



SCOTTISH LAND COMMISSION  
COIMISEAN FEARAINN NA H-ALBA

# Community Engagement Survey Results 2022



## Executive Summary

The Scottish Land Commission (“the Commission”) carried out two surveys on community engagement in 2022 – one for landowners and managers and another for communities – to build on baseline studies carried out in 2019. The surveys were intended to explore whether and what community engagement activities were taking place, how effective engagement was felt to be, and any perceived benefits or barriers to engagement.

We received a similar number of responses to the landowner survey as in 2019 (65 in 2022, compared to 64 in 2019) but fewer responses to the community survey (259 in 2019, and 111 in 2022). We do not know how many of the respondents in 2022 also responded in 2019. In addition, as survey respondents were self-selecting, we should recognise that those who noticed and responded to the survey are more likely to have previously been exposed to the work of the Commission and other stakeholders in the sector on community engagement. Due to these limitations and the small sample sizes we need to be cautious in comparing data between the two years and in drawing conclusions from the results.

Limitations in survey data collected mean that this survey does not draw out conclusive reasons for *why* changes have occurred; whether the Commission has had influence, or whether change occurred due to other factors.

The lessons drawn from this survey will inform our future work on good practice, including our training and workshops programme. We will also use the survey results to inform any future research work.

Some of the key results from the survey are:

- Context
  - The majority of respondents for both surveys were from rural areas. More need to be done to understand the experience of landowners and managers and communities in urban areas.
  
- Knowledge and awareness
  - Two thirds of respondents to the community survey reported that they knew who the landowners in their area were and how to contact them.
  - The majority of landowners and managers who responded knew who their local community organisations were and how to contact them. This was consistent with the 2019 survey.
  - A higher proportion of landowners and managers felt somewhat or very familiar with their local community’s aspirations, increasing from 63% of respondents in 2019 to 81% in 2022.
  
- Experiences of engagement
  - A majority of community respondents felt their views did not have much of an influence on the decisions made about significant aspects of the way land or buildings are used or managed in their community (63%).
  - This contrasts with landowners and managers, who responded that community views do have an impact on the decisions they make about land (79%) and that their engagement is effective, with 89% of landowners reporting their efforts as somewhat or very effective.

- Fewer landowners and managers reported facing barriers to engagement in 2022 (32%) than in 2019 (53%). Community survey respondents reported concerns about engagement not being meaningful, difficulty in finding information, and engagement not being widespread enough.
- Community survey respondents were asked to identify ways to improve engagement, and suggestions included regulatory or legal changes, more accessible information being made available, more direct communication, decentralised decision making, and training for landowners, managers and local councillors on engagement.
- Landowners and managers identified a number of benefits to community engagement, including that engagement facilitates co-operation and builds understanding and buy-in, that engagement enables expectations to be managed, and that engagement helps to build positive relationships.

From the results, we can draw out the following:

- Those responding in their capacity as part of a community group (such as a Development Trust or Community Council) were more likely to know at least some of their local landowners, compared with those responding as individuals, suggesting participation in community groups has a beneficial knowledge-sharing effect.
- Responses suggest that there is an ongoing need to raise awareness of the Commission's [Protocol on Community Engagement](#) and [Scottish Government Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land](#) and how they can be used to support engagement.
- The landowners and managers who responded appeared to be fairly confident in relation to their experiences of engagement and they recognise the benefits it brings. There may be opportunities to make more of these positive experiences to encourage good practice in engagement by other landowners and managers.

## **Background**

### *Policy*

The Scottish Government's [Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement](#) (LRRS), which was updated in 2022, sets out a vision and principles for land use, management, and ownership in Scotland. Principle 7 of the Statement sets out:

“There should be meaningful collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land”.

Meaningful engagement in decisions made about land and buildings is a key aspect of responsible management and use of land. Decisions relating to land and buildings can have a wide range of social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts on local communities, and effective engagement can mitigate negative impacts, while delivering benefits for landowners and communities.

After the LRRS was launched and to support the principles on community engagement, the Scottish Government published [Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land](#). The Commission then published a [Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land](#) in January 2019.

