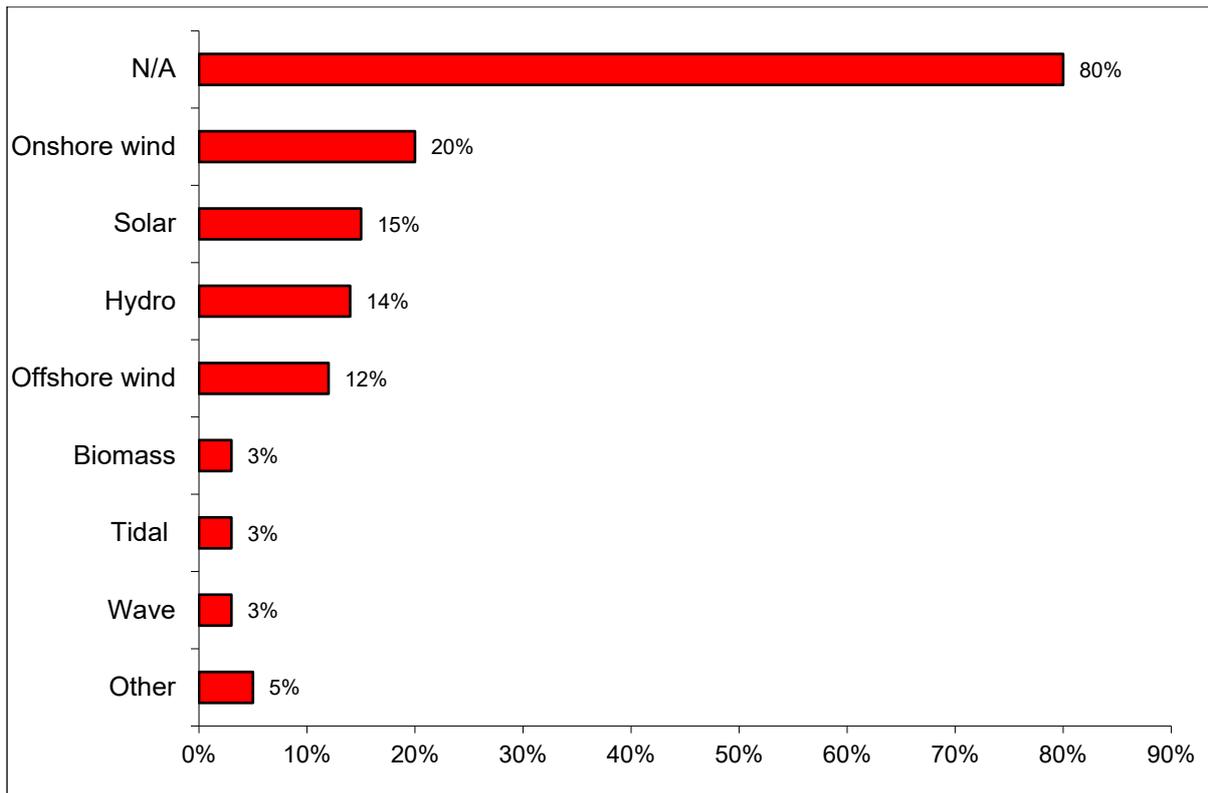
Figure 2. Primary area of business or involvement

Source: Q2a & Q2b (Base = 28 respondents)

## 2.5 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 respondents (20%) and around one in seven or less of respondents were involved in solar (15%), hydro (14%) or offshore wind (12%). Other areas were cited by 3% or less of respondents.

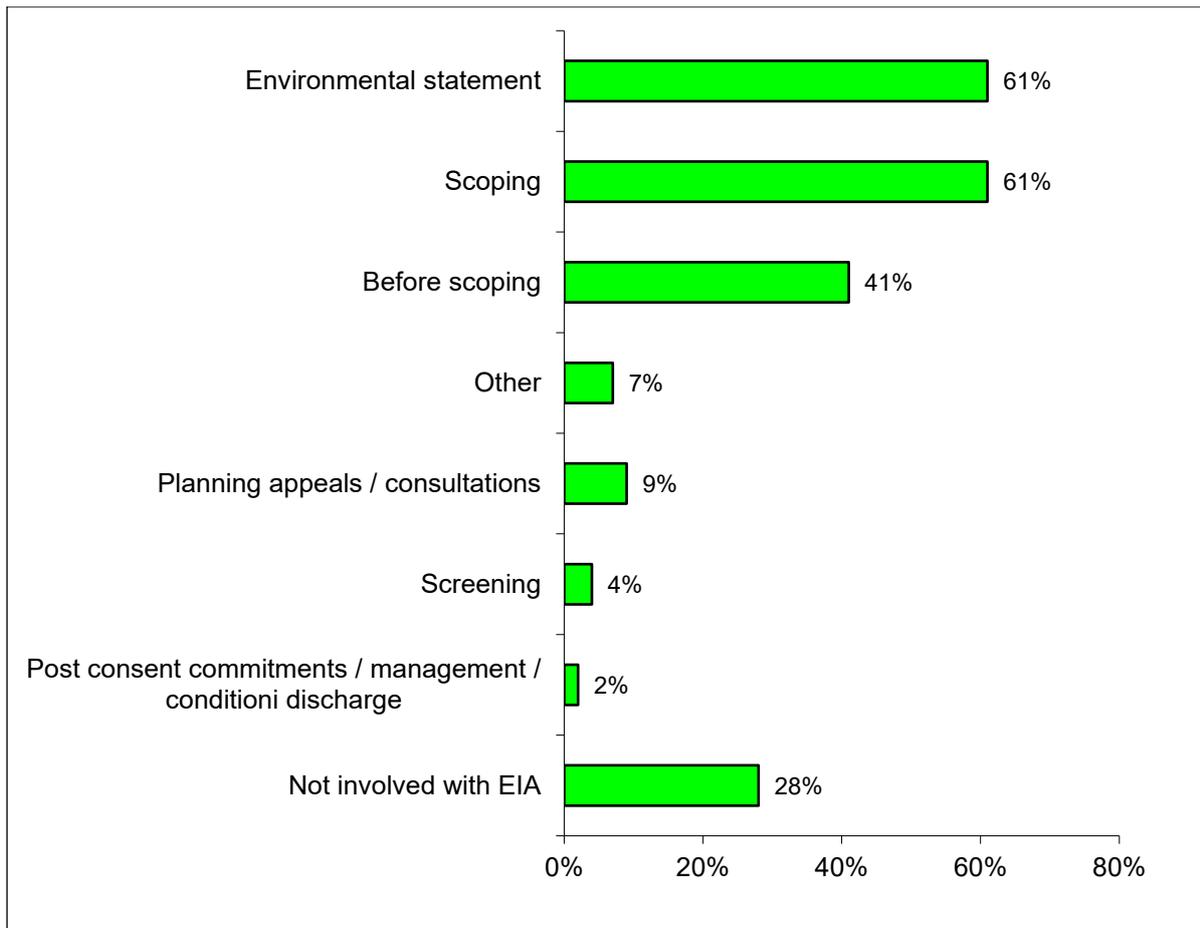


*Figure 3. Area of involvement in renewables*

Source: Q2a(i) (Base = 59 respondents)

## **2.6 Involvement with Environmental Impact Assessment**

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



*Figure 4. Involvement with EIA*

Source: Q3 (Base = 46 respondents)

As Figure 4 demonstrates, most respondents (61%) were involved at the Scoping stage or in the Environmental Statement (61%, with just over two in five respondents involved before scoping (41%). Just over a quarter were not involved with EIA (28%).

