

## Chapter 2

### Key themes and findings from the survey

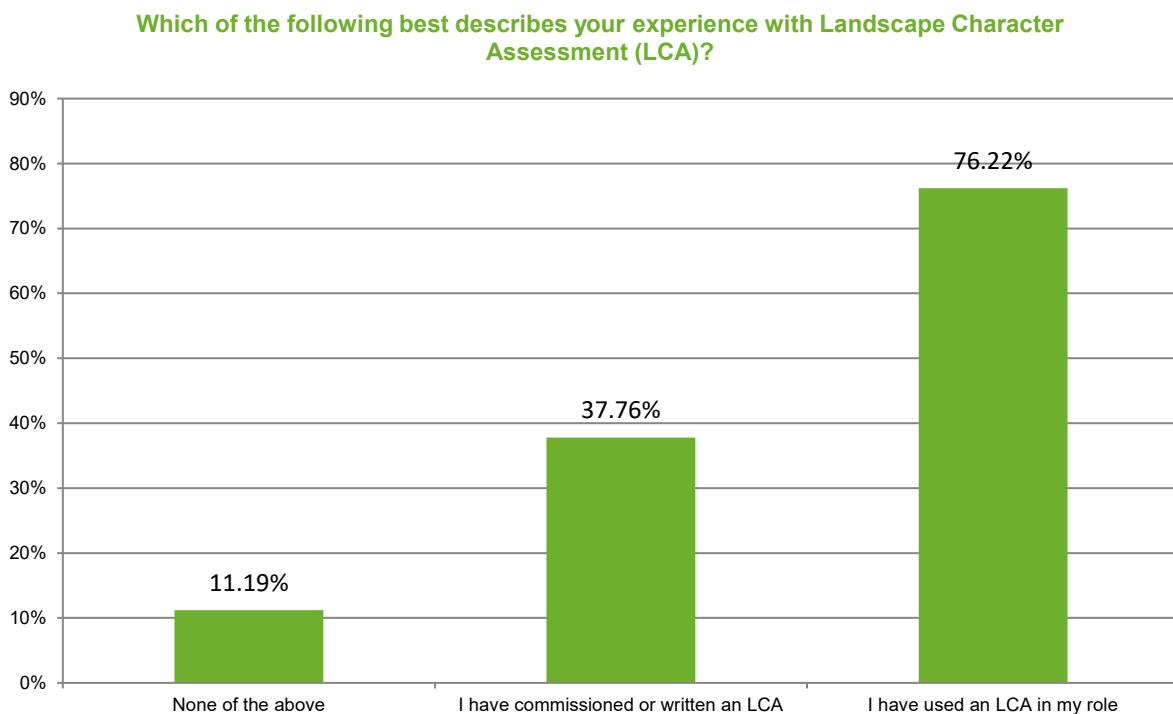
#### This chapter sets out the key findings from the survey

**2.1** An online survey was hosted on the LCA Consultation Hub from the 9<sup>th</sup> February to the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

**2.2** As stated in the method, there were two main 'routes' through the survey questions: one focused on the LCA Approach document and another on Landscape Character Assessments (i.e. the products of the guidance). Respondents were guided along one or both of the routes in the survey, depending on their personal experience.

**2.3** The first section of the survey asked participants about their experience with LCA and the type of organisation that they worked for.

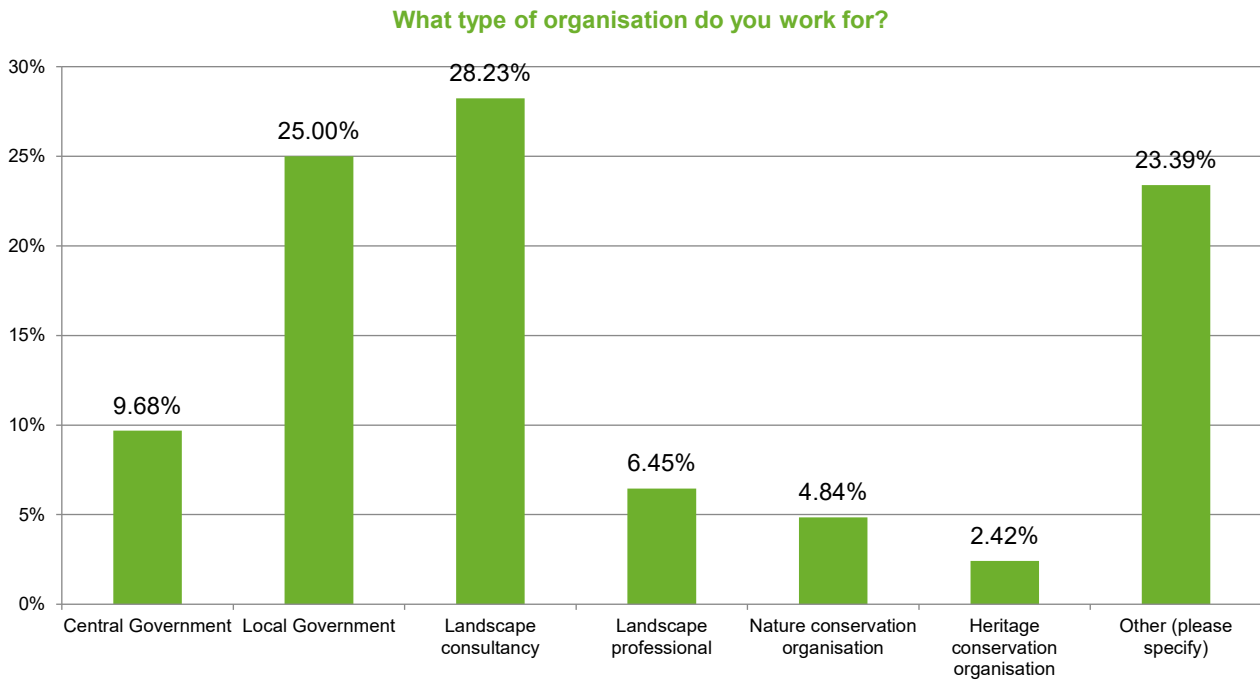
Figure 2.1 Chart showing responses to the question: Which of the following best describes your experience with Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)?