### *Commission surveys*

In 2019, the Commission carried out two surveys; one of landowners and managers, and one of community organisations and individuals, to establish a baseline measurement of involvement in, and experiences of, community engagement activities. The [results](#) of the first surveys provided a baseline from which progress can be measured.

In Autumn 2022, the Commission carried out two further surveys to understand what progress has been made since 2019, and what additional support, guidance or changes might be required to encourage and enable more effective engagement in relation to land use decisions. The surveys were launched in September and ran until mid-December 2022. Both surveys were promoted widely across our social media channels and with key stakeholders and membership organisations.

## **Summary of key findings**

### ***Who responded to the survey?***

A total of 111 people responded to the community survey, and 62 people responded to the landowners' survey. These response rates are lower than in 2019 when 64 responses were received from landowners and managers and 259 responses were received from communities.

In 2022, community survey respondents came from 21 of Scotland's 32 local authority areas, compared with 30 in 2019. In addition, three quarters of these respondents came from rural contexts in 2022, compared with 54% in 2019. Urban responses are therefore less well represented in the community survey.

However, in both 2019 and 2022 over 80% of landowner and manager respondents came from rural contexts. In 2022, these responses came from 15 local authority areas, with 20% of responses from the Highlands.

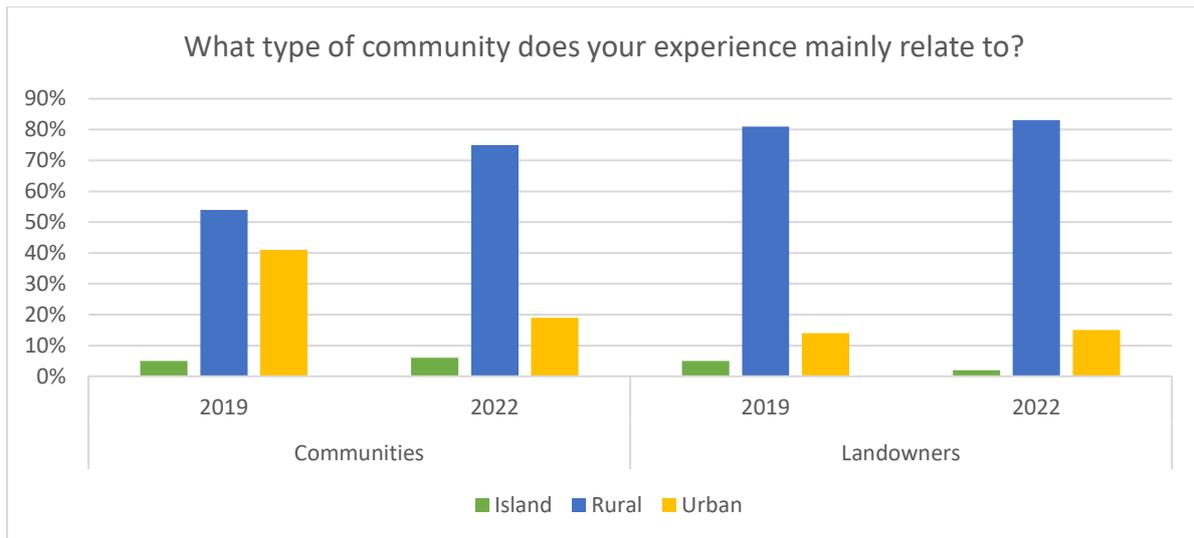


Figure 1 – Profile of respondents.

The largest sub-group of responses to the landowner survey were from land managers or other land professionals (29%) and farm owners (27%). Most of those who completed the community survey were responding as individuals rather than as representatives of community-based organisations (55% in 2019 and 74% in 2022). The increase in individuals may reflect changes to survey distribution between years, as the 2019 survey was circulated to all community councils in Scotland in correspondence from Scottish Government, and this did not happen in 2022. This may also have contributed to the lower sample size in 2022.

**What did communities tell us they know about land ownership and use in their area?**

*Knowledge of who owns land*

Overall, almost two thirds (65%) of community survey respondents knew who at least some of the landowners were in their area and how to contact them. This represents a five-percentage point increase since 2019.

