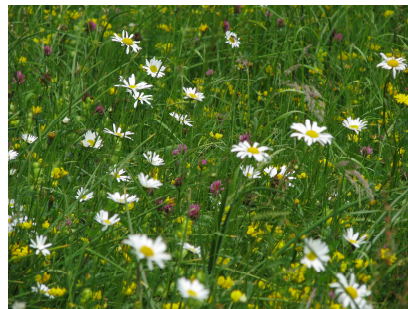




# High Weald Grassland Manager Survey

Informing a High Weald Nature Recovery Area proposal



High Weald AONB Partnership  
April 2019



The High Weald: an outstanding medieval landscape



# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>p.1</b>
<b>2. Survey results and analysis</b>	<b>p.1</b>
2.1 Area of your holding	p.1
2.2 Nearest village or town	p.2
2.3 What types of grassland do you have on your holding?	p.3
2.4 Would you like/do you plan to make these changes to your grassland?	p.4
2.5 How do you manage your grassland?	p.5
2.6 How do you pay for the management of your grassland?	p.6
2.7 Does your grassland provide any other services of value?	p.7
2.8 What sources of advice and information do you use?	p.8
2.9 Do you manage, or have you in the past managed, your grassland in any agri-environment scheme?	p.9
2.10 Would an agri-environment scheme, with payment by results and the land manager in control of deciding when to do what, appeal to you?	p.10
2.11 Does an approach where the land manager develops their own management plan, with the opportunity to get help through an advisor, appeal to you?	p.11
2.12 What help would be useful? [in developing a land management plan]	p.12
2.13 How confident would you be in assessing your grassland using these definitions? [used in Countryside Stewardship]	p.13
2.14 How knowledgeable do you feel about soil health in general?	p.13
2.15 Have you recently obtained information on your soil's health?	p.14
2.16 Are there any obstacles for you in managing your grassland?	p.15
2.17 Joining a focus group or receiving further information on events	p.16

## 1. Introduction

The High Weald AONB is characterised by low input grassland and is a refuge for species-rich grassland. There is scope to increase this resource, and the High Weald is well placed to benefit from future government investment in it as a 'public good'. It is recognised, however, that there are many types of grassland managed in many different ways, many issues for land managers around managing grassland for multiple objectives and that more support is needed.

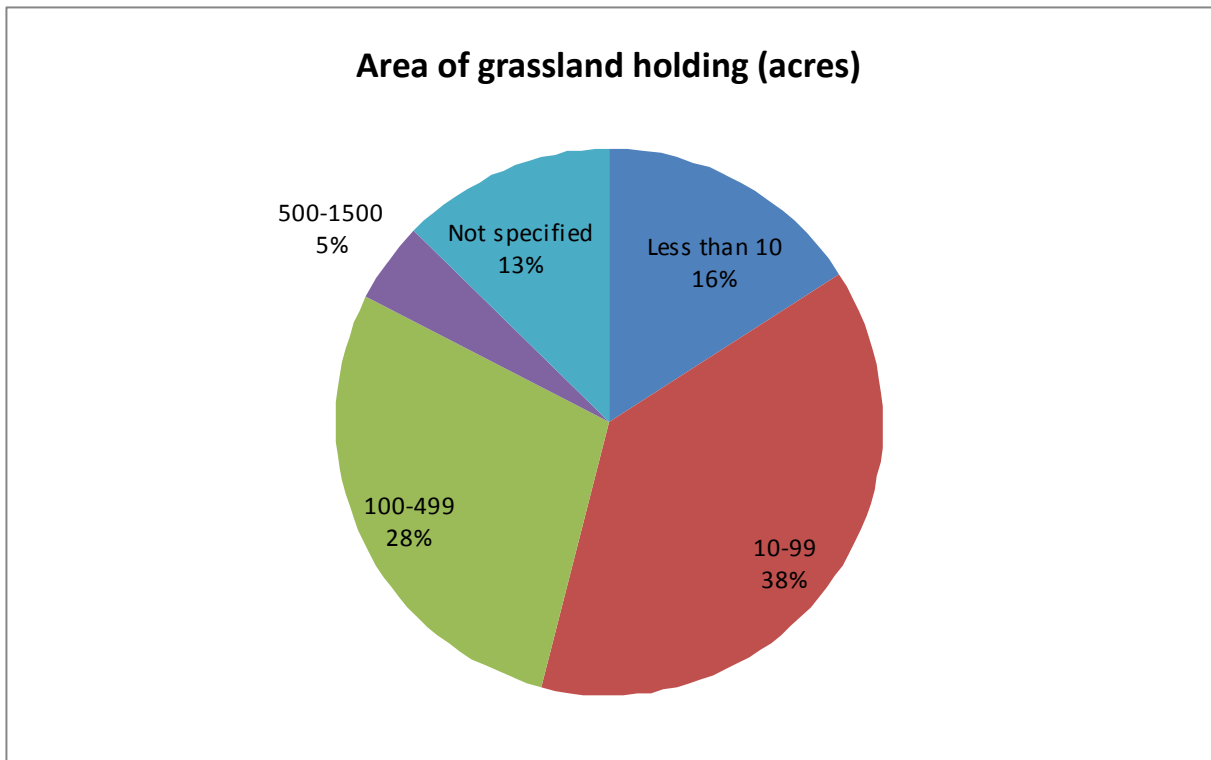
This survey was undertaken as part of a collaborative approach to developing a High Weald Nature Recovery Area proposal that will provide recommendations on knowledge transfer, landscape-scale targeting, restoration mechanisms, grassland management plans, and measuring grassland outcomes.

The survey of grassland owners and managers was undertaken from 8 to 23 February 2019. It was an online survey promoted to the AONB Partnership's contacts via emails to landowners and managers, e-news and social media. A total of 63 responses to the survey were received.

## 2. Survey results and analysis

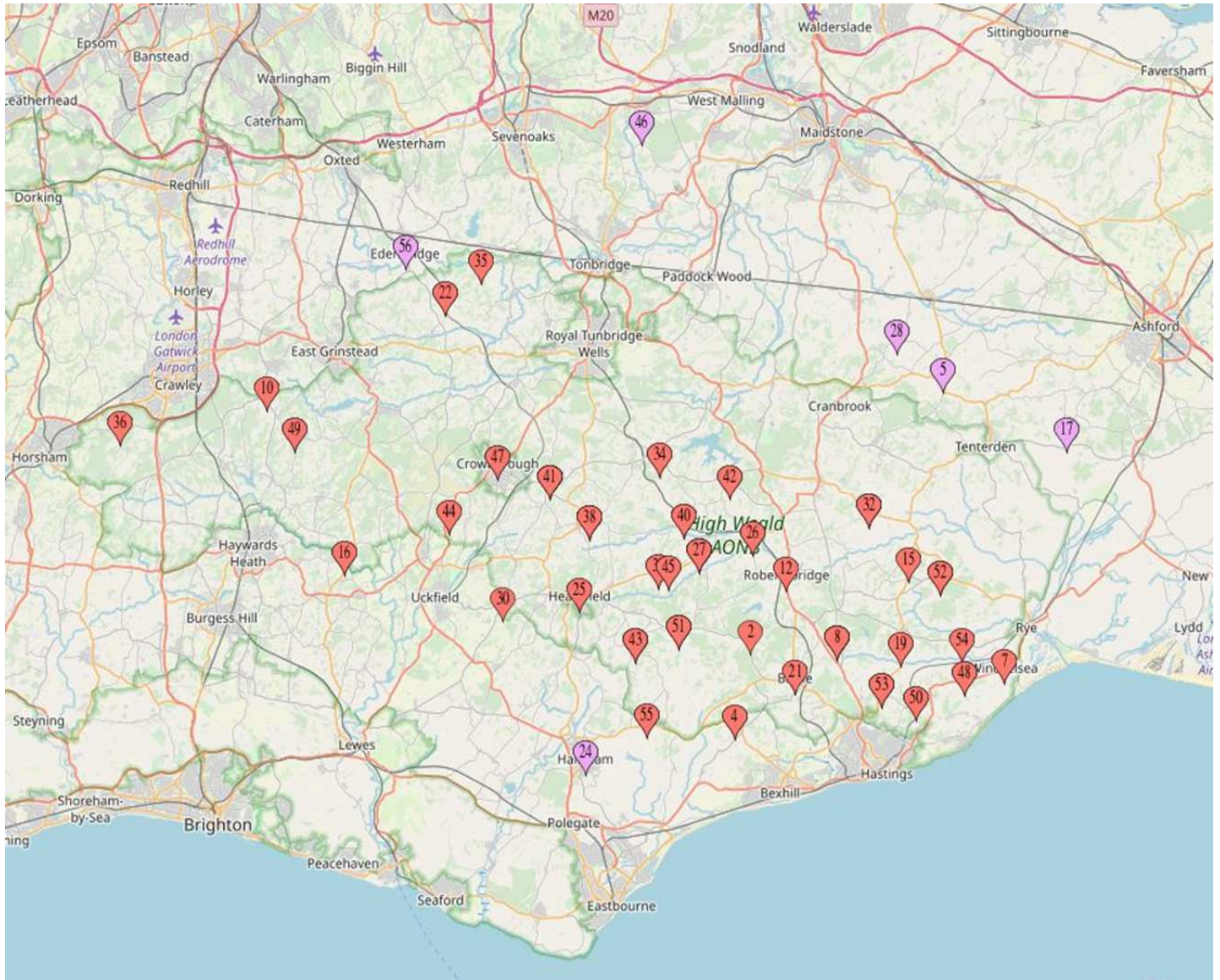
### 2.1 Area of your holding

In terms of the holding area, the majority of respondents at two-thirds (66% or 42 people) said their holdings were between 10 and 499 acres. Most of these (38% or 24 people) said their holdings were between 10 and 99 acres. Some 16% (10 people) had holdings of less than 10 acres and 5% (3) had holdings of 500 acres and over. Some (13% or 8 people) didn't specify the area of their holding.