**2.4** Figure 2.1 above shows the responses to the question 'Which of the following best describes your experience with Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)?'. People could choose multiple responses to this question, hence the percentages

total more than 100%. Most of the respondents (76%) had used LCA in their role, while 37% had commissioned or written an LCA. 11% had neither commissioned/written or used an LCA.

Figure 2.2 Chart showing responses to the question: What type of organisation do you work for?



2.5 Figure 2.2 shows responses to the question 'What type of organisation do you work for?'. Participants came from a variety of professional backgrounds, with 'Landscape consultancy' and 'Local Government' the most popular responses to this question. No one from the forestry or agricultural sector participated in the survey.

2.6 'Other' organisations that respondents worked for included:

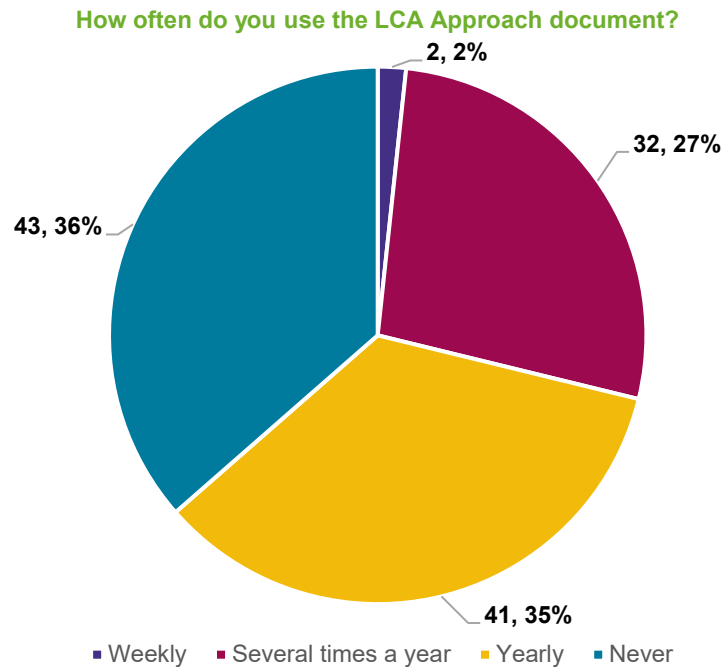
- National Park Authorities/National Landscape Partnerships
- Landscape/Environmental charities (e.g. 'Friends of' groups, Trusts)
- Non-departmental government body
- Natural Resources Wales
- National Highways

2.7 This represents a good diversity of people working across the public and private sectors, as well as people working for the third sector. However, there were no respondents from forestry or agricultural organisations.

## Findings on the LCA Approach document

2.8 This section presents the findings from questions about the LCA Approach document.

Figure 2.3 Chart showing responses to the question: How often do you use the LCA Approach document?



**2.9** Most respondents to the survey use the LCA Approach document – with 64% using the Approach document once a year or more, while 36% had never used the document. Full results are shown on Figure 2.3 above.

**2.10** Respondents were asked to provide explanations of why they did or did not use the document. Answers to this question are summarised below:

**2.11** Those who stated they did use the Approach said that the document:

- Is a recognised and accepted guidance source for LCA.
- Provides useful information on methodology for LCA.
- Is useful for reviewing LCAs.
- Provides consistency across different LCAs.

**2.12** Those who did not use the Approach said:

- They were unaware or has forgotten the document existed.
- They only used LCAs in their work, rather than the Approach document.
- It was not relevant to their work area.
- They preferred to use the 2002 version of the guidance to LCA.