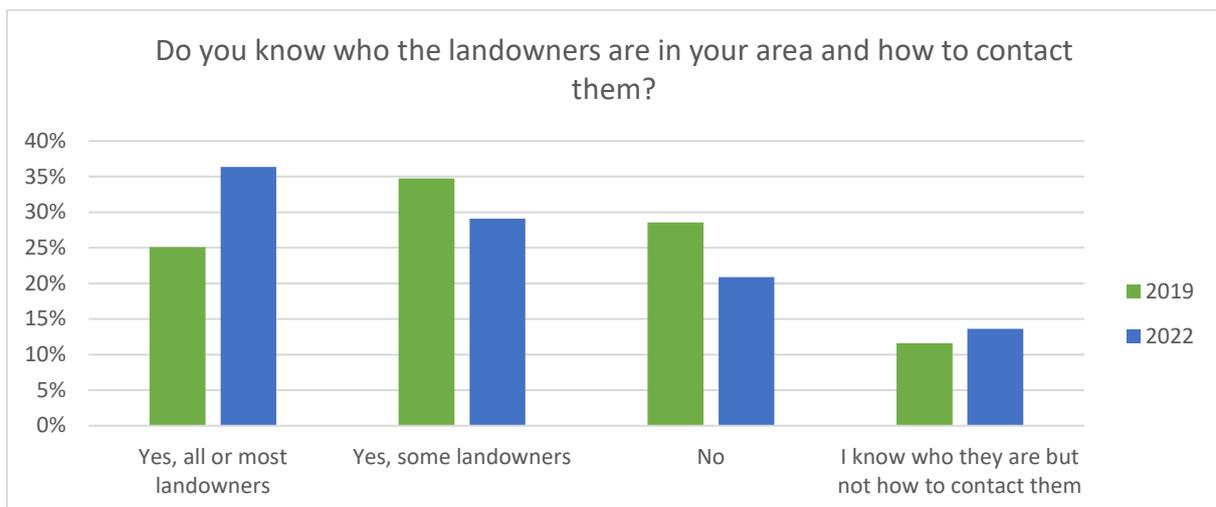


Figure 2 – Knowledge of landowners in local area, Community Surveys 2019 and 2022.

Those responding as members of a community group were more likely to know local landowners compared with those responding as individuals. This suggests that participation in community groups has a beneficial knowledge-sharing effect. However, responses from individuals suggested an increase in landowner knowledge between years, with the proportion of individuals reporting that they know all or most of their local landowners increasing from 19% to 30%. Similarly, as in 2019, urban respondents seemed to be less likely to know their local landowners overall, but responses showed an increase in the proportion who know all or some landowners between 2019 and 2022 (43% to 53%).

#### *Understanding of how decisions are made*

Community survey respondents reported an increased understanding of how decisions are made about land and buildings in their communities. The proportion of respondents indicating that they have full or some understanding increased from 65% in 2019 to 75% in 2022.

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2022</b>
I fully understand	15%	20%
I have some understanding	50%	55%
I have little understanding	28%	17%
I have no understanding	7%	8%

*Figure 3 – Table showing responses to question about understanding of how land use decisions are made.*

#### *Familiarity with plans for land*

Responses to the community survey indicated slight decreases in knowledge and understanding in some areas:

- Familiarity with local landowners’ short-term plans for the land or buildings – fewer community respondents answered that they felt very or quite familiar with these plans (a decrease from 22% to 16%).
- Familiarity with community priorities and aspirations for the local area – a higher proportion of respondents answered ‘a little’ or ‘not at all’ (an increase from 33% to 47%), while fewer answered ‘very’ or ‘quite’ (a decrease from 46% to 34%).
- How access to land and buildings could support their communities’ priorities – fewer respondents answered ‘very’ or ‘quite’ (a decrease from 43% to 36%) and more answered ‘moderately’ (increase from 13% to 19%).

Overall, these responses suggest that communities are not as aware of plans and priorities for land in their local areas as they were in 2019. Comparing between questions, results suggest that communities feel less familiar with local landowners plans than they do with community priorities and how access to land could support their communities’ priorities. Familiarity with local landowners’ long-term plans was broadly similar in the 2019 and 2022 surveys.