## **2.7 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 NatureScot makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

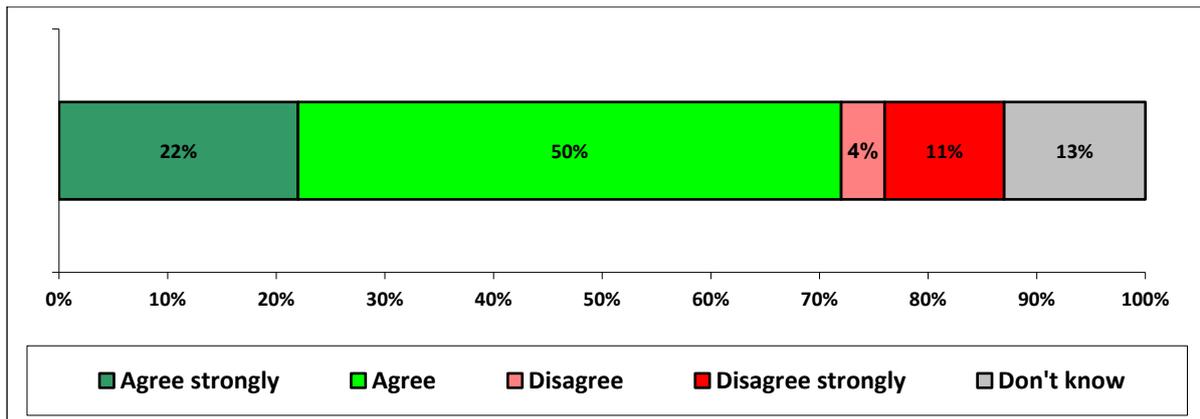


Figure 5. Contribution to the planning process

Source: Q19a (Base = 46 respondents)

As can be seen in Figure 4 above, results to this question are positive, with a majority of respondents agreeing that NatureScot (72%) makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

## 2.8 Examples of where NatureScot could have been more enabling

Respondents were then asked to give specific examples of where NatureScot could have been more enabling or made a more positive contribution to the planning system. Comments were received about NatureScot from 18 respondents.

The key themes that emerged related to the need for clear communication and engagement, access to key officers and a need for clarity and depth in any information provided to customers. The main themes noted in responses are outlined below.

Key comments, but each only made by three respondents, related to the need for NatureScot to comment on more applications, be stronger in their objections, or to be less pro-development; to make more effort to engage with the public and consultancies, for example, to communicate early in the process or to improve upon their post consent engagement; or for greater involvement with planning officials. Three respondents also made negative comments about NatureScot's contribution to wind farms and renewable energy developments.

Two respondents commented on the need for NatureScot to consider the objectives within the wider policy context or cited specific local issues or planning applications where it was felt that NatureScot could have provided more detail or been more robust in its involvement or objections.

Other comments made, each by only one respondent, included the need for NatureScot to:

- Be less cautious in support for some developments or to reach decisions more quickly.
- Have more and / or easily accessible case officers.
- Be a strong advocate for the natural heritage.
- Provide clear and practical advice.
- Be independent of the Scottish Government.

## 2.9 Ease of contacting relevant staff

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

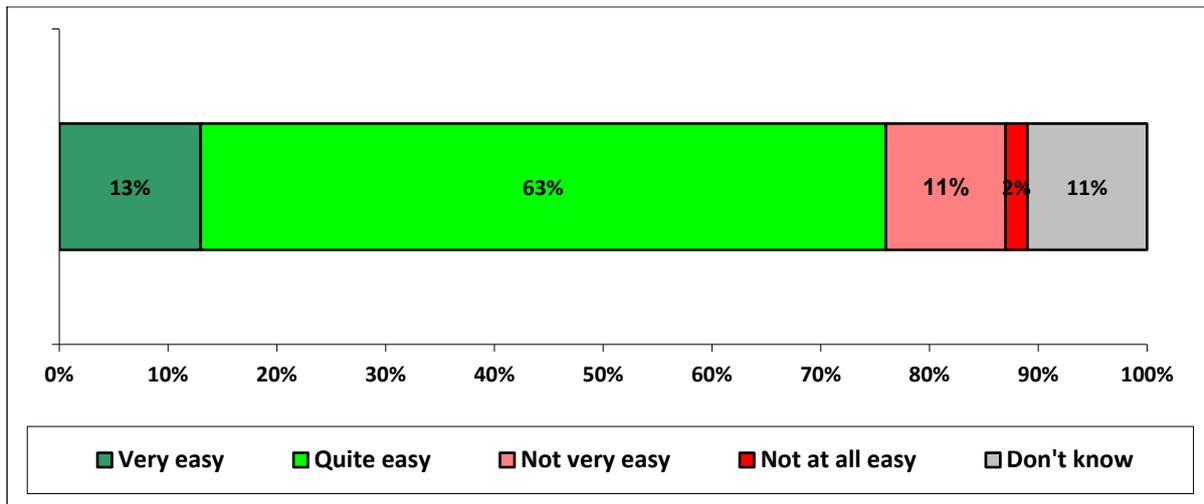


Figure 6. Ease of contacting relevant staff

Source: Q4 (Base = 46 respondents)

As shown in Figure 6, views on contacting relevant staff were positive, and just over three in four respondents (76%) considered it easy to contact relevant NatureScot staff. Only 13% of respondents considered it not easy to contact relevant NatureScot staff.

## 2.10 Services and advice used and views on these

NatureScot offers a wide range of services to organisations, communities and the general public as part of their 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 correspondence: by letter or email) or indirectly (through the website).