**2.13** Most respondents generally did not use the LCA Approach document when working with LCA (55%) but a significant proportion (45%) did use the guidance (see Figure 2.4). Many respondents explained that while the LCA Approach formed a useful methodology when first starting to use LCA, once more experienced with the documents they did not need to refer to it every time they used an LCA.

Figure 2.4 Chart showing responses to the question 'Generally, when you use, write or otherwise work with an LCA, do you use the LCA Approach document?'

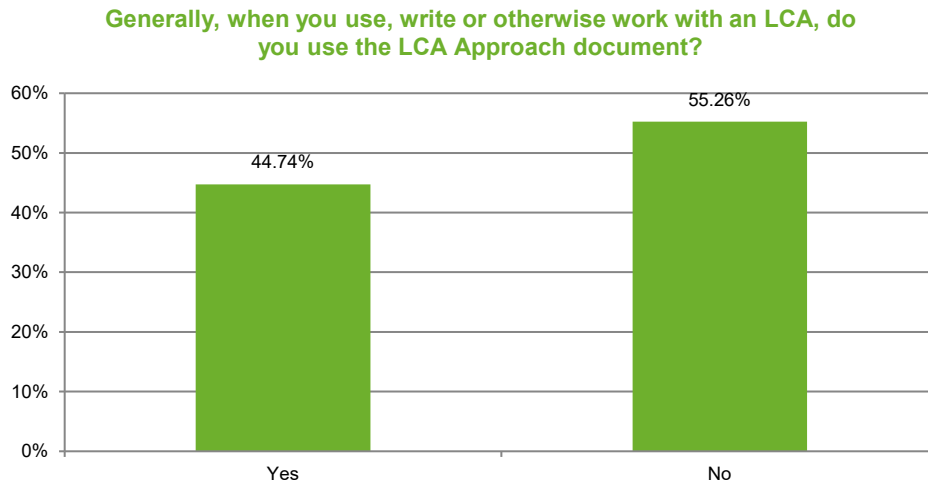
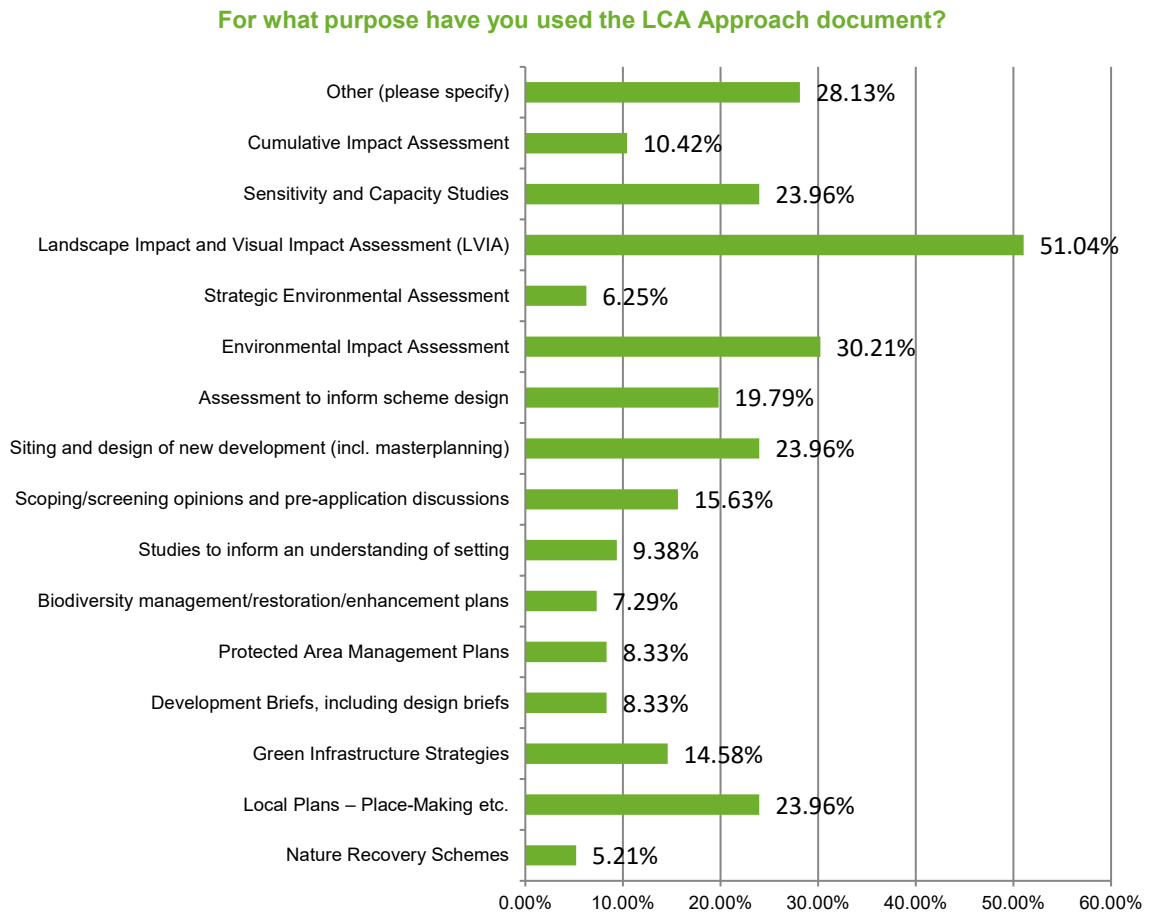


Figure 2.5 Chart showing proportion of responses to the question 'For what purpose have you used the LCA Approach document?'