### **What did land owners and managers tell us about how they approach engagement?**

#### *Knowledge of communities*

In contrast to communities, 87% of respondents to the landowners and managers survey reported that they knew who the community organisations in their area were and how to contact them. This

was a decrease of 10% from 2019, but still a clear majority of respondents. Landowners reported increased awareness of community aspirations for the area, and how these might impact on, or be supported by, the land or buildings they own or manage. The proportion who felt somewhat or very familiar with community aspirations rose from 63% of respondents in 2019 to 81% in 2022.

#### *Attitudes towards engagement*

In 2019, 10% of landowners and managers surveyed did not believe it was appropriate to engage with their local community. In 2022, this fell to 5%.

There was no change in the proportion of landowners and managers who said they had a community engagement plan in place already (31%). There was an increase in the proportion of landowners who indicated that they do not believe that an engagement strategy or plan is necessary but do engage with the community in other ways (increasing from 39% to 52%). When asked to explain their answers, the written comments of landowners and managers suggested the following:

- Those who had a formal plan in place felt it was beneficial because it ensured regular and effective communication and allowed their approach to community engagement to be integrated with their wider land management planning.
- Those who felt formal plans were unnecessary generally felt that engagement could take place informally with local community as and when needed.
- Some of those who did not believe it was appropriate to engage felt that way for practical reasons, as they worked only a small area of land that did not affect nearby communities significantly, so it would not be a good use of their resources.

#### *Confidence in engaging*

In terms of confidence, there was no change in the proportion of landowners who did not feel at all confident engaging with their community (5% in both 2019 and 2022). The proportion of landowners who were confident (extremely or very) decreased slightly whilst the proportion of landowners identifying as 'somewhat confident' also slightly increased.

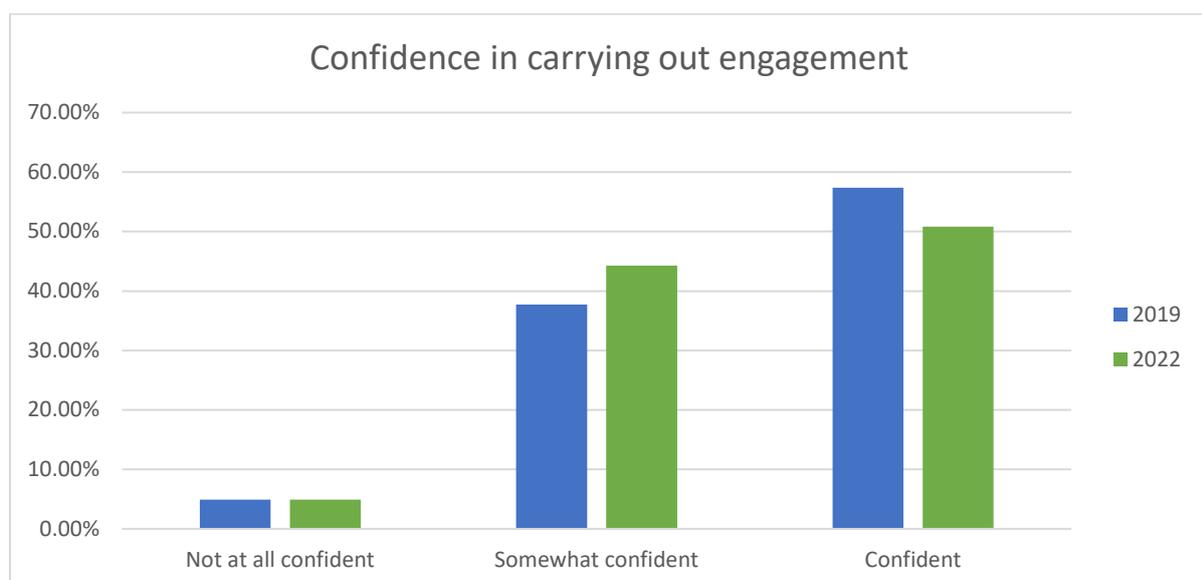


Figure 4 – Confidence in carrying out engagement, land owner and manager surveys.

## How effective did respondents feel engagement was?

The 2022 survey results indicate a difference in the experience of engagement between landowners and communities.