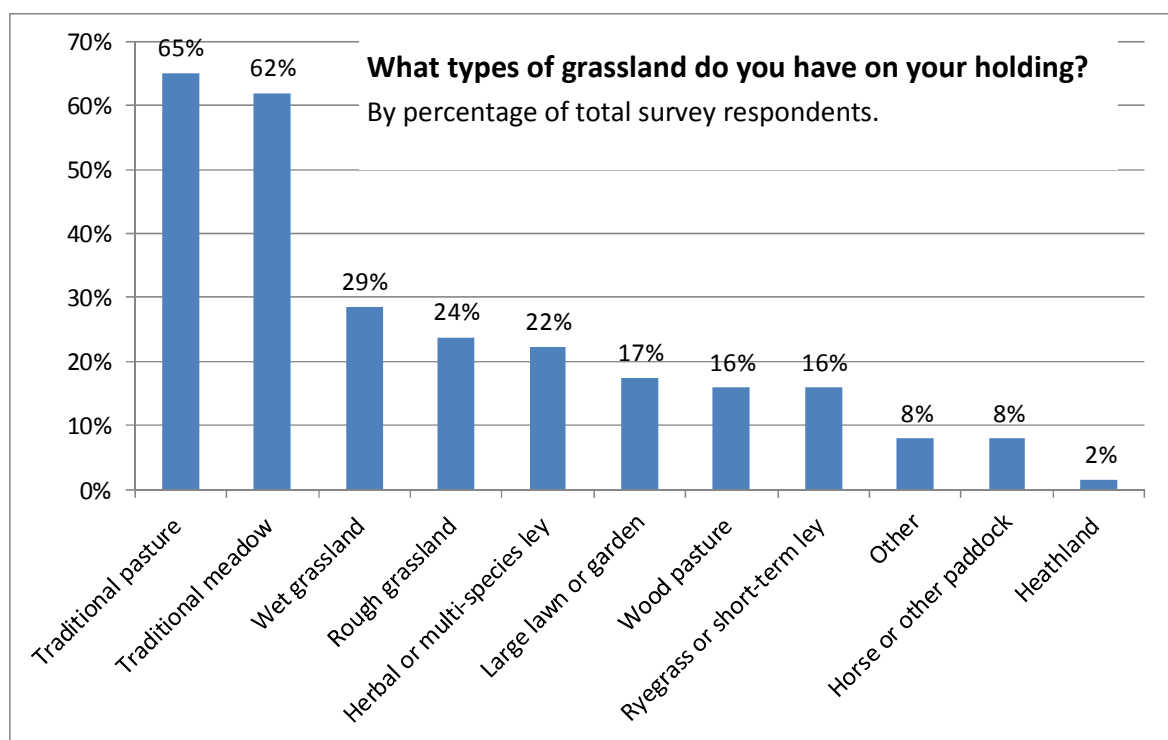
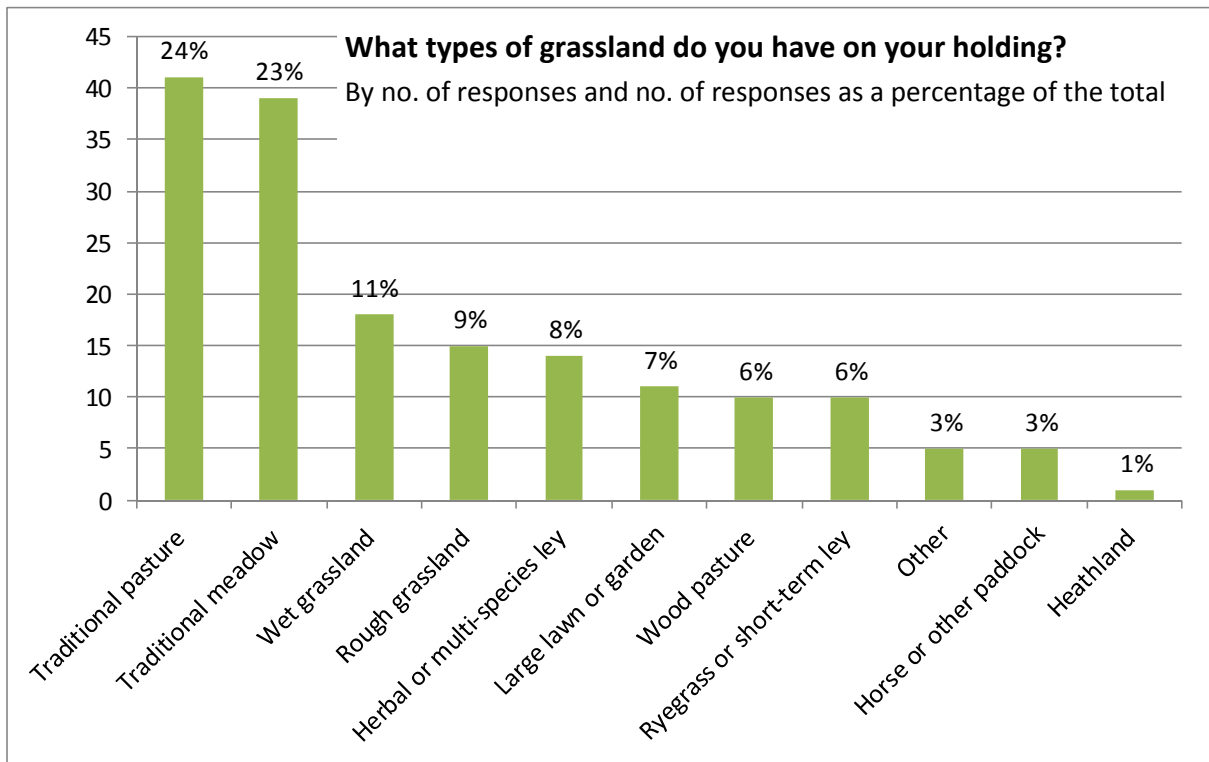
## 2.2. Nearest village or town

The map below shows locations of the nearest village or town to the respondents' grassland areas where they were specified, 10% (6 respondents) didn't specify the location. The majority of responses (70% or 44) were from grassland managers in the East Sussex High Weald, with four from the High Weald in Kent and three from the West Sussex High Weald. Six responses were from managers of grassland outside the High Weald in Kent and East Sussex, amounting to over 570 acres in total.