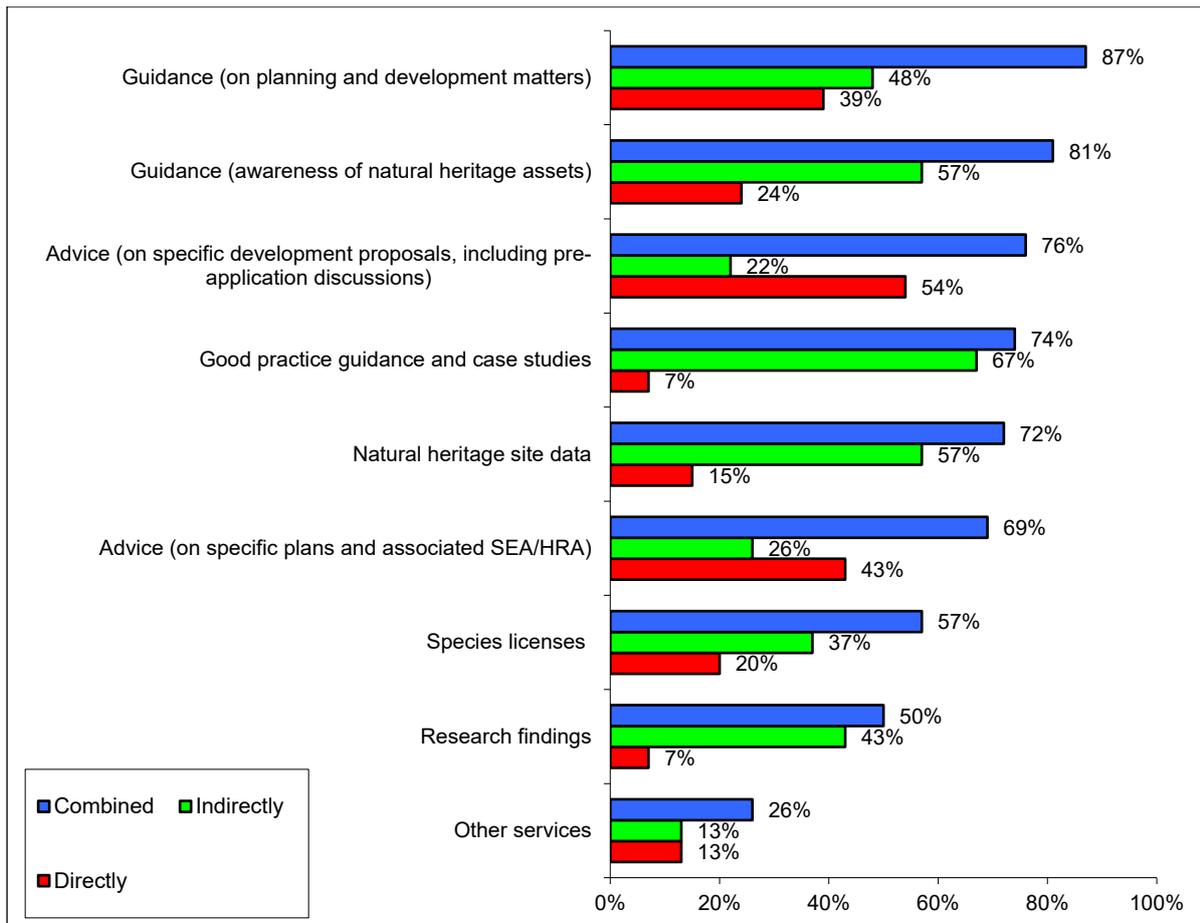


Figure 7. NatureScot services used

Source: Q11 (Base = 46)

As Figure 7 demonstrates, numbers accessing NatureScot services are high, with half or more having accessed each of the named services either directly or indirectly. A number of services were cited on a combined basis by around three in four or more respondents; guidance on planning and development matters and guidance on awareness of natural heritage assets being the two most popular services, followed by advice on specific development proposals, including pre-application discussions, good practice guidance and case studies and natural heritage site data.

Looking at services accessed directly shows that advice on specific development proposals, including pre-application discussions, was made use of by 54% of respondents.

Having gathered information on which NatureScot services are used, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements about NatureScot services. Seven of these statements related specifically to NatureScot services and eight related to advice provided by NatureScot. Figure 8 shows responses relating to views on NatureScot services.

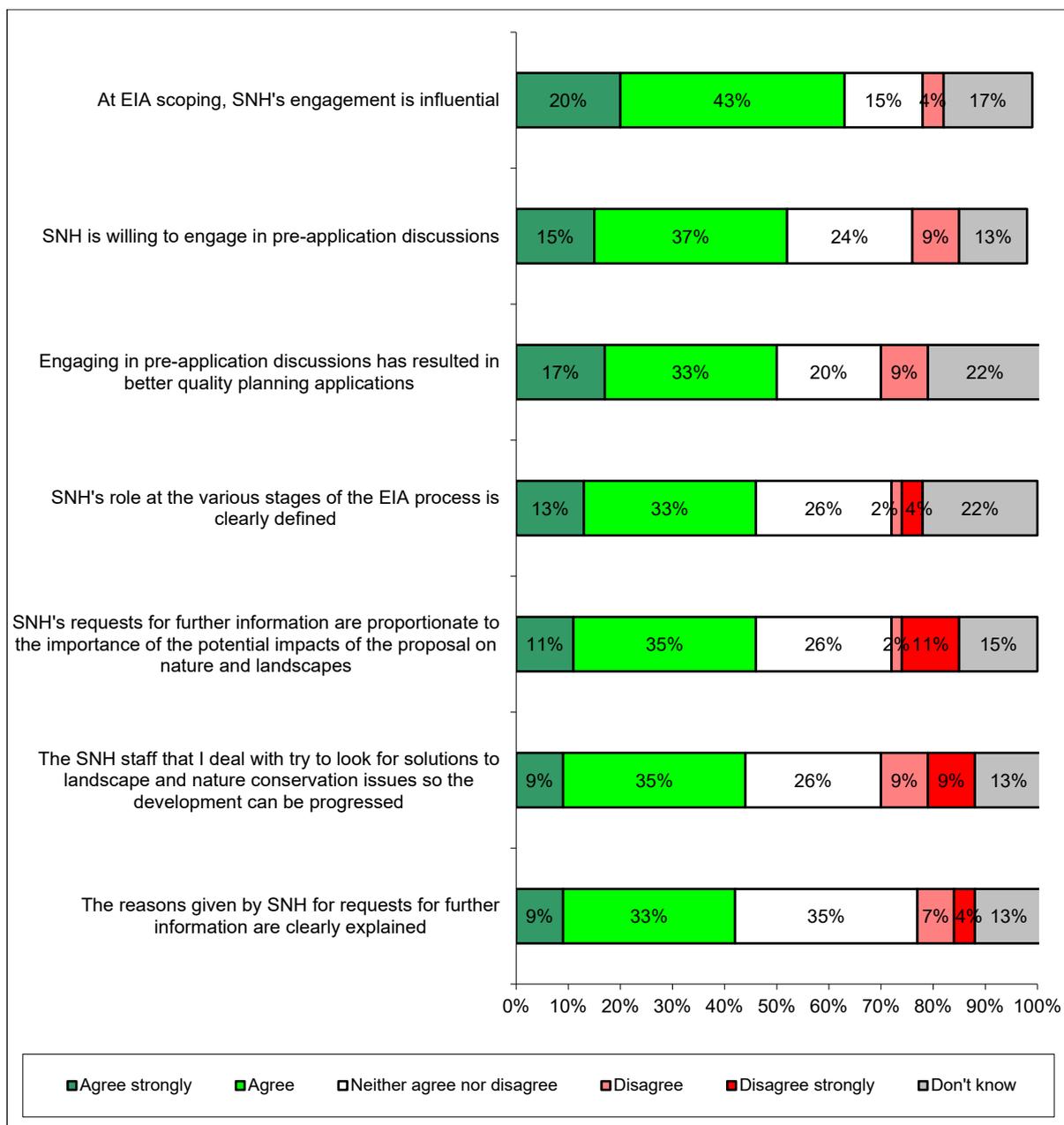


Figure 8. Views on NatureScot services

Source: Q12

Figure 8 shows that views were positive. More respondents agreed rather than disagreed with each statement, although significant proportions also gave a neither/nor or don't know response. A majority agreed that 'at Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, NatureScot's engagement is influential' (cited by 62%), 'NatureScot is willing to engage in pre-application discussions' (52%) or 'Engaging in pre-application discussions has resulted in better quality planning applications (50%).'.