Most community respondents reported that their views did not have much of an influence on the decisions made about significant aspects of the way land or buildings are used or managed in their community (63%). In contrast, most landowners and managers who responded feel that community views do have an impact on the decisions they make about their own land (79%).

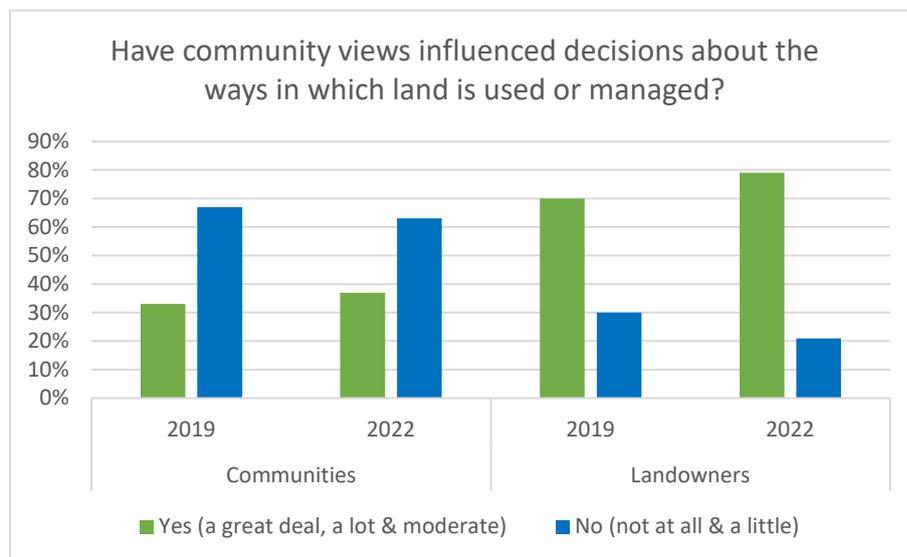


Figure 5 – Influence of community views on decisions, Community and Landowner surveys.<sup>1</sup>

## Types of engagement activities

Respondents to both surveys identified a range of types of engagement activities taking place, with a mix of formal and informal activities.

Statutory consultation for planning developments was the most common type of engagement identified by community survey respondents as having taken place in the last two years. 19% of respondents said that none of the identified engagement activities had taken place in their local area.

A smaller number of community respondents also highlighted email, word of mouth and direct contact as being ways in which landowners and managers had engaged with them. Some respondents mentioned that forestry had engaged them in non-statutory consultation and others suggested that the renewable sector tended to do better in terms of communication and consultation.

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<sup>1</sup> Communities were asked "To what extent have community views influenced the decisions made about significant aspects of the way land or buildings are used or managed in your community in the last two years?" and landowners were asked "To what extent have community views influenced the decisions you have made about the way your land is used or managed in the last two years?"

Type of Engagement Activity	Respondents who said these activities had taken place in the last 2 years
Statutory consultation for planning developments	40%
Public meetings	27%
Public notices and information	24%
Surveys or other consultation documents	23%
Social media posts / blogs	22%
Public exhibitions / street stalls	22%
Statutory consultation for forestry developments	19%
Newsletters	15%
None	19%
Focus groups / advisory panels	11%

Figure 6 – Table of engagement activities.

Around a third of landowners and managers reported that they had used public notices and information to engage with communities. A similar proportion of respondents had used social media or blog posts, while a quarter reported using consultation documents, public exhibitions, and public meetings. 27% of landowners chose ‘Other’ consultation methods, which included direct correspondence with specific community organisations, organising events and visits, and informal contact.

### What did communities say about their experiences of engagement?

#### *Engagement activities and effectiveness*

61% of respondents took part in some, most or all of the engagement activities carried out in their community, a 5-percentage point decrease since 2019. Around 20% of community respondents reported that no engagement took place (23% in 2019).

Of those who did take part in engagement, the proportion of respondents who reported they felt it was effective increased slightly from 42% to 50% and the proportion of respondents who did not feel it was effective decreased from 58% to 50%.