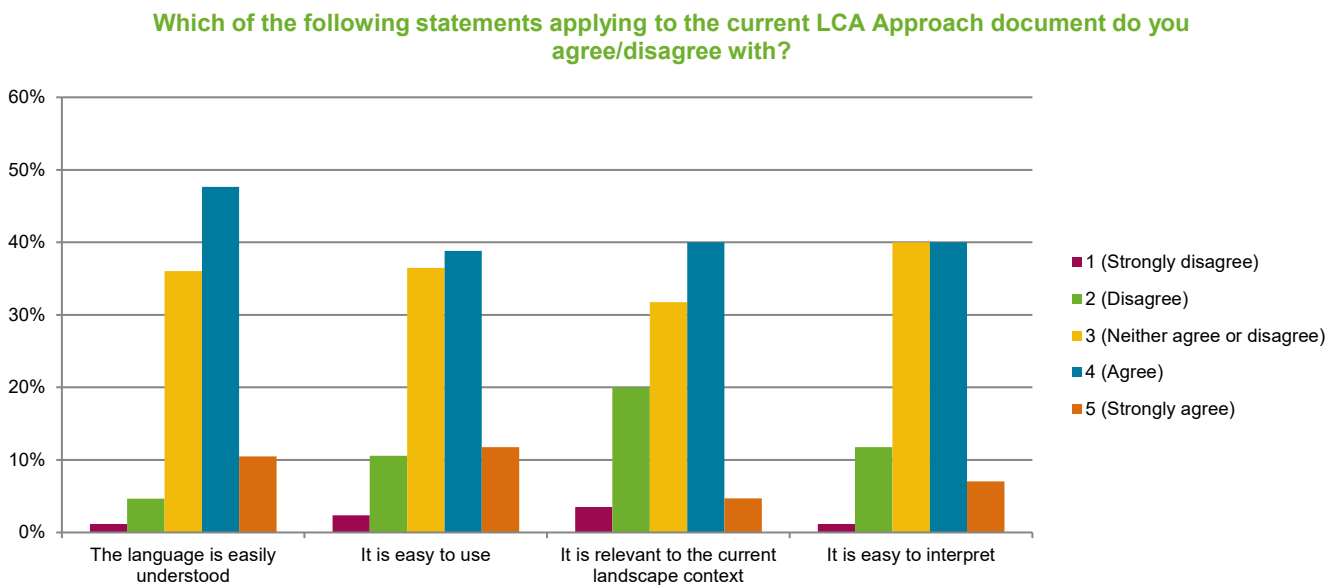


2.14 Figure 2.5 shows that the majority of respondents used the LCA Approach document for purposes relating to the planning system. The top five responses were Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), Environmental Impact Assessment

(EIA), Local Plans – Place Making, Siting and design of new development, and 'Other'. Note that respondents could select more than one response for this question.

**2.15** Survey participants also responded that they used the LCA Approach for work relating to strategies (e.g. Green Infrastructure Strategies, Nature Recovery Schemes etc.). While the LCA Approach was used less frequently for these purposes than work relating to the planning system, this may be indicative of the fact that there are currently fewer people working with these types of documents compared to the number of people working within the planning system.

**Figure 2.6** Chart showing responses to the question: Which of the following statements applying to the current LCA Approach document do you agree/disagree with?



**2.16** Figure 2.6 shows that survey responses indicate that the LCA Approach document uses easy-to-understand language and provides a robust methodology. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Approach document was easy to understand (58.14%), and just over half agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to use (50.58%).