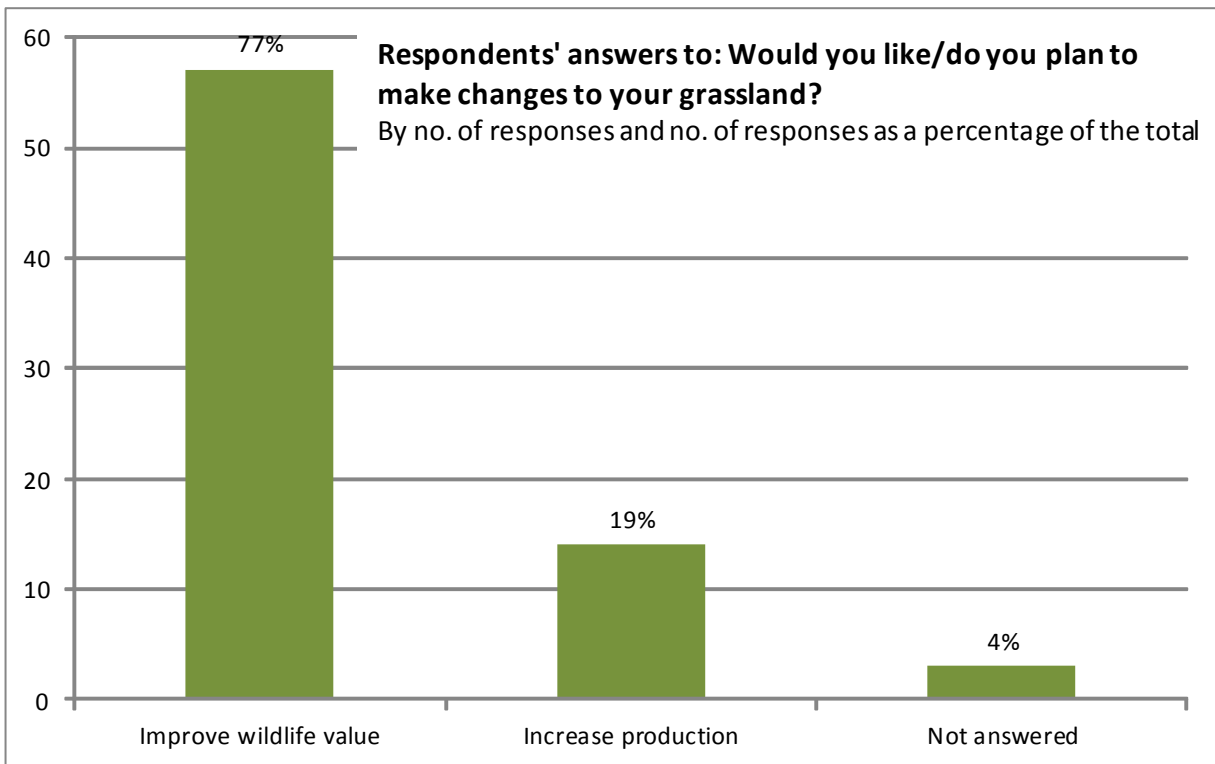


### 2.3. What types of grassland do you have on your holding?

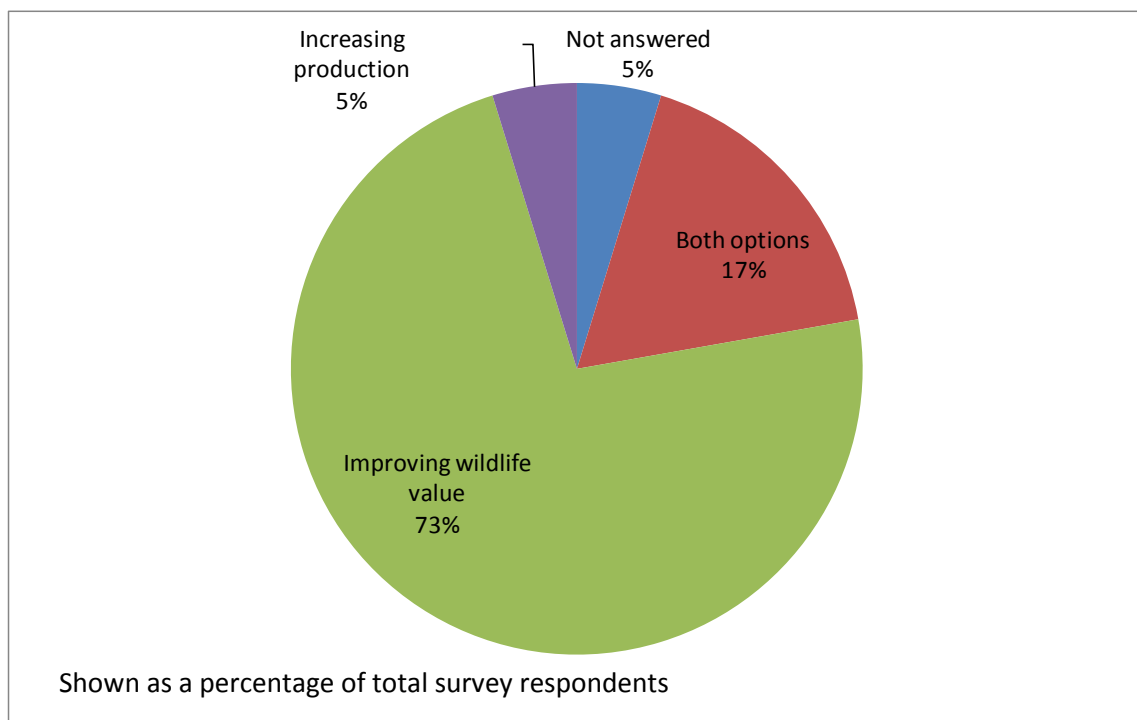
Traditional pasture and traditional meadow were the most common types of grassland on respondents' holdings, accounting for almost half (47%) of the grassland types mentioned overall. Almost two-thirds of respondents (65% or 41) said they had traditional pasture and almost as many had traditional meadow (62% or 39). The remainder was mainly either wet grassland, rough grassland, herbal or multi-species ley, large lawns or gardens, wood pasture, and rye grass or short-term ley. Less common, and accounting for just 7% of the grassland types mentioned overall, were horse or other paddocks, heathland or 'Other' (grassland planted with native trees, orchard, banks, pond area and poor grass that is not species-rich were mentioned).



**2.4. In the future, would you like/do you plan to make either of these changes to your grassland?**

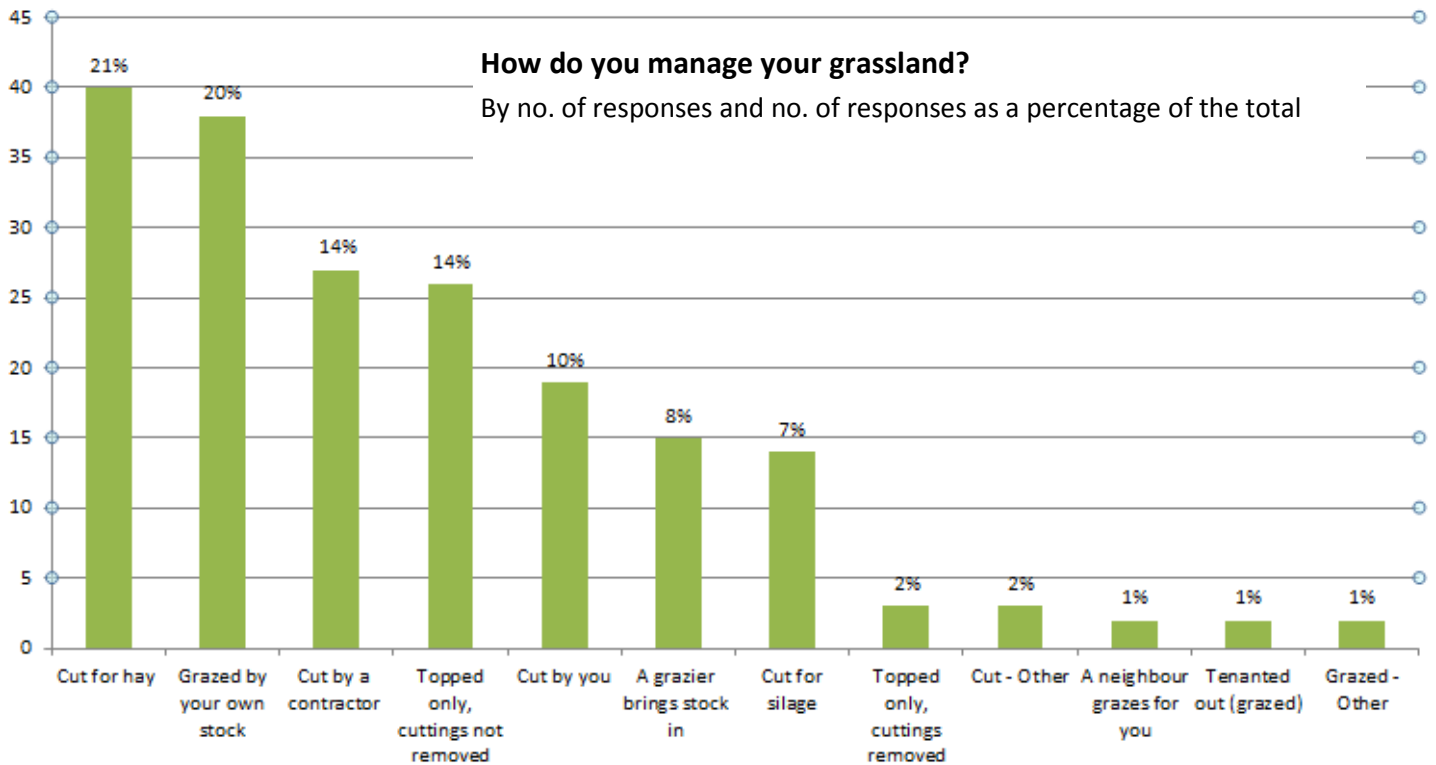


More than 90% of all the survey respondents (57 people) said they would like to, or planned to, make their grassland more species-rich or improve its value for wildlife. Just over a fifth (22% or 14 people) said they would like to, or planned to, increase production from their grassland. Some 17% of respondents (11 people) chose both options, and three didn't answer the question.



## 2.5 How do you manage your grassland?

Some 63% of all the respondents (40 people) said they cut their grassland for hay and almost as many (60% or 38) graze their grassland with their own stock. The next most common grassland management methods amongst respondents were cutting by a contractor and topping grass without removing the cuttings, followed by cutting the grassland themselves, a grazier bringing stock in and cutting for silage.



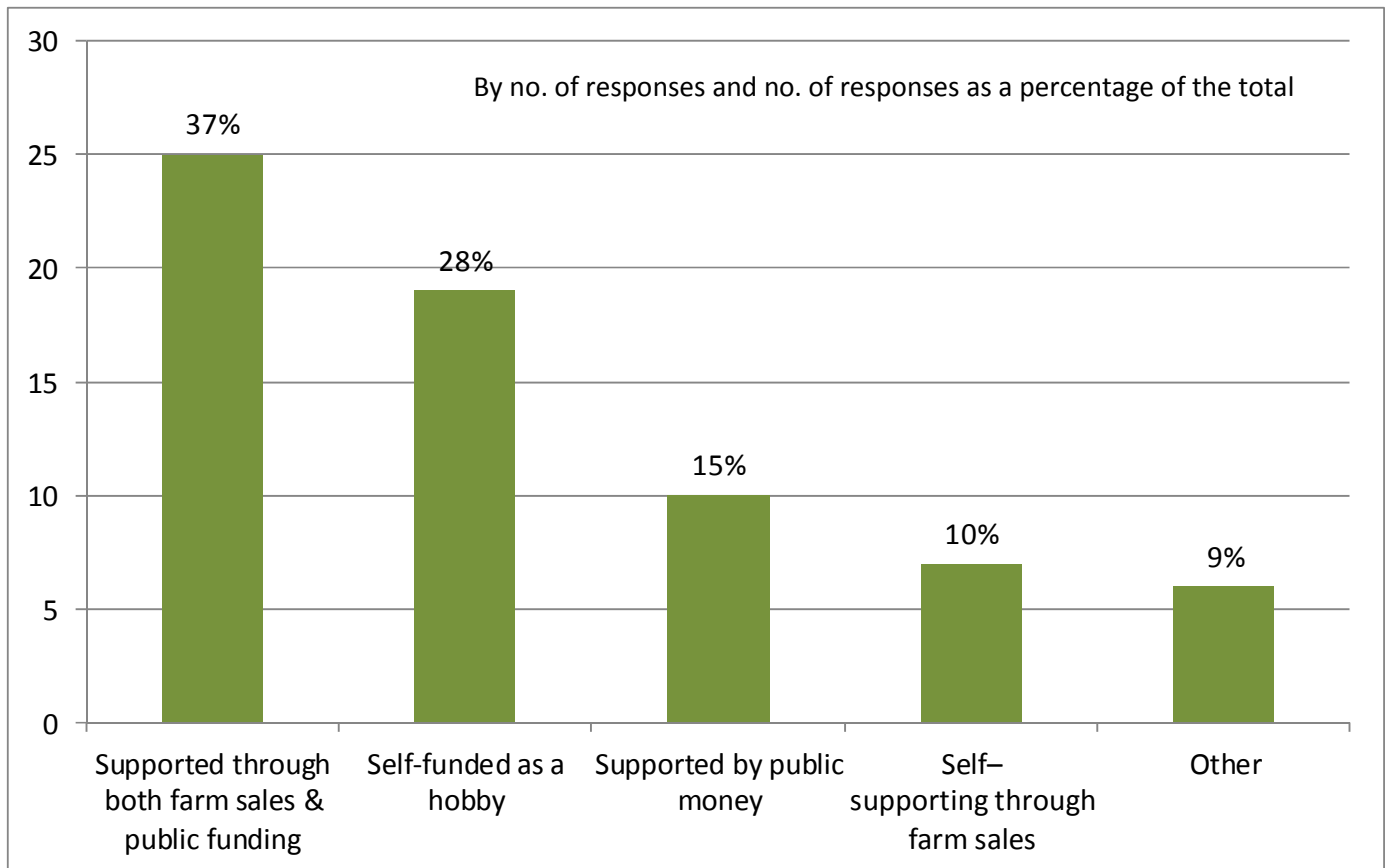
- 'Cut - Other' included 'cut and raked by volunteers participating in churchyard management ' and 'topped very occasionally '.
- 'Grazed - Other' included, 'aftermath grazed Nov to Jan' and 'sheep keep '.