Reasons provided by those who felt engagement activities were ineffective included:

- Concerns that consultation is meaningless and feelings that views given through a consultation are largely ignored by those making decisions about land.
- Perceptions that consultation is a ‘tick-box exercise’ and those carrying it out are not really interested in local opinions.
- Lack of information about engagement taking place – feelings that direct information from landowners and councils is limited and the onus is on communities to find the information.
- Concerns that local decisions are overruled by central government.
- Perceptions of a lack of wider community engagement, beyond a core of people who are already engaged.

### *Preferences for engagement*

Communities were asked how they would *like* to be engaged with. Community preferences for methods of consultation were very similar to 2019, with public meetings or workshops being identified as the most preferred option across both surveys. These may reflect differences in the preferences of individuals rather than trends.

<b>Preferred engagement method</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2019</b>
Public meetings or workshops	59%	72%
Via the local Community Council or another representative group	53%	63%
Written consultation (e.g. paper or online surveys)	44%	59%
Information updates on local noticeboards / newspapers / newsletters	39%	57%
Through a project steering group that includes local residents	42%	53%
Ballot / vote on any changes	28%	49%
Via engagement on social media	36%	49%

*Figure 7 – Table of preferred engagement methods, Community surveys.*

### *Changes in community engagement*

Only a quarter of community survey respondents reported that community engagement has changed for the better in the last two years. 48% felt community engagement had not changed, 14% were not aware of community engagement in their area, and 13% felt it had changed for the worse.

For those who felt engagement had changed for the better, they highlighted increased engagement from the local community, and consultation resulting in good outcomes for the community.

For those who felt engagement had not changed, or changed for the worse, respondents highlighted the following themes:

- Lack of information – the onus is on communities to find out about plans
- Engagement not taking place early enough – funding bids or planning applications are often the first communities hear of them.
- Issues with digital literacy meaning the reliance on online information is a barrier to engagement.
- Perceptions that consultation does not result in any change/is not meaningful.
- Experiences of hostility from landowners and councillors who do not want to change their views.

### *Perceptions of engagement carried out by different stakeholders*

Community survey respondents were asked to rate community engagement in relation to land use decisions by different organisations in their area.

Community councils and development trusts/community organisations were rated highest, with 37% and 34% of respondents rating their experience of engagement as strong or very strong in the 2022 survey respectively.

Large scale private landowners and small-scale private landowners were rated the lowest, with 80% and 76% of respondents rating their experience of engagement as weak or very weak in the 2022 survey respectively.

Scottish Government, Local Authorities and other public bodies were relatively similar in terms of perception, with 67%, 67%, and 59% of respondents rating them as weak or very weak in the 2022 survey respectively.

### *Communities' ideas for improving engagement*

Communities were asked how community engagement in their area could be improved and what support might be needed. Their answers can be summarised as follows:

- Regulatory or legal changes. Suggestions included:
  - A legal requirement to engage in writing and time for community to respond, for communities to be balloted, or for community benefit to be provided.
  - Mandatory requirement to act in line with the land rights and responsibilities statement.
  - A requirement that no land use change plans could be submitted without evidence of consultation.
  - A greater requirement for consultation on plans that affect the environment or climate change.
- More direct communication, meetings, workshops, and citizens assemblies.
- More accessible information.
- Developing relationships with local council/councillors/planning board.
- Break down siloes between community groups (forestry, housing etc) to work together.
- Funding for communities to be involved in engagement e.g. from local land tax or central government.
- Greater recognition of the value of local knowledge.
- Public sector playing a more active role in planning.
- Support for community wealth building.
- Decentralised decision making.
- Positive examples and praise from the Commission/ Scottish Government.
- Training for landowners/managers and councillors on meaningful engagement.

### **What did land owners and managers say about the effectiveness and benefits of community engagement?**

Most landowners and managers surveyed stated they had carried out community engagement activities in 2019 (81%) and in 2022 (77%).

In general landowners felt their engagement was effective, with 61% finding it somewhat effective, and 28% finding it very effective. Their reasons for this included:

- Engagement facilitated cooperation, allowing joint projects to be delivered successfully.
- In-person engagement increased community awareness of land-use decisions and opportunities.

Attitudes towards the benefits of engagement have changed positively between the two surveys. There was an increase in the proportion of landowners and managers who reported that there are benefits to engagement, from 73% in 2019 to 88% in 2022.