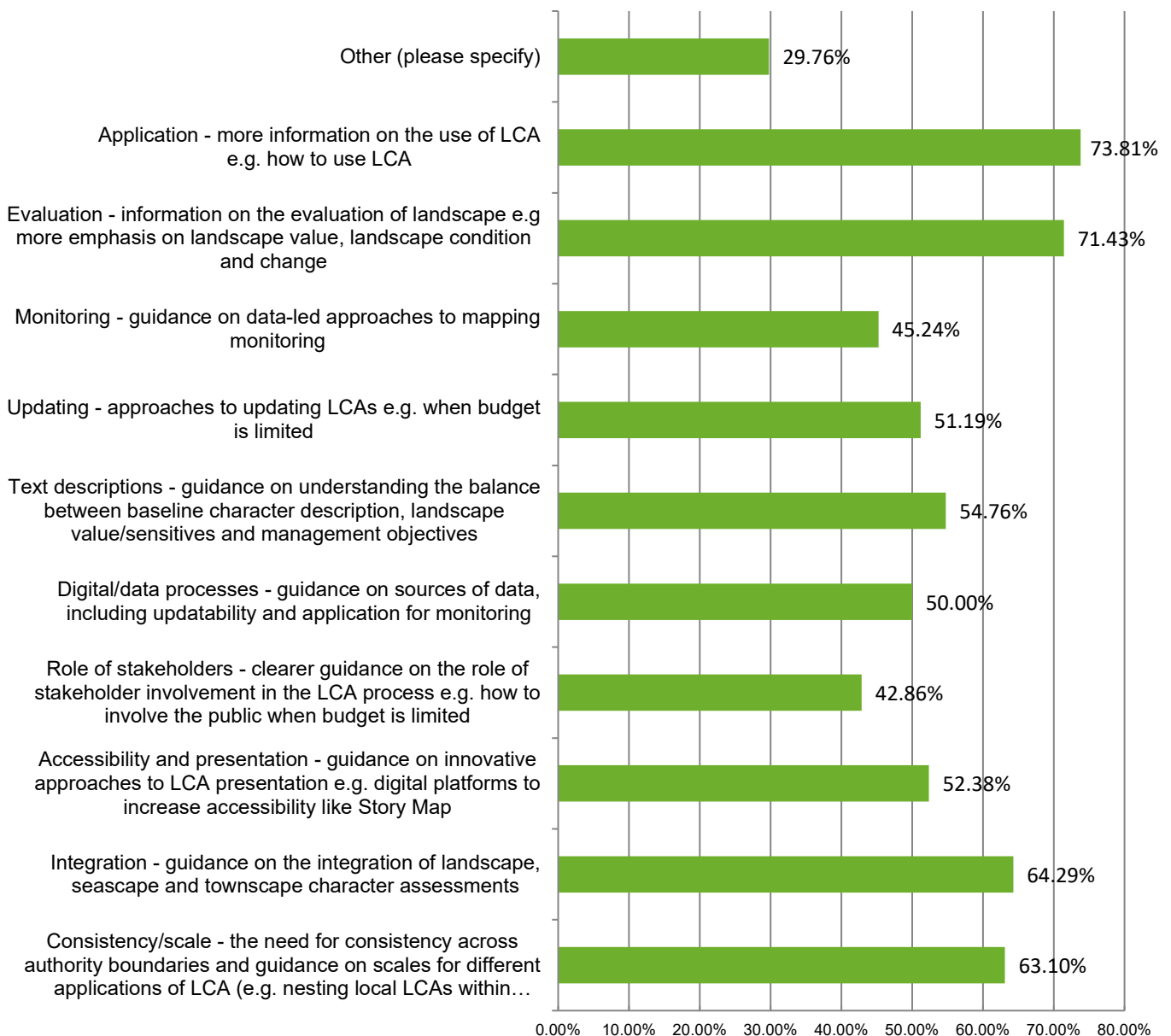
**2.17** Most disagreement occurred in relation to the question 'it is relevant to the current landscape context' (23% disagree or strongly disagree) which reflects concerns expressed in supporting comments about the age of the document and policy changes that have occurred since its publication.

**2.18** Improvements noted in the explanatory comments for this question included:

- The language needs updating for the current policy context and to include less jargon to be more inclusive/accessible.
- A need to reflect changes in mapping and data technology which have occurred since the Approach was published.
- A need to integrate landscape with other priorities such as nature recovery, climate adaptation and mitigation, social and economic needs
- More illustrations, diagrams and case studies to illustrate the LCA Approach, similar to those used in the 2002 guidance.

Figure 2.7 Chart showing responses to the question: Which of the following improvements would you like the future LCA Approach document to cover?

Which of the following improvements would you like the future LCA Approach document to cover?



**2.19** Survey respondents were asked to indicate which improvements they would like an updated LCA Approach document to include. The results from this survey question are shown in Figure 2.7. The most popular improvements included 'Application – more information on the use of LCA' and 'Evaluation – more emphasis on landscape value, condition and change'.

**2.20** Some improvements noted in the survey comments included:

- A need for a renewed focus on resilience, landscape change and creation of new character in response to issues such as climate change.

- Lack of case studies and practical examples, reducing accessibility to new audiences.
- Length of the text can be a barrier to new audiences understanding the Approach document.
- Overly prescriptive in some sections.

"In my view the LCA Approach document was a backward step from the 2002 LCA Guidance. The LCA Approach was drafted with a much less rigorous consultation process. The final document is less clearly presented, and it lacks case studies and practical examples, which makes Landscape Character Assessment less accessible to new audiences".

Survey respondent from a multi-disciplinary consultancy

**2.21** Respondents highlighted the need for the LCA Approach document be more accessible, both in terms of its language and terminology, but also through illustrations, diagrams and case studies.

**2.22** It was noted that the Approach document needs to be adaptable to changing situations to stay relevant. By being hosted on a website it is more easily updatable and able to link to other relevant information e.g. case studies, related methodologies such as Landscape Sensitivity Assessment.