Although not included in the above chart as a management response, one respondent also mentioned that they 'can't get it grazed'.

## 2.6 How do you pay for the management of your grassland?

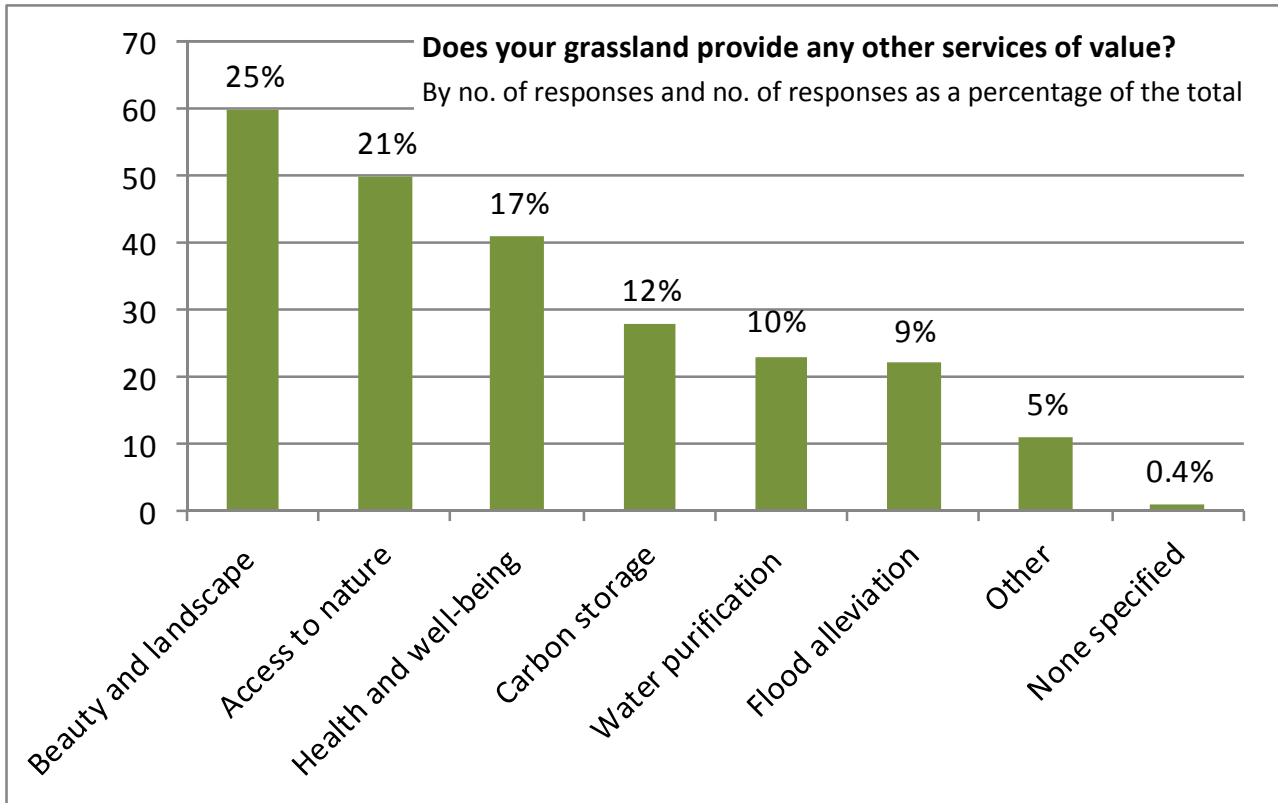
The most respondents (40% or 25 people) said they pay for management of their grassland through both farm sales (e.g. fodder, stock and meat) *and* public funding (agri-environment scheme and/or Basic Payment Scheme). This was followed by entirely self-funding as a hobby or interest (30% of respondents or 19 people), then support through schemes using public money (10 respondents) and then self-supporting through fodder, stock or meat sales (7 respondents).

Other methods of payment for grassland management mentioned by 6 respondents were diversification, farm attraction, PCCs, rental, estate management company, and a free grazing agreement with grazier.



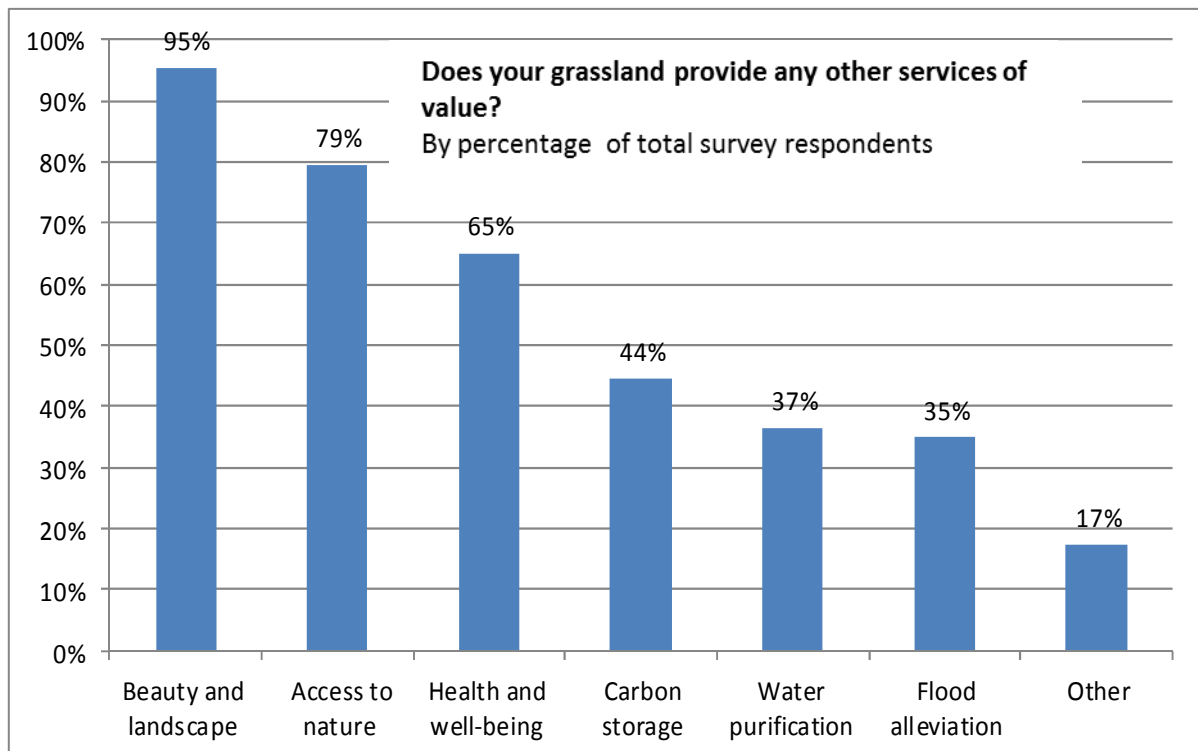
NB. Two respondents chose more than one of the options in the bar chart above.