The main benefits described were:

- Engagement means contentious issues can be addressed head-on.
- Communities can better understand and ‘buy-in’ to decisions being made.
- Expectations can be effectively managed.
- Speculation and misunderstandings can be prevented, and positive relationships built.

### What barriers to good engagement did land owners and managers identify?

There was a decrease in the proportion of landowners and managers who reported facing barriers when it comes to engaging with their local community. The proportion who perceived that there were barriers decreased from 53% to 32%. The main barriers outlined by landowners and managers included:

- A difficulty in identifying community groups to contact.
- A perceived lack of interest and participation from local communities in attempts in engagement (such as poor attendance at community council meetings).

### Are people aware of and using existing published guidance?

#### Awareness

Both the landowners and managers survey and the community survey tested awareness of existing published guidance on community engagement. Respondents were asked about levels of familiarity with:

- The Scottish Government’s *Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land*;
- The Scottish Land Commission’s *Protocol on Community Engagement in Land Use Decision-Making*; and
- The *National Standards for Community Engagement*.

In the 2019 survey, 34% of community respondents reported that they had used or heard of Scottish Government’s ‘Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land,’ compared with 82% landowners and managers. In 2022, this increased to 55% of communities and remained broadly similar for landowners and managers.

		I am familiar with and have used this	I have heard of this but have not used this	I am not familiar with this and have not used this
2022				
Scottish Government’s ‘Guidance on Engaging Communities in Decisions Relating to Land’	Community	10%	45%	45%
	Landowner	25%	56%	19%

Figure 8 – Table of responses on familiarity with Scottish Government Guidance.

Respondents were less familiar with the Commission’s ‘Protocol for Community Engagement’ than with the Scottish Government guidance in the 2022 survey.

2022		I am familiar with and have used this	I have heard of this but have not used this	I am not familiar with this and have not used this
Scottish Land Commission’s ‘Protocol for Community Engagement’	Community	8%	40%	52%
	Landowner	25%	48%	27%

Figure 9 – Table of responses on familiarity with SLC Protocol.

The 2022 surveys also asked about the ‘National Standards for Community Engagement.’ Respondents to the 2019 survey were not asked about this.

2022		I am familiar with and have used this	I have heard of this but have not used this	I am not familiar with this and have not used this
‘National Standards for Community Engagement’	Community	13%	27%	60%
	Landowner	23%	44%	33%

Overall, the results show an increased awareness in published guidance amongst communities and individuals. However, the biggest increases were in responses indicating that respondents have heard of the guidance but have not used it, suggesting awareness is not yet translating into increased usage. Overall, the same is true for landowners and managers, where responses showed a slight decrease in use of the guidance but an increase in awareness.

#### *Sources of information on community engagement*

Landowners and managers indicated that they had heard about the Scottish Government guidance through sector membership organisations, with the Scottish Land Commission website an important secondary source. This was the same as in 2019.

For communities, the most commonly identified sources of information about both the Scottish Government guidance *and* the protocol on community engagement were the Scottish Land Commission website, followed by word of mouth, social media, or the Scottish Government website.

#### *Usefulness of guidance*

In terms of the perceived usefulness of the guidance, protocols and standards for communities, 36% of community respondents indicated that they found the Government guidance and Commission protocol extremely, very or somewhat useful, compared with 27% for the national standards.

Communities said they would find it more useful if the documents were actually used by those carrying out engagement, with some respondents suggesting there should be legislative requirements for landowners to follow the guidance. Others suggested they should be better publicised to communities and made easier to read.

### ***Methodology comments***

Blank responses were removed from the analysis. Results are mainly discussed as percentages of responses to each question, e.g. “19% of respondents were from urban contexts” indicates that 19% of those who answered this question selected this answer.

Limitations in survey data collected mean that this survey does not draw out conclusive reasons for *why* changes have occurred, whether the Commission has had influence, or whether change occurred due to other factors.

In some cases, comparisons between years or between the community and the landowner surveys required recoding of answers. This was only done where feasible without changing the original meaning of responses.

Due to the different sample sizes between years in the community survey, and the relatively low sample size for the landowner survey, the results should be treated with caution. Perceived differences in percentages between years may not be the result of real differences in involvement or experiences of engagement over time.