## Findings on Landscape Character Assessment

**2.23** This section presents the findings from questions about Landscape Character Assessment in general.

**2.24** Survey responses indicate that LCA is useful and effective at helping shape decisions but there is scope for improvement. LCAs are a successful part of the evidence base within the planning system and should continue to be used in this way. Figure 2.8 shows that over half of respondents considered LCAs to be 'very useful', while a further 32% considered them to be 'quite useful'. Less than 5% thought that LCAs were 'not very useful' or 'not useful'.

Figure 2.8 Chart showing responses to the question: How useful do you find LCAs?

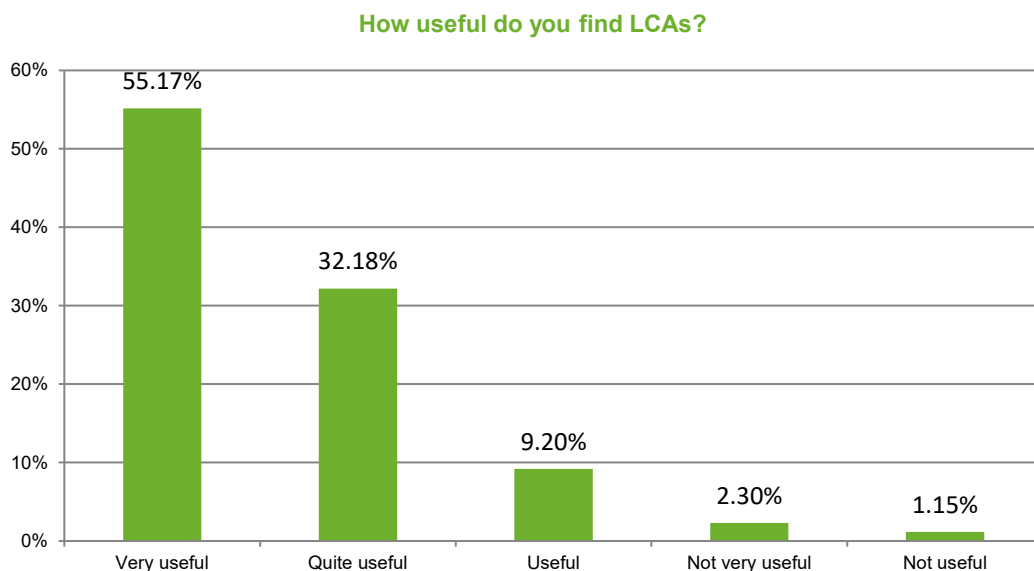
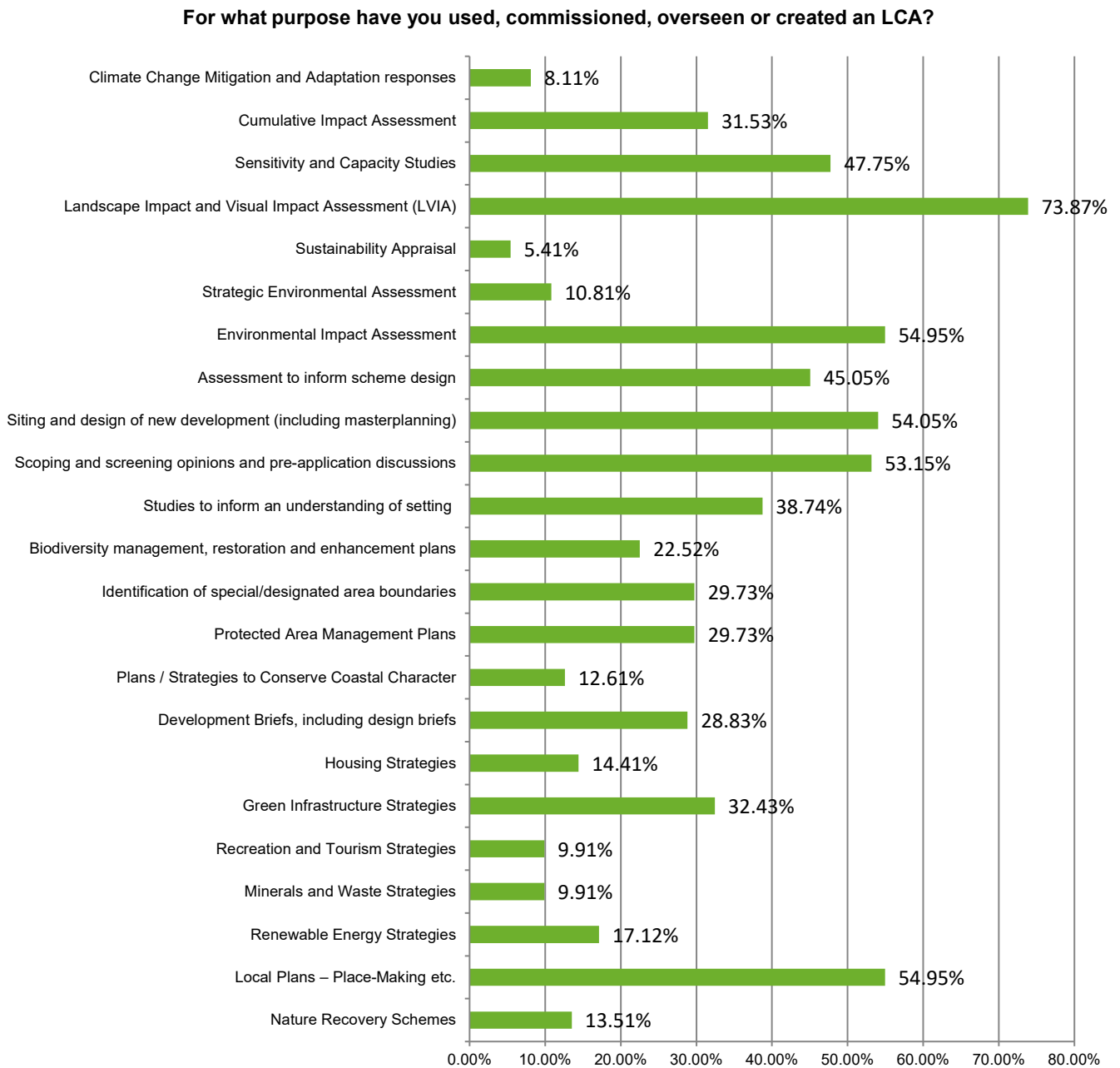