In four of the statements, a majority did not agree – although numbers disagreeing were still comparatively low. The largest proportions disagreeing with statements were: 13% of respondents disagreeing that 'NatureScot's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes' (compared to 46% who agreed to some extent); and 18% disagreeing that 'The NatureScot

staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed' (compared to 44% who agreed to some extent).

Respondents were also asked for their agreement or disagreement with a range of statements on advice given by NatureScot. Figure 9 shows the findings.

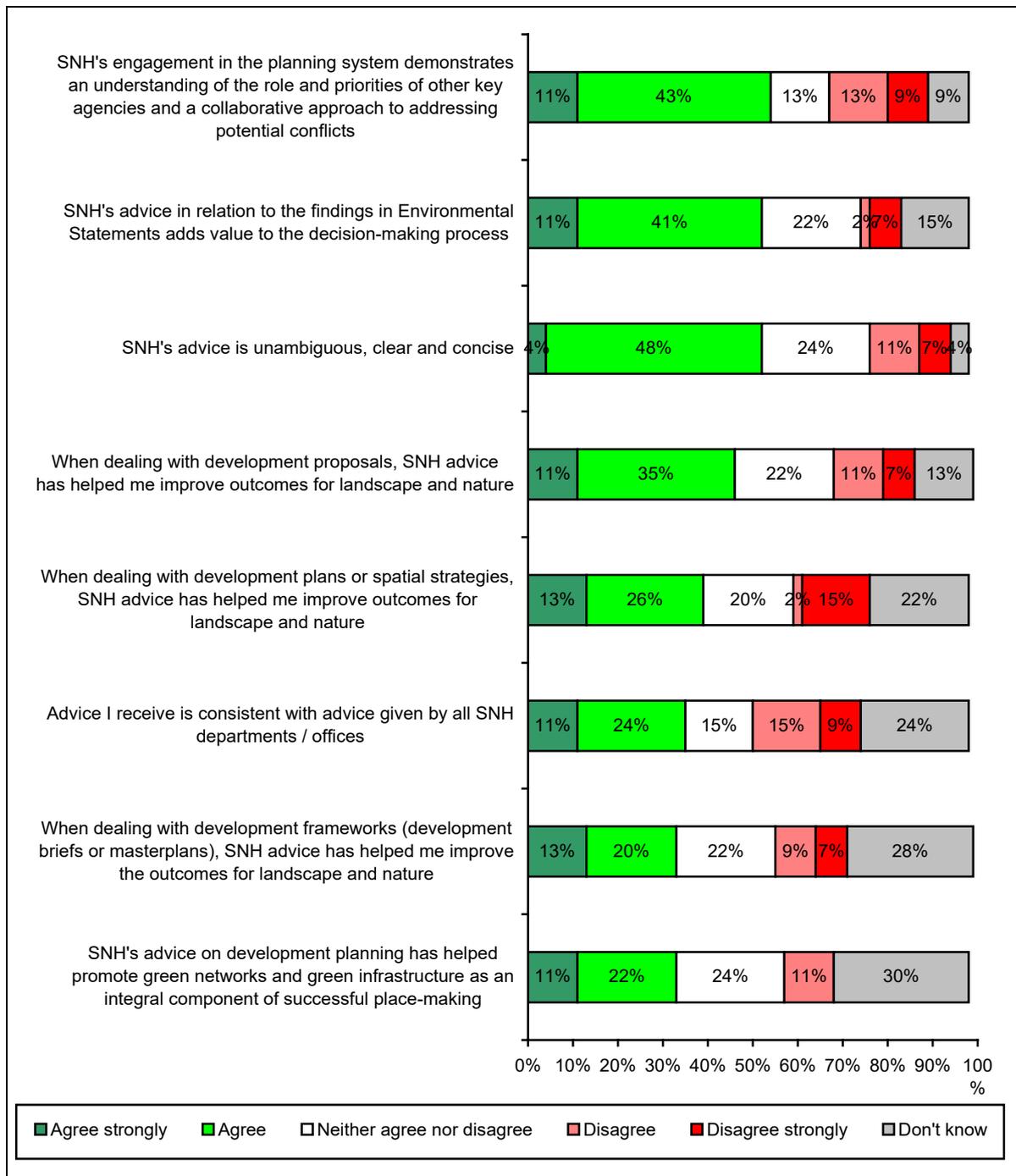


Figure 9. Views on advice given by NatureScot

Source: Q13

As shown in Figure 9, views in relation to many of the statements were positive although, as with the statements on service, significant proportions gave a neither/nor or don't know response. For each of the statements, higher proportions agreed to some extent than disagreed.

The statements with the highest proportions agreeing to some extent were: ‘NatureScot’s engagement in the planning system demonstrates an understanding of the role and priorities of other key agencies and a collaborative approach to addressing potential conflicts’ and ‘NatureScot’s advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process’ (cited by 54% and 52% respectively).

The statements with the highest proportions disagreeing to some extent were: ‘Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all NatureScot departments / offices’ (35% agreed and 24% disagreed) and ‘NatureScot’s engagement in the planning system demonstrates an understanding of the role and priorities of other key agencies and a collaborative approach to addressing potential conflicts’ (54% agreed and 22% disagreed).

Respondents who felt they had experienced inconsistencies in advice between NatureScot departments or between NatureScot and other agencies were asked to give examples of these; some respondents referred to inconsistencies within NatureScot and / or with other agencies; some respondents referred to instances where there were inconsistencies in advice provided by NatureScot. The biggest point, made by five respondents, was that NatureScot is inconsistent in relation to landscape-related advice. Other key comments, cited by four respondents each, were inconsistencies between NatureScot and local authorities or NatureScot diverting from its remit and offering unnecessary advice. Other inconsistencies mentioned by smaller numbers of respondents referred to information on habitats, climate change, wild land and building work.

## 2.11 Awareness of Service Statement

As well as satisfaction, NatureScot is keen to know about levels of awareness around its Service Statement.

All respondents were asked to indicate their awareness of the 2018 NatureScot Service Statement and a link was provided within the survey for respondents to access if they wished.

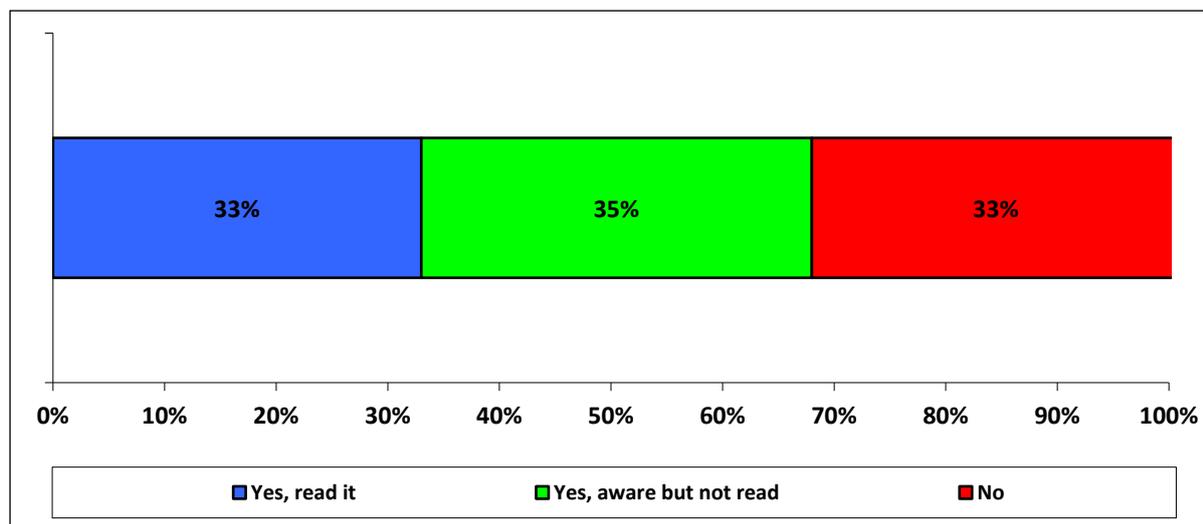


Figure 10. Awareness of Service Statement

Source: Q5 (Base = 46 respondents)

Figure 10 shows that a majority of respondents were aware of the Service Statement, although not all had read it. Around a third of respondents (33%) had read the 2018 NatureScot Service Statement and around a third of respondents claimed to be unaware of the Statement.