## 2.7 In your view, does your grassland provide any other services of value?



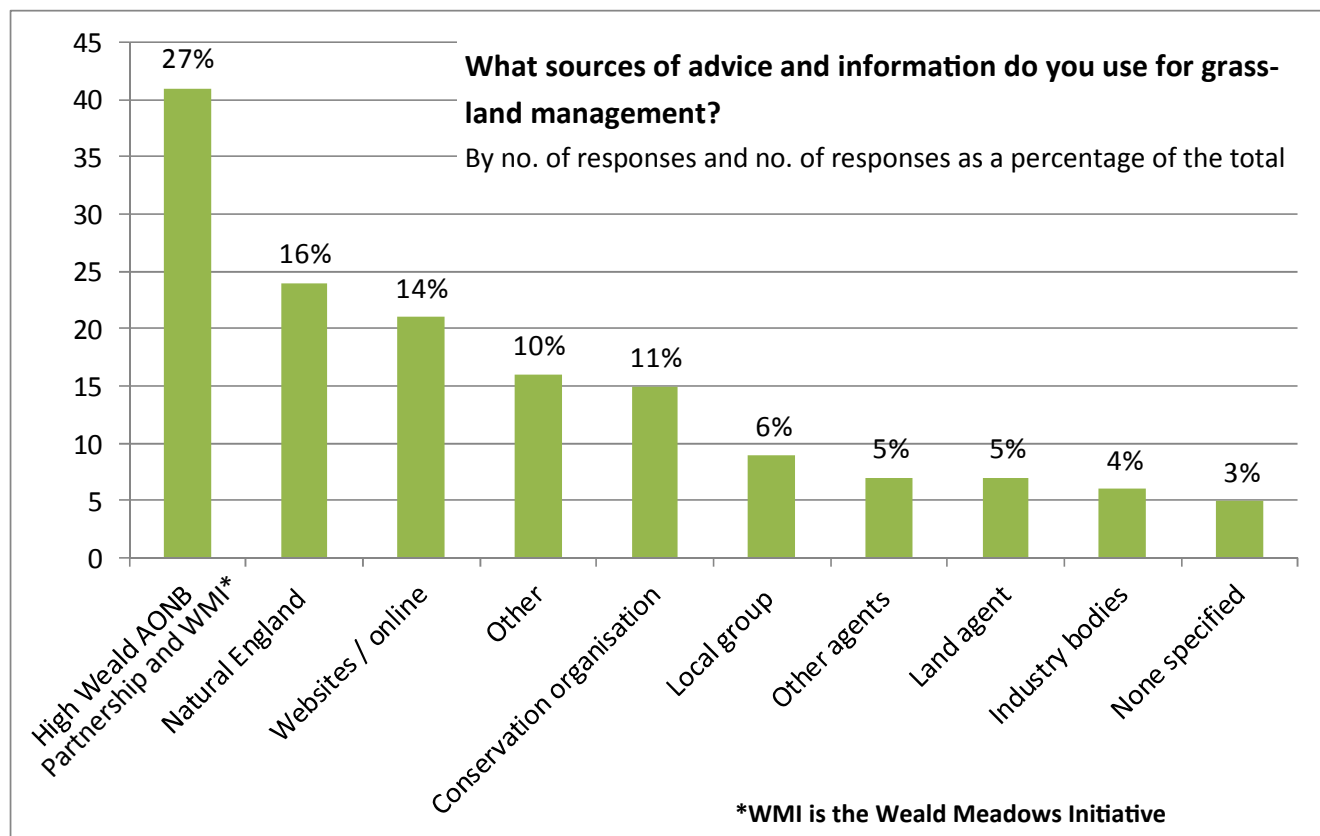
The vast majority of respondents (95% or 60) chose 'beauty and landscape' as a service provided by their grassland. 'Access to nature' was chosen by over three-quarters of respondents (79% or 50). This was followed by 'health and wellbeing' which was chosen by just under two-thirds (65% or 41).

Amongst the 11 mentions of 'Other' services of value mentioned by respondents in the free text box as being provided by their grassland, almost two-thirds were 'wildlife habitats and biodiversity' or 'insects and pollinators'. Additional services mentioned were tourism, educational talks and seed harvesting for meadow regeneration.



## 2.8. What sources of advice and information do you use for grassland management?

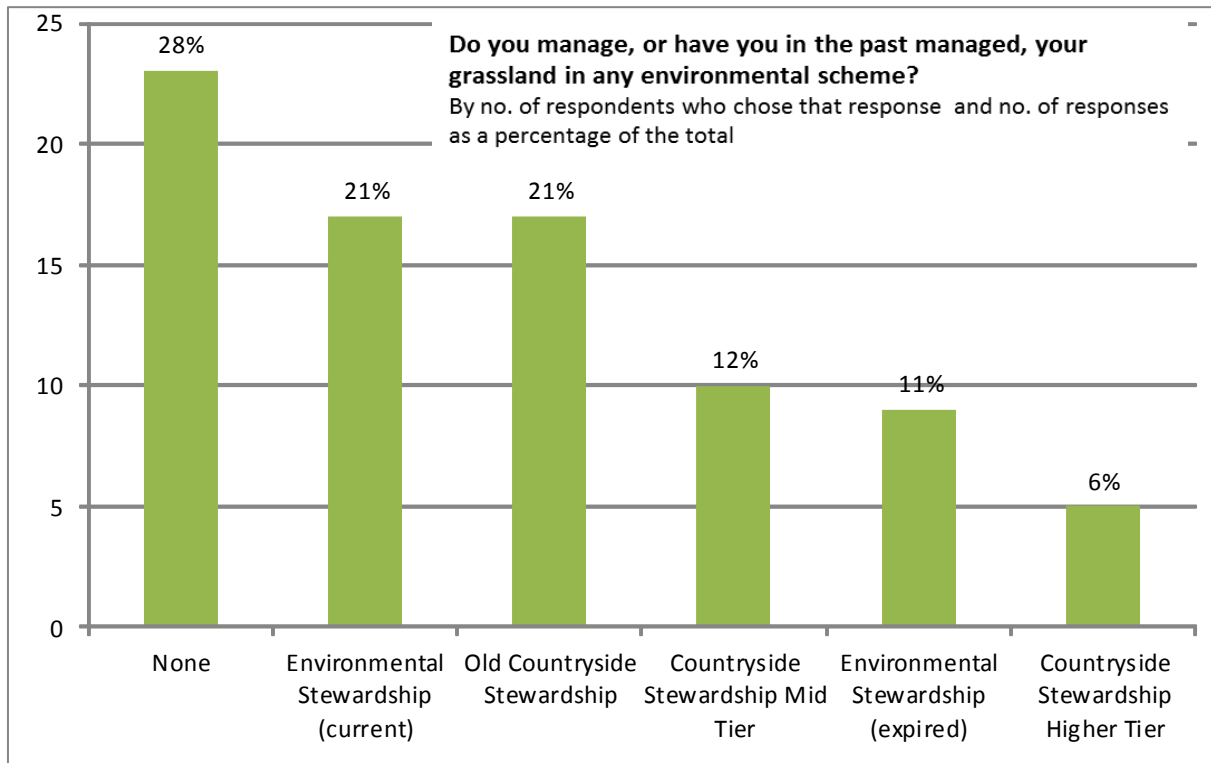
The High Weald AONB Partnership and the Weald Meadows Initiative (WMI) was mentioned most often as a source of advice and information, it had been used by 65% of respondents or 41 people. This was followed by Natural England which was mentioned by 38%, or 24 respondents, and websites or online sources of advice and information which were used by a third of respondents, or 21 people. Conservation organisations (e.g. the Wildlife Trusts or Buglife) were mentioned by nearly a quarter (24% or 15 people). Less commonly used by respondents, each being mentioned by between 10 and 11%, were local groups (e.g. Small Farm Training Group), other agents (e.g. FWAG), land agents (e.g. CLM Cluttons) and industry bodies (e.g. Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board).



'Other' sources of advice were mentioned by a quarter of respondents and included:

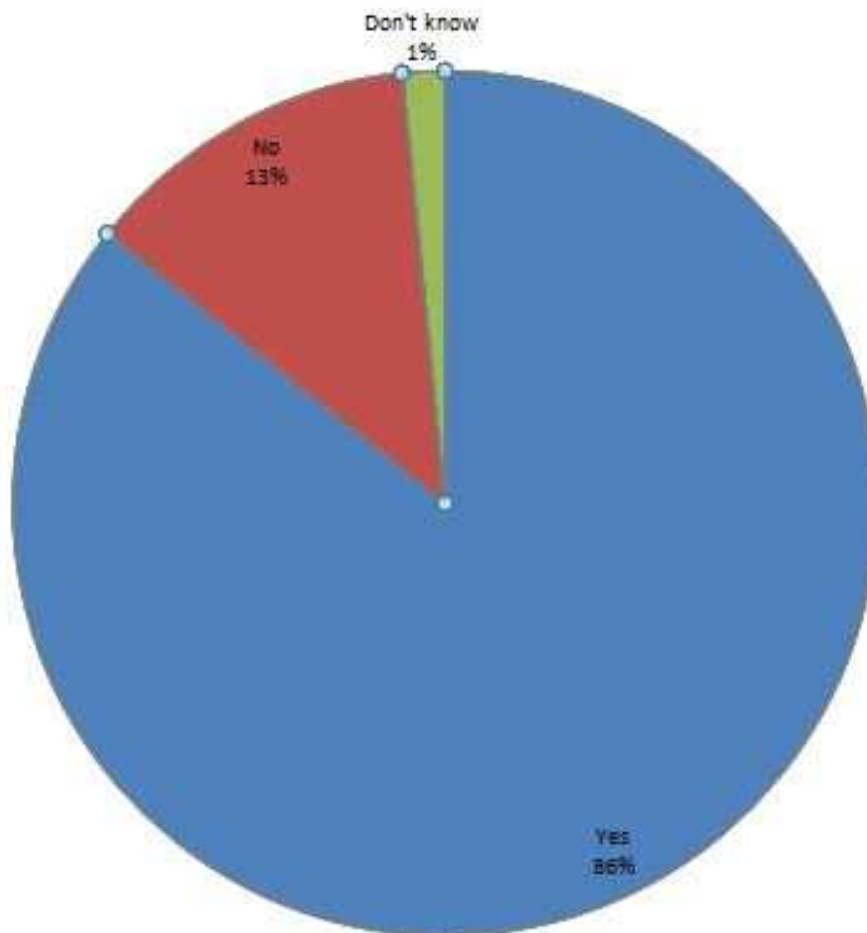
- None
- own experience and self-education
- booklets
- experienced staff
- contractors
- seed dealers
- the Soil Association
- PFLA
- grazing or wildflower groups.