Figure 2.9 Chart showing responses to the question<sup>1</sup>: For what purpose have you used, commissioned, overseen or created an LCA?



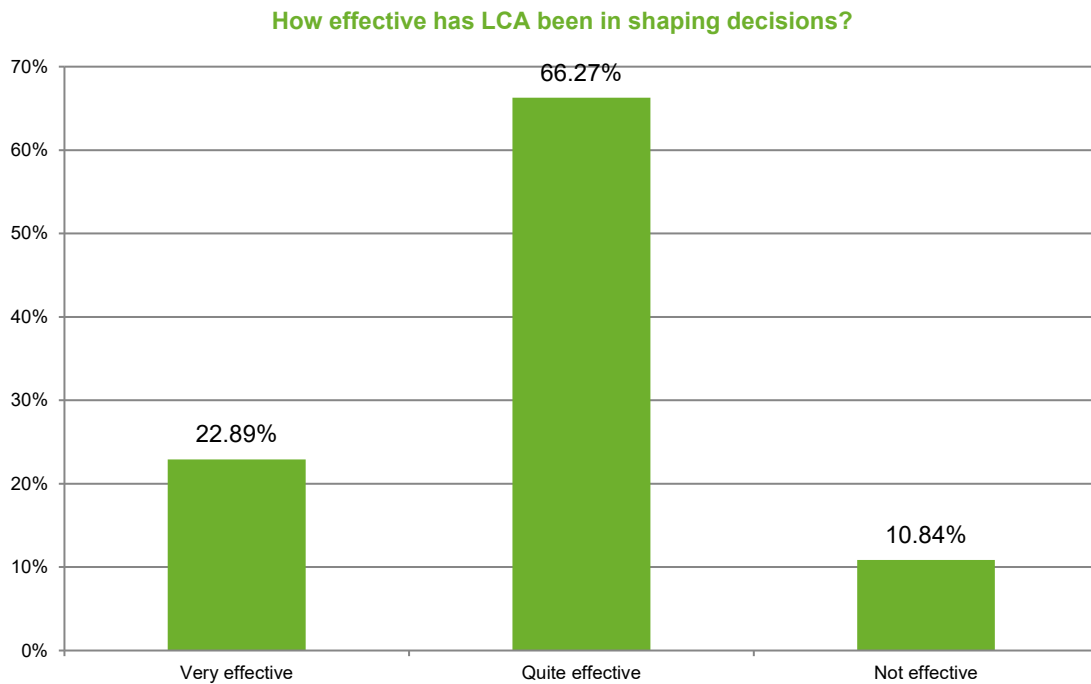
**2.25** Figure 2.9 shows that most respondents used LCA for purposes related to planning and the planning system. This includes uses relating to planning applications and local planning policy. The most commonly used purposes of LCA identified in the survey included LVIA (74%), EIA (55%), Local Plans (55%), siting and design of new development (54%) scoping/screening/pre-application discussion (53%). Fewer respondents used LCA for purposes relating to strategies (e.g. housing, green infrastructure etc) although this is more likely to reflect the smaller number of participants working with these

<sup>1</sup> This chart shows a selection of the possible responses, reflecting those most commonly chosen. Options with less than 5 responses have been removed for clarity.



sorts of documents than those working within the planning system, rather than an indication of the usefulness of LCAs for a given purpose.

Figure 2.10 Chart showing responses to the question: How effective has LCA been in shaping decisions?