## 2.12 Awareness of guidance

NatureScot is keen to obtain views on the guidance they produce. 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 the guidance produced by the organisation.

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of various pieces of guidance and weblinks were provided for respondents to access these if they wanted to.

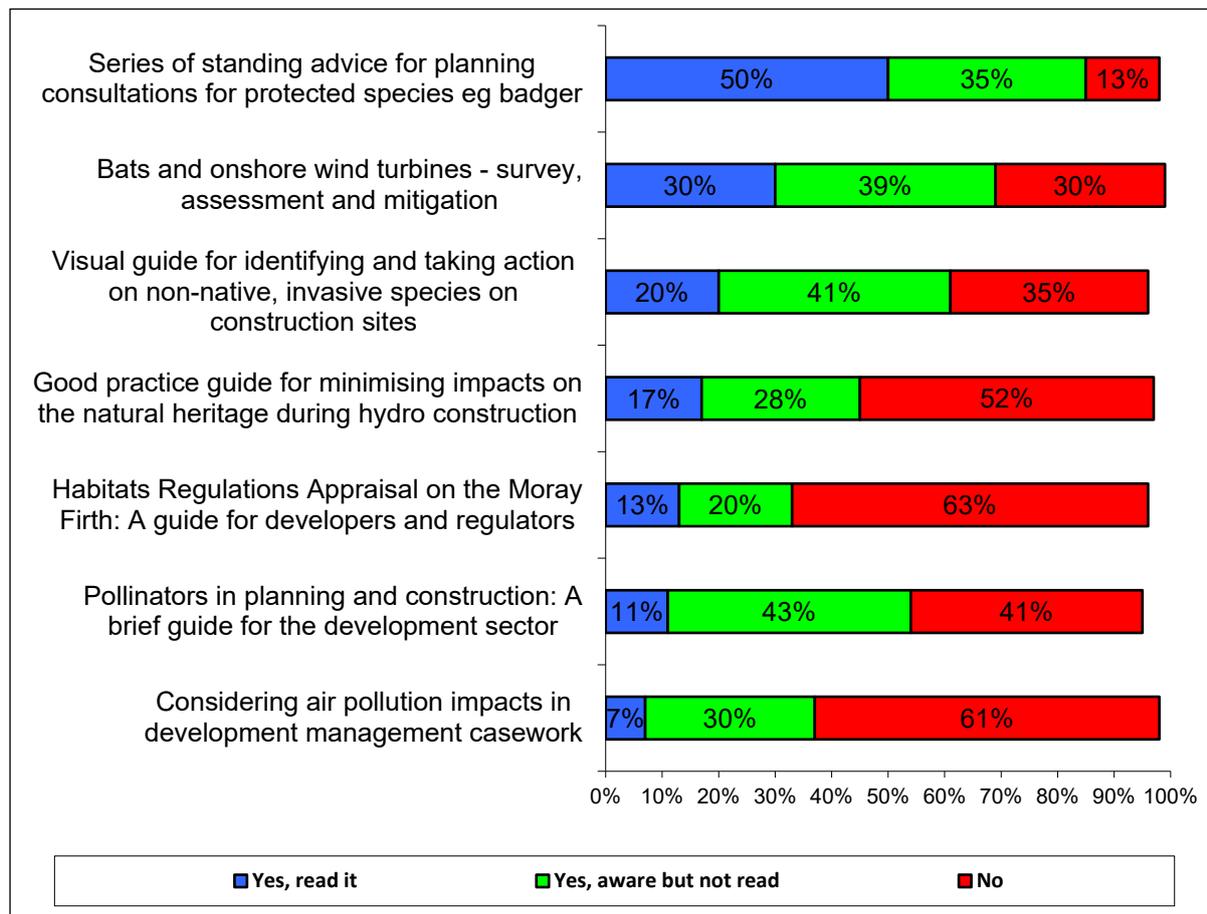


Figure 11. Awareness of NatureScot guidance

Source: Q6 (Base = 46)

As can be seen in Figure 11, over half of respondents were aware of four different elements of the NatureScot guidance and half claimed to have read the series of standing advice for planning consultations for protected species. The least read and used guidance was Habitats Regulations Appraisal on the Moray Firth but this is not surprising given that it will only be of direct relevance to respondents who are working within, or close to, this specific geographic area.

Respondents were then asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements relating to guidance and its accessibility. The following table provides the average scores for each of these statements for NatureScot.

Table 1. Level of agreement that ....

	Score out of 5
I can easily find guidance on the website	3.57
Guidance documents are well laid out	3.59
The language used in guidance documents is jargon-free	3.60
Guidance is unambiguous	3.27
Guidance documents are concise	3.30
The information contained in guidance is relevant to me	3.98
The information contained in guidance is useful to me	3.89

Source: Q7

Overall, views were relatively positive, although the data highlight some areas where improvement is needed. There is a need to ensure that guidance is unambiguous and concise.

Half or more of respondents agreed with five of these statements. Importantly, high proportions of respondents agreed that information contained in guidance is relevant or useful, and only very small proportions disagreed with this.

The data suggest that there is a need for NatureScot to provide guidance that is concise and unambiguous given that the lowest levels of agreement are for these two statements. The data also suggest that guidance is relatively easy to find on the website, and 61% agreed that they can easily find guidance on the website, with only 13% of respondents disagreeing they can easily find guidance on the website.

### 2.13 Possible improvements to guidance

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide further comment on what NatureScot could do to improve its guidance in order to help reduce impacts on the natural heritage or the historic environment and to secure the benefits of both – 31 respondents 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 NatureScot to make guidance less wordy and ambiguous, and more concise or streamlined. It will obviously be important to ensure clear signposting on the website and 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 emerging themes also included a need to:

- Engage with local communities and planning staff and ensure collaborative and partnership working.
- Be clear about what is required from planning customers.
- Set guidance in a broad context.
- Provide (more) guidance on specific topics eg water conservation, protected species, habitat loss, etc.
- Provide wider availability of staff to contact.
- Provide local advice and guidance as well as guidance at a national level.
- Jointly produce guidance documents (with other consultancies).
- Focus advice on the natural heritage / conservation or protection of the natural heritage.
- Ensure guidance is up to date on specific topics eg wild land or wind turbines etc.
- Remove any bias from guidance so that all developments are treated equally.
- Provide guidance at an earlier stage eg at scoping.