## 2.9 Do you manage, or have you in the past managed, your grassland in any agri-environment scheme?



Over a third of the survey respondents (37% or 23 people) did not manage, and had not in the past managed, their grassland in any agri-environment scheme. However the majority of respondents overall (62% or 39 people), manage or had managed their grassland within an agri-environment scheme. The two most frequently mentioned of these schemes were the current Environmental Stewardship Scheme and the Old Countryside Stewardship Scheme, of which 17 people (or 27% of the respondents) respectively took part, or had taken part in. Followed by the Countryside Stewardship Mid-Tier Scheme, then the expired Environmental Stewardship Scheme and lastly the Countryside Stewardship Higher-Tier Scheme of which only 5 respondents were, or had been, involved in.

**2.10 Would an agri-environment scheme, with payment by results leaving the land manager in control of deciding when to do what, rather than following set instructions and dates, appeal to you in managing your grassland?**

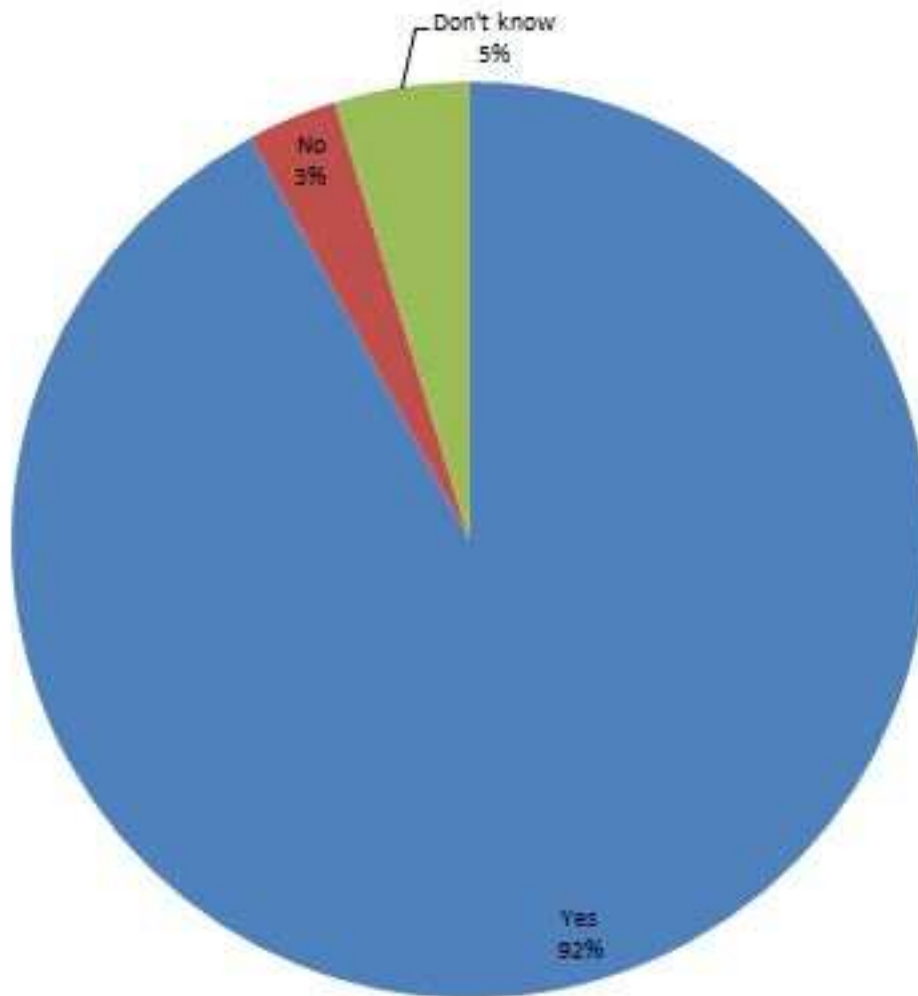


The majority of respondents at 86% (54) said 'yes' this kind of scheme would appeal to them. Although 13% (8 people) said 'no' and one respondent said they didn't know.

**Respondents' comments in the free text box included these themes:**

- Unless a scheme helps farm income, land managers may not want to join or fund the balance of costs
- Interest would depend on the prescriptions and how results are assessed
- The difficulty of assessing results
- Effects on results e.g. climate, weather and land managers' knowledge, interest and incentives
- Belief that land manager knowledge is limited in some areas, e.g. wild flowers
- Finding the CSS too restrictive to adjust land use to meet needs as a visitor attraction
- Lack of understanding of schemes and being put off by bureaucracy
- Schemes being complicated and not viable
- Land area managed being too small to make joining worthwhile.

**2.11 Does the ELM approach where the land manager develops their own management plan, with the opportunity to get help through an advisor, appeal to you?**



The vast majority of respondents at 92% (58) said 'yes' this approach appealed to them. Only two said 'no' and three said they didn't know.

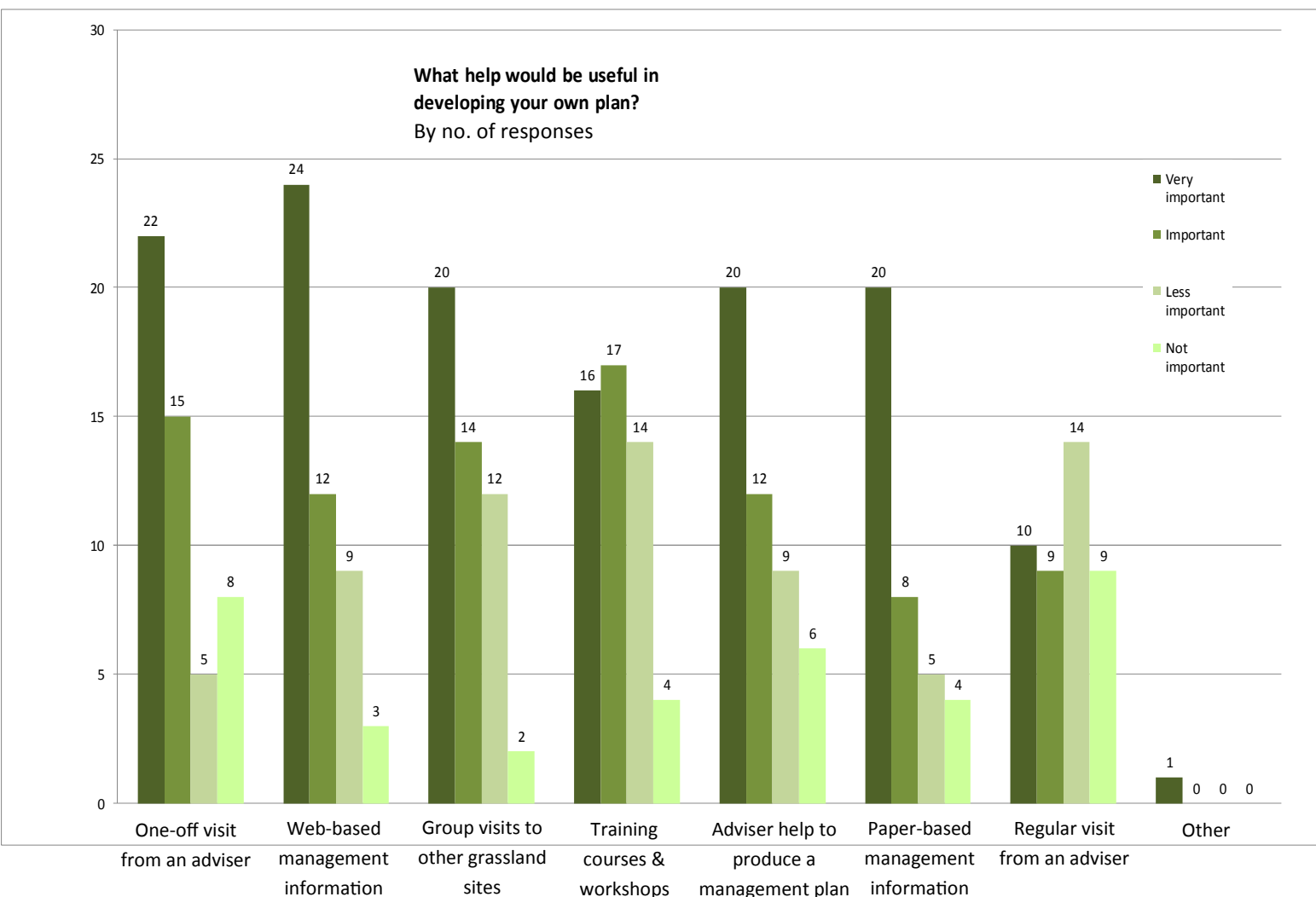
**Respondents' comments in the free text box included these themes:**

- Finding previous schemes effective as they incentivised farmers and landowners for doing less or making changes at no cost, rather than rather than having to pay for new work, e.g. leaving hedges uncut or changing timing of mowing headlands.
- Interest would depend on the manager and whether they are prepared to develop their own plans.
- Interest would depend on the adviser.
- Interest would depend on the terms of the ELM.
- A preference for an approach where an advisor is not required so the land agents aren't the main profiteers.

## 2.12 What help would be useful?

[in developing your own land management plan]

'Web-based management information' was seen by the most as a **very important** source of help, with slightly fewer seeing a 'one-off visit from an adviser' as being **very important**. Just behind these in terms of being seen as **very important** sources of help were 'group visits to other grassland sites', 'adviser help to produce a land management plan' and 'paper-based management information'. 'Training courses and workshops' were seen as an **important** source of help by the most, and slightly fewer thought a 'one-off visit from an adviser' was **important**. 'Regular visits from an adviser' were perceived by the most as being **less important**, or **not important**.