**2.26** Survey responses indicate that LCA is useful and effective at helping shape decisions with LCAs seen as a successful part of the evidence base within the planning system.

**2.27** In response to the question 'How effective has LCA been in shaping decisions' shown in Figure 2.10, 89% of respondents stated that LCA had been 'very effective' or 'quite effective', particularly related to their use in the planning system. However, concerns were raised about LCA being perceived as subjective by decision makers and landscape character being fixed/static.

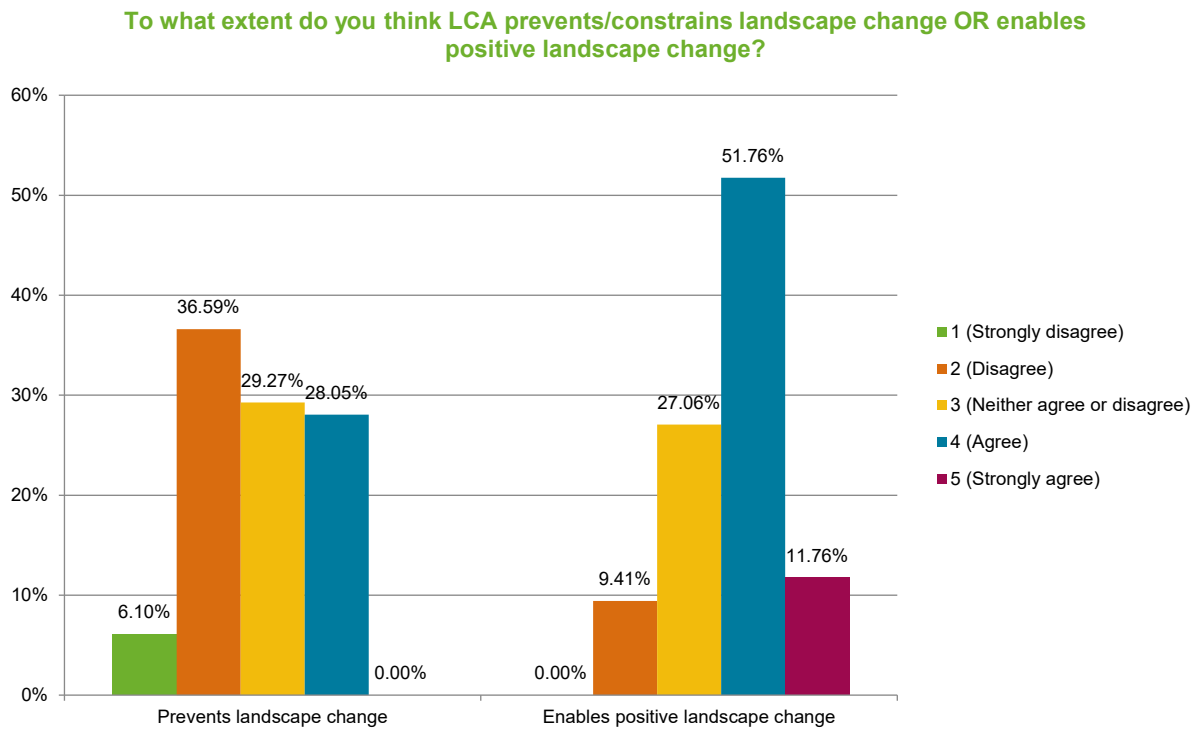
**2.28** Comments associated with this question highlighted examples of the way in which the application of LCA could be improved and broadened. For example:

- Better integration with national initiatives to address major issues/changes such as the climate and biodiversity crises (e.g. LNRS, Green Infrastructure, woodland creation).
- More focus on evaluation/objectives for landscapes.
- Embedding LCA into Design Codes to become a more integral part of design processes.
- Use as a baseline to monitor landscape change.

"An understanding of landscape context and of particular landscapes is very important but does not often endure very far into the decision-making process, particularly outside of protected landscapes, where there are so many pressures acting on the landscape".

Survey respondent from Central Government organisation.

Figure 2.11 Chart showing responses to the question: To what extent do you think LCA prevents/constrains landscape change or enables positive landscape change?



**2.29** The question 'To what extent do you think LCA prevents/constrains landscape change or enable positive landscape change' had a mixed response. The results from this question are shown in Figure 2.11. There was no clear consensus on whether LCA prevents landscape change. The majority of respondents agreed that LCA enables positive landscape change, although some of the commentary for this question indicated ways in which this could be improved, including:

- LCAs becoming a more integral part of design processes through improvements in their accessibility to people outside the landscape profession.
- Better integration of LCA with other plans impacting on landscape e.g. local plans, Protected Landscape management plans.
- LCAs used as a key information source for guiding large-scale/wide-reaching initiatives such as LNRS, BNG and ELMs.
- LCAs explicitly stating potential landscape enhancements and opportunities, as well as describing existing positive valued features within a place.
- LCAs used for monitoring change to measure their effectiveness.