## 2.14 What else could NatureScot do in support of its guidance?

Respondents were also asked to say what else NatureScot could do in support of the guidance to better help other organisations consider natural heritage assets. The data suggests that respondents would welcome a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals, although face-to-face contact and opportunities to discuss issues are clearly also important, with hosting a programme of sharing good practice events also being a popular suggestion, along with the delivery of capacity building and / or continued professional and development training.

Table 2. What else could be done in support of guidance?

	Percentage of respondents
Deliver a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals	70
Host a programme of sharing good practice events	63
Deliver capacity building and/or continued professional development training	65
Develop video podcasts that demonstrate best practice and guidance in action	57
Develop online, interactive scenario-based eLearning activities	41
Other	20
Don't know/no reply	9

Source: Q9

The main theme from those who selected 'Other' was the need for NatureScot to engage more with professionals involved in the planning process, for example, consultants, planners or developers.

## 2.15 Usage of NatureScot's Planning for Great Places webinars

Respondents were also asked whether they had taken part in any Planning for Great Places series of webinars, and how useful they had found these. Almost a third of respondents (31%) had participated in these webinars, and all claimed to have found these 'very' or 'quite' useful.

In considering topics that they would like to see covered in future webinars, a range of suggestions emerged from two or more respondents, including:

- Protected species issues.
- Habitat related issues.
- Topics based on specific work that has been undertaken.
- Landscape-related issues.
- Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Habitats Regulation Appraisal / Appropriate Assessment.
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

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

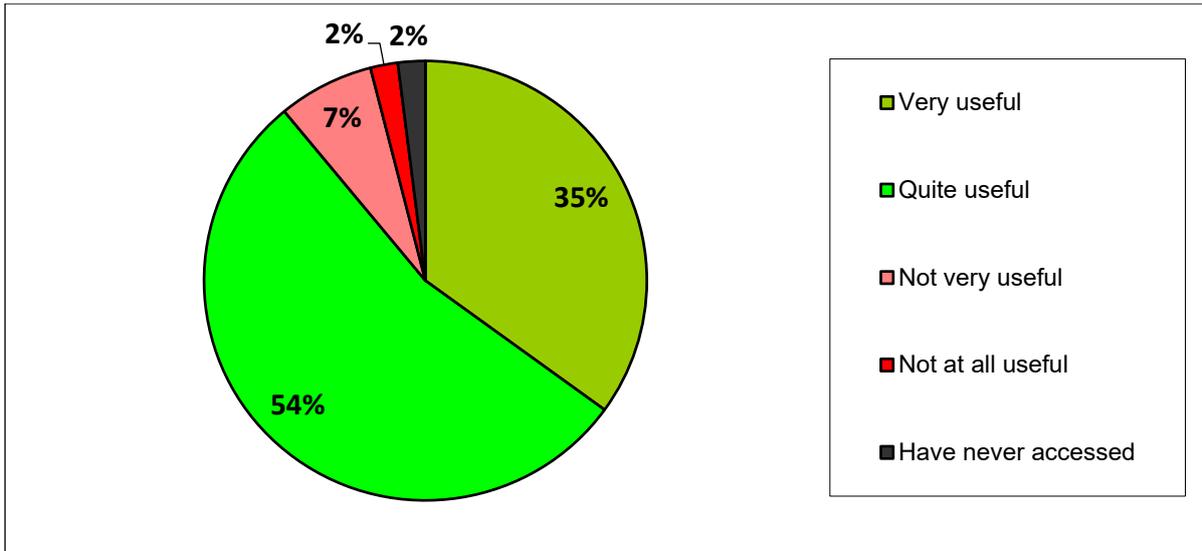


Figure 12. Usefulness of information and / or guidance accessed through NatureScot's website

Source: Q15 (Base = 46)

As shown, the response to this question is very positive with the majority of respondents (89%) 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.

**2.16 NatureScot's Planning and Development e-newsletter**

Respondents were also asked how useful they found NatureScot's Planning and Development e-newsletter. The following Figure shows that findings are relatively positive and most of those who were aware of the newsletter found it useful (54% of all respondents or 83% of those aware of the e-newsletter), compared to only 11% who did not find this useful.

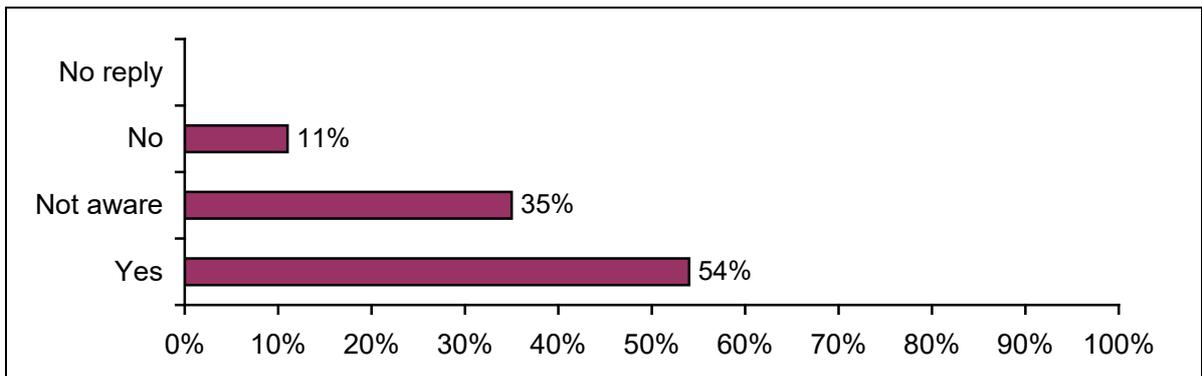


Figure 13. Usefulness of NatureScot's Planning and Development e-newsletter

Source: Q10

**2.17 Usefulness of NatureScot's responses in relation to SEA**

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

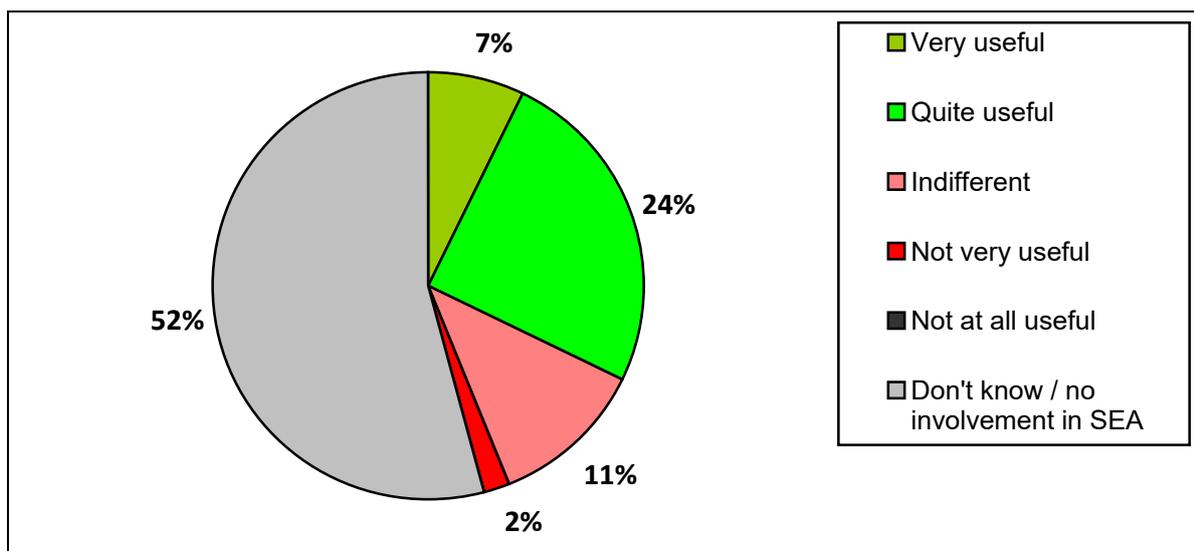


Figure 14. Usefulness of NatureScot's responses in relation to SEA

Source: Q16 (Base = 46)

Views on the usefulness of NatureScot's responses in relation to SEA were positive with a greater proportion of respondents (31%) finding this 'very' or 'quite' useful, compared with only 2% who felt this was not useful. A majority of respondents (52%) replied 'don't know' or had no involvement in SEA.