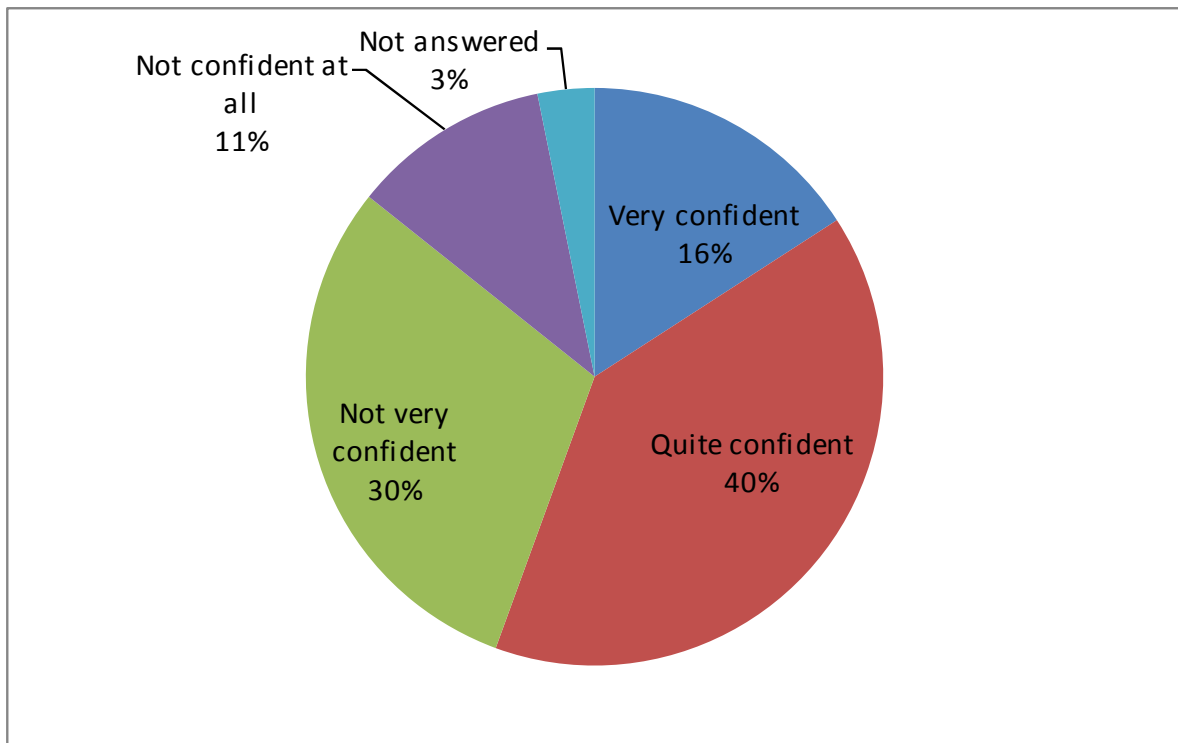


Only one 'Other' response was rated and shown in the above chart: 'Assistance with identifying and form filling for relevant schemes'.

In the free text box, 'online chat with an advisor' was mentioned by a respondent. It was also commented by another respondent that 'the adviser should not have to be a land agent paid by the farmer'.

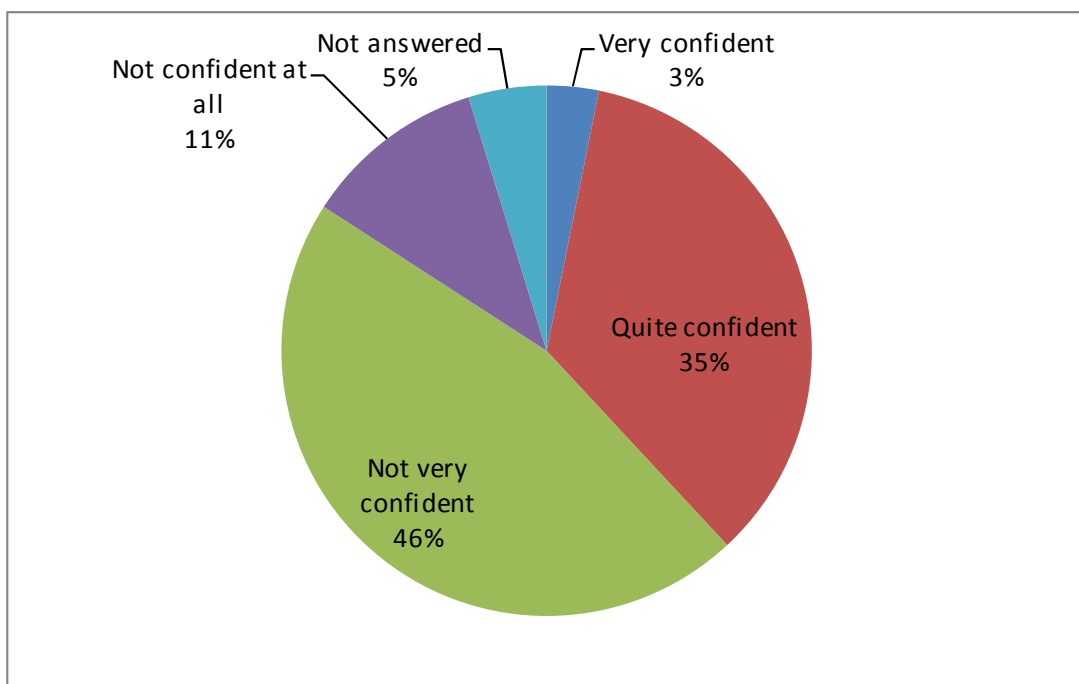
### 2.13 How confident would you be in assessing your grassland using these definitions?

[definitions of semi-improved and species-rich grassland used in Countryside Stewardship].



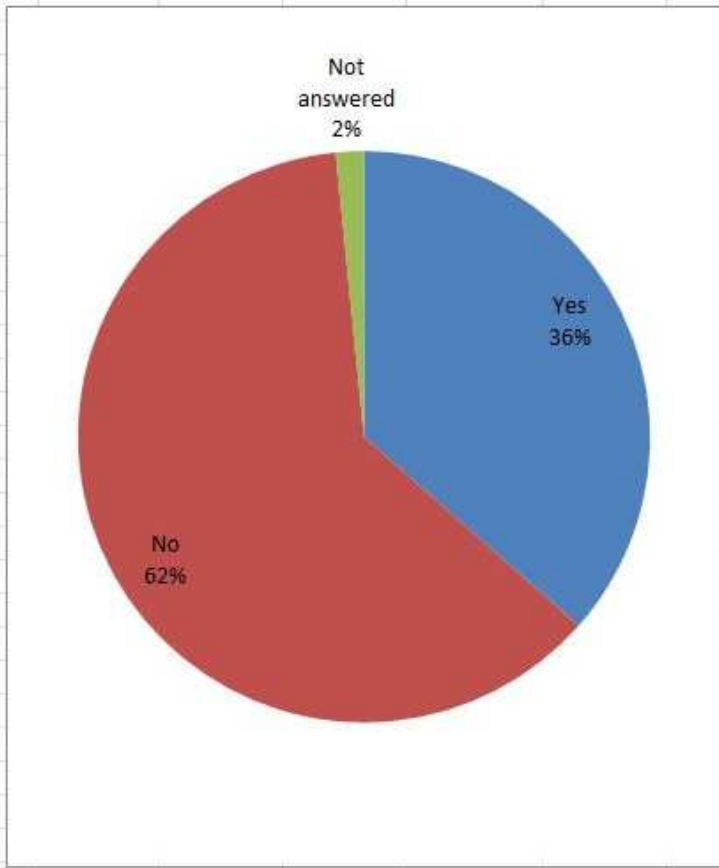
The majority of the survey respondents overall, 56% (35 people) said they would be either **quite confident** (40%) or **very confident** (16%) in assessing their grassland using the Countryside Stewardship definitions. However almost a third (19 people) said they would **not be very confident** in using the definitions, and a further 11% (7 people) said they **would not be confident at all**.

### 2.14 How knowledgeable do you feel about soil health in general?



The majority of the survey respondents overall at 57% (36 people) said they felt **not very confident** (46%) or **not very confident at all** (11%) in their knowledge of soil health in general. However just over a third (22 people) said they felt **quite confident** in their knowledge, and a further 3% (2) said they were **very confident** in their soil health knowledge.

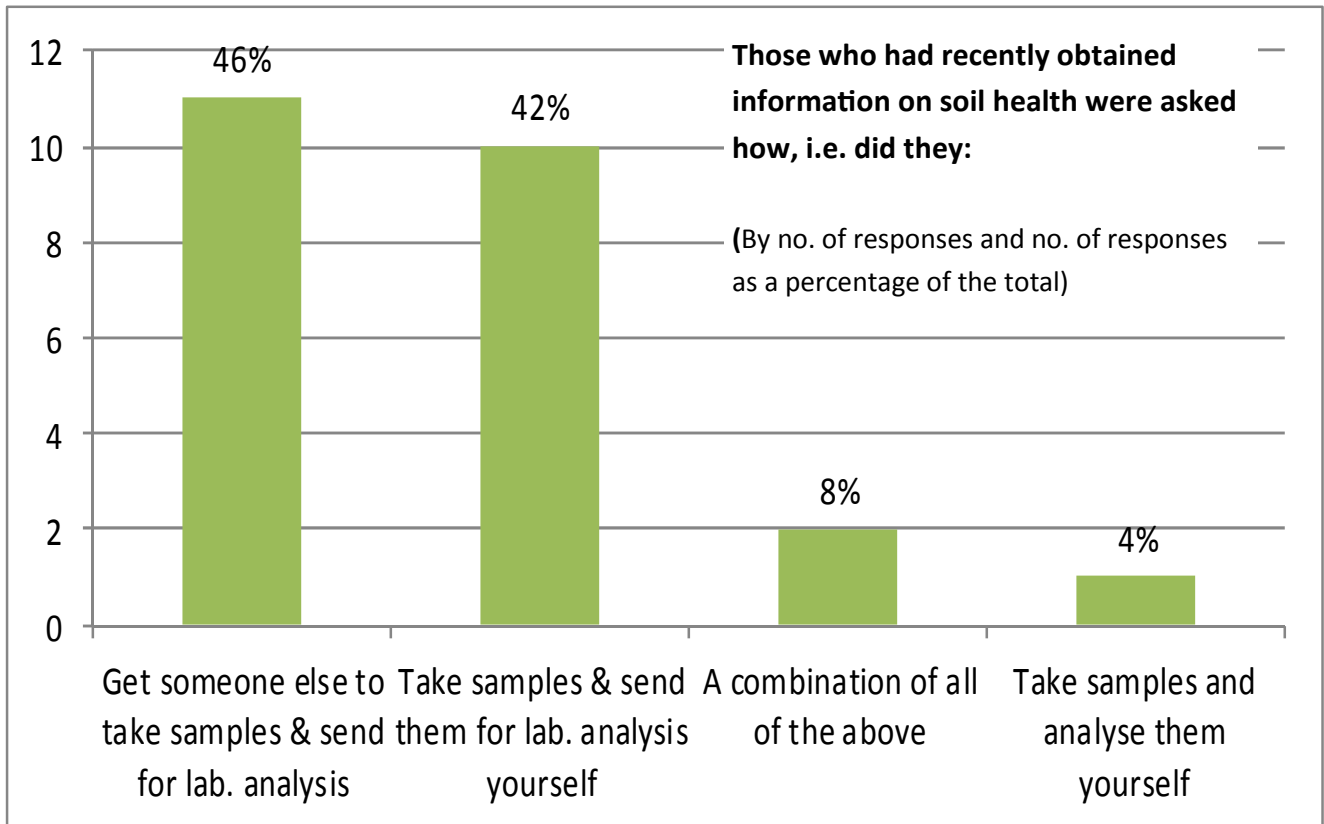
## 2.15 Have you recently obtained information on your soil's health?



Over half the survey respondents (62% or 39 people) said they had not recently obtained information on their soil's health. However just over a third had (36% or 23 people) and one person didn't answer.

Reasons given in the free text box as to why respondents hadn't recently obtained information on soil health included:

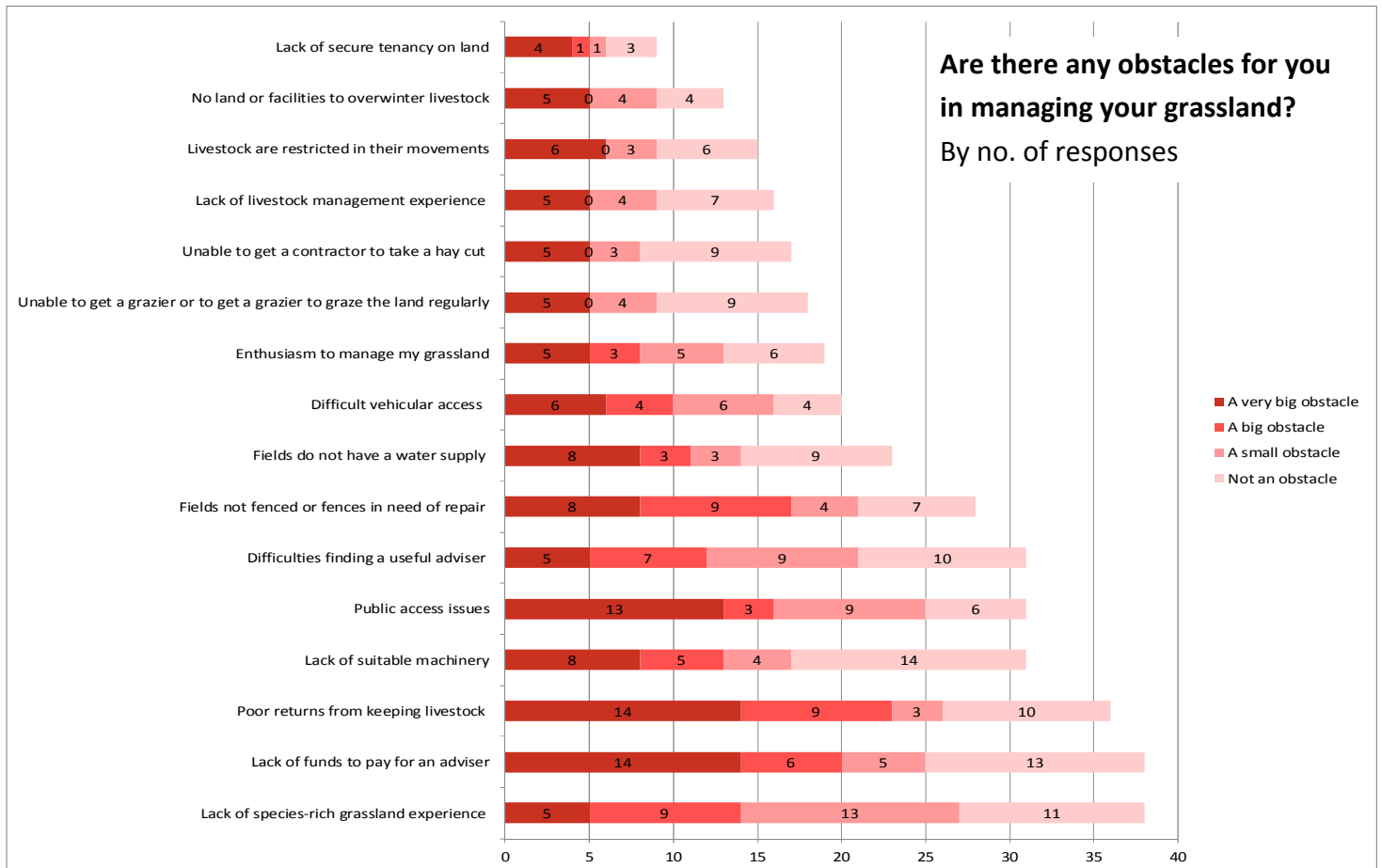
- assuming the soil is OK
- that it was analysed a few years ago
- not knowing what to do
- being worried about the cost
- not being knowledgeable enough
- it not being a priority
- not feeling the need to
- not being sure of the benefits
- not having thought about it.



Some 38% of the overall survey respondents had obtained information on their soil's health (24 people). Of these, almost half (48% or 11 people) said they got someone else to take them and send them for laboratory analysis. A further 10 respondents (43%) took samples themselves and sent them for analysis. Two respondents undertook a combination of both those sampling options, and only one took samples and analysed them themselves.

## 2.16 Are there any obstacles for you in managing your grassland?

‘Poor returns from keeping livestock’ was seen by the most respondents as a **very big obstacle** or a **big obstacle** to them in managing their grassland. ‘Lack of funds to pay for an adviser’ was seen as equal to ‘poor returns from keeping livestock’ in terms of being a **very big obstacle**, followed closely by ‘public access issues’. Conversely ‘lack of funds to pay for an advisor’ was seen by almost as many as **not being an obstacle**. ‘Fields not fenced or fences in need of repair’ came close behind ‘lack of funds to pay for an advisor’ in terms of being seen as a **very big obstacle** or a **big obstacle**. ‘Lack of species-rich grassland experience’ was perceived by the most as being a **small obstacle** or **not an obstacle**.



NB. Survey respondents were not asked to rate any ‘other important obstacles’ that they specified in the free text box.

**‘Other important obstacles’ mentioned by respondents in the free text box were mainly about costs and subsidies. There were nine mentions on this theme:**

- Lack of engagement or contribution to capital costs by Natural England
- Poor subsidies for managing land for long term benefit of the land to keep it available for food production longer term
- Return on management costs
- Income from farm to justify any expenditure
- Lack of finance to maintain fences, cut hedges and overhanging trees
- Cost of native species seed mixes for improving the variety and quality of grasses and wildflowers
- Cost of hiring help to implement environmentally beneficial strategies in the field
- Capital to invest into establishment of no-till grassland
- Contractor costs.

### **'Other important obstacles' in managing grassland mentioned by respondents in the free text box:**

- "Time to devote to this important aspect of farming!"
- Contractor knowledge of good management practices ( for burial grounds)
- Public attitudes (burial grounds) i.e. tidiness versus wild flower meadows and wildlife
- Needing to proceed with the majority view where the estate is run by a management company with residents as members
- "Environment Agency's irrelevant phosphate calculations being applied to my grazing system "
- "The difficulties are starting to defeat me and I am sad to see the meadow in decline "
- Old age
- Steep land with heavy impermeable subsoil, poor drainage on lower slopes
- People on footpaths with dogs
- Walkers with dogs not under control wandering wherever they want to are a major disincentive to conservation work (and woodland management).

### **Other comments made by respondents in the free text box in association with this question:**

- For Churchyards and cemeteries (370+ in Sussex), these are areas with open access for the public, covering many acres of countryside so a perfect opportunity to promote wildlife conservation
- Education, and changing attitudes to wildlife conservation are key. Grazing is rarely possible although sheep are unhelpfully used as 'mowing machines' in summer months in two Sussex churchyards
- Only a few acres with 12 sheep does not seem applicable
- Grassland management needs a reason - livestock are the obvious and historic answer. Pressures from