## 2.18 Early engagement in the planning system

As part of their shift towards early engagement in the planning system, NatureScot is keen to ascertain which areas of work they should focus their efforts on. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of efforts in a range of areas and the following table 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 3. Focus of efforts

Area of work	Score out of 10
Advising on Habitats Regulations Appraisal	8.84
Contributing to pre-application discussions on development proposals	8.02
Advising on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)	7.92
Advising on Design frameworks, development briefs, masterplanning	7.76
Inputting to Strategic and Local Development Plans	7.73
Influencing National plans of other agencies / bodies	7.69
Building capacity in others through guidance and training	7.05

Source: Q17

The data show that all of these areas are considered to be of relative importance, with advising on Habitats Regulations Appraisal, contributing to pre-application discussions on development proposals and advising on SEA being key.

## 2.19 NatureScot's approach to guidance and advice

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed that NatureScot's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed). Just over two thirds (68%) agreed this was the case and only 20% disagreed.

## 2.20 Satisfaction with service received

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

The average score for NatureScot was 6.64 out of 10. The lowest average score was awarded by developers.

Respondents were then asked to say what NatureScot could do to achieve a rating of 10; 27 respondents commented specifically. Many of the themes emerging to this question echoed themes already outlined at earlier questions. These included the need for increased / better engagement and collaboration with other organisations and a greater willingness to enter into dialogue; along with a need for clear and concise information to be provided. That said, there was some acknowledgement of the need for the organisation to be given the resources they need in order to carry out their role. Table 4 shows the comments made by the largest numbers of respondents.

*Table 4. Suggestions for improvements*

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
More willing to enter into dialogue / better engagement / collaboration	26
Provide resources needed to do job	19
Provide more training / joint training	19
Consistency across offices	15

Source: Q20b

### **3. KEY MESSAGES**

#### **3.1 Contribution to the planning process**

Respondents across this survey agreed that NatureScot makes a positive contribution to the planning process.

However, there are comments about the need for clear communication and engagement with customers, access to key officers and providing clarity and depth in information provided.

While views of NatureScot's contributions to the planning process are largely positive, there are some respondents who feel that the organisation could be more strident in their support for the natural environment, for example, by providing stronger objections on some planning applications.

#### **3.2 Ease of contacting relevant staff**

NatureScot maintains positive relationships with its customers, and a majority of respondents feel it is easy to contact relevant staff.

#### **3.3 Services and advice used, and views on these**

To an extent, respondents will only make use of services and advice that is relevant and / or useful to them in their role. For all of the services and advice used by respondents, views were positive.

The data suggest that NatureScot needs to focus on ensuring their engagement in the planning system demonstrates an understanding of the role and priorities of other key agencies, along with a collaborative approach to addressing potential conflicts; that advice given is unambiguous, clear and concise; that advice on development proposals and development frameworks help to improve outcomes for landscapes and nature; that they deal with development plans and spatial strategies to improve outcomes for landscape and nature, and that advice is consistent across all departments and offices.

#### **3.4 Awareness of Service Statement**

A majority of respondents were aware of the NatureScot 2018 Service Statement.

#### **3.5 Awareness of guidance**

Views on guidance produced by NatureScot are positive. However, the data points to the need for the organisation to ensure its guidance is unambiguous and concise.

Areas for improvement to guidance include ensuring all guidance is concise and streamlined as well as being written in language that is not ambiguous. NatureScot also needs to ensure that all guidance is well publicised and accessible. This includes ensuring that all guidance is clearly signposted on its website.

In terms of supporting guidance, there is support from respondents for webinars aimed at planning professionals, sharing good practice events and the delivery of capacity building and / or continued professional development training. In turn, these events allow for customer relationships to be maintained and built upon and to maintain positive impressions of the organisation.

### **3.6 Early engagement in the planning system**

It will be important that NatureScot continues to focus its efforts across a wide range of areas. While contributing to pre-application discussions on development proposals is seen to be of primary importance, the data emphasises the need to offer a range of advice and support which includes advising on design frameworks, development briefs and masterplanning; advising on SEA; influencing the national plans of other agencies / bodies; inputting to strategic and local development plans and building capacity in others through guidance and training.

### **3.7 Satisfaction with service received**

Overall satisfaction with the service provided by NatureScot is high, with respondents awarding an average score of 6.64 (from a maximum of 10). Key approaches to improve this score will include increased engagement and collaboration, along with a willingness to enter into dialogue; and for the provision of clear and concise information. There is also a need to ensure that staff provide consistent advice to customers, both across their own departments and offices as well as being in line with advice given by other organisations.

## APPENDIX 1: LIST OF SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 Which of the following best describes your interest in the Planning System:

1	I work as a developer
2	I work as a planning consultant or agent
3	I work in another organisation representing the interests of developers
4	I am a planning officer or work within a planning authority
5	I work within a Scottish Government department
6	I work within a government agency
7	I work within a non-government organisation (NGO) or voluntary body
8	I am a member of a community council
9	I am part of a community or other local organisation
10	I am a private individual
11	I am a member of a special interest group
12	I am a householder applicant
13	Other (please specify)

Q2a What is the primary area of your business (tick all that apply in the list):

1	Renewables
2	Housing
3	Terrestrial minerals
4	Marine minerals
5	Agriculture
6	Forestry
7	Aquaculture
8	Fishing
9	Tourism
10	Nature conservation
11	Other (please specify)
12	All of the above

Q2a(i) Please say which area of renewables (tick all that apply in the list):

1	Hydro
2	Onshore wind
3	Offshore wind
4	Wave
5	Tidal
6	Solar
7	Biomass
8	Other

Q2b Please say which of the following areas your involvement in the planning and associated development systems is related to (tick all that apply in the list):

1	Renewables
2	Housing
3	Terrestrial minerals
4	Marine minerals
5	Agriculture
6	Forestry
7	Aquaculture
8	Fishing
9	Tourism
10	Nature conservation
11	Other (please specify)
12	All of the above

Q2b(i) Please say which area of renewables (tick all that apply in the list):

1	Hydro
2	Onshore wind
3	Offshore wind
4	Wave
5	Tidal
6	Solar
7	Biomass
8	Other

Q2c Which of the following organisations have you had any contact with in relation to planning?

1	Architecture & Design Scotland
2	Crofters Commission
3	Forestry & Land Scotland
4	Health Boards
5	Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
6	Historic Environment Scotland (HES)
7	Marine Scotland
8	NatureScot
9	Regional Transport Partnerships
10	Scottish Enterprise
11	Scottish Forestry
12	Scottish Water
13	SportScotland
14	The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
15	Transport Scotland

Q3a If you are involved with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), at which stages are you involved with NatureScot?

1	Before Scoping
2	Scoping
3	Environmental Statement
4	Other (please specify)
5	Not involved with EIA

Q4 How easy would you say it is to contact relevant NatureScot staff?

1	Very easy
2	Quite easy
3	Not very easy
4	Not at all easy
5	Don't know

Q5 Are you aware of the 2018 NatureScot Planning for Development Service Statement?

1	Yes – I have read it
2	Yes – I'm aware of it but haven't read it
3	No

Q6 Are you aware of the following guidance from NatureScot?

	Guidance document	Yes – I have read it	Yes – I'm aware of it but haven't read it	No
1	A handbook on Environmental Impact Assessment: Guidance for Competent Authorities, Consultees and others involved in the EIA process in Scotland (5 <sup>th</sup> Edition April 2018)			
2	Wind farm proposals on afforested sites – advice on measures to minimise attractiveness to hen harrier, merlin and short-eared owl (Jan 2016)			
3	Assessing the cumulative impact of onshore wind farm developments (Mar 2012)			
4	General scoping and pre-application advice (Mar 2016)			
5	Decommissioning and Restoration Plans (DRP) for on-shore wind farms (Version 2, Feb 2016)			
6	Large scale solar photovoltaic installations: Considering landscape, visual and ecological impacts (Jan 2016)			
7	Good practice during windfarm construction (Version 3, Sept 2015)			
8	Visual representation of wind farms (Version 2.2, February 2017)			

9	Siting and designing wind farms in the landscape (Version 3, February 2017)			
10	Species advice notes for developers			
11	Good practice image guide for hydro scheme contractors			

Q7 Thinking now about guidance produced by NatureScot, please tell us to what extent you agree with the following statements:

Statement	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know
I can easily find guidance on the website.						
Guidance documents are well laid out.						
The language used in guidance documents is jargon-free.						
Guidance is unambiguous.						
Guidance documents are concise.						
The information contained in guidance is relevant to me.						
The information contained in guidance is useful to me.						

Q8 What could NatureScot do to improve its guidance in order to help you reduce impacts on the natural heritage (please write in below)?

Q9a To support this guidance, what else could NatureScot do to better help other organisations consider natural heritage assets? (tick all that apply):

1	Develop video podcasts that demonstrate best practice and guidance in action
2	Deliver capacity building and/or continued professional development training
3	Host a programme of sharing good practice events
4	Deliver a programme of webinars aimed at planning professionals
5	Develop online, interactive scenario based eLearning activities
6	Other (please specify)
7	Don't know

Q9b Have you taken part in or viewed any of our Planning for Great Spaces series of webinars?

1	Yes
2	No
3	Don't know

Q9c If yes, how useful have you found them?

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

Q9d What topics would you find it helpful to cover in future webinars?

Q10 Do you find NatureScot's Planning and Development e-newsletter useful?

1	Yes
2	Not aware of it
3	No

Q11 Which NatureScot services have you used, and how (tick all that apply)?

	NatureScot Service	Indirectly through NatureScot website	Directly through NatureScot correspondence
1	Guidance (awareness of natural heritage assets)		
2	Guidance (on planning and development matters)		
3	Advice (on specific plans and associated SEA/HRA)		
4	Advice (on specific development proposals, including pre-application discussions)		
5	Good practice guidance and case studies		
6	Natural heritage site data		
7	Research findings		
8	Species licenses		
9	Other services		

Q12 The following statements relate to various NatureScot services. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each:

Statement	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know
NatureScot's requests for further information are proportionate to the importance of the potential impacts of the proposal on nature and landscapes.						
The reasons given by NatureScot for requests for further information are clearly explained.						
NatureScot is willing to engage in pre-application discussions.						

The NatureScot staff that I deal with try to look for solutions to landscape and nature conservation issues so the development can be progressed.						
Engaging in pre-application discussions has resulted in better quality planning applications.						
NatureScot's role at the various stages of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process is clearly defined.						
At Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) scoping, NatureScot's engagement is influential.						

Q13 The following statements relate to advice given by NatureScot. Please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each:

Statement	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	Don't know
NatureScot's advice is unambiguous, clear and concise.						
When dealing with development proposals, NatureScot advice has helped me improve outcomes for landscape & nature						
NatureScot's advice complements and does not conflict with advice from other agencies.						
Advice I receive is consistent with advice given by all NatureScot departments/offices.						
When dealing with development plans or spatial strategies, NatureScot advice has helped me improve outcomes for landscape and nature.						
When dealing with development frameworks (development briefs or masterplans), NatureScot advice has helped me improve the outcomes for landscape and nature.						

NatureScot's advice on development planning has helped promote green networks and green infrastructure as an integral component of successful place-making.						
NatureScot's advice in relation to the findings in Environmental Statements adds value to the decision-making process.						

Q14 Please can you give any specific examples of inconsistencies in advice that you have experienced between NatureScot departments or between NatureScot and other agencies.

Q15 How useful have you found the information and/or guidance that you have accessed through NatureScot's website?

1	Very useful
2	Quite useful
3	Not very useful
4	Not at all useful
5	Have never accessed

Q16 In relation to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), how useful have you found NatureScot's responses?

1	Very useful
2	Quite useful
3	Indifferent
4	Not very useful
5	Not useful at all
6	Don't know / no involvement in SEA

Q17. As part of our shift towards early engagement in the planning system, please tell us which of the following areas of work you think NatureScot should focus our efforts on. Rate the importance of our efforts in these areas from 1 (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important)

	NatureScot work	1 Not at all important	2 - 9	10 Extremely important	Don't know
1	Building capacity in others through guidance and training				
2	Influencing National plans of other agencies/bodies.				

3	Contributing to pre-application discussions on development proposals				
4	Inputting to Strategic and Local Development Plans				
5	Advising on Strategic Environmental Assessment				
6	Advising on Habitats Regulations Appraisal				
7	Advising on Design Frameworks, Development Briefs, Masterplanning				

Q18 Overall, do you agree or disagree that NatureScot's approach to guidance and advice is enabling (i.e. constructive and customer-focussed)?

1	Agree strongly
2	Agree
3	Disagree
4	Disagree strongly
5	Don't know

Q19a Overall, do you agree or disagree that NatureScot makes a positive contribution to planning and development processes?

1	Agree strongly
2	Agree
3	Disagree
4	Disagree strongly
5	Don't know

Q19b Please can you give any specific examples of where NatureScot could have been more enabling or made a more positive contribution to the planning system.

Q20a On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is not at all satisfied and 10 is completely satisfied), please could you rate your overall satisfaction with the service you receive from NatureScot.

1 Not at all satisfied	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 Completely satisfied	Don't know
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Q20b What could NatureScot do for you in order to achieve a rating of 10?



**NatureScot**

Scotland's Nature Agency  
Buidheann Nàdair na h-Alba

**[www.nature.scot](http://www.nature.scot)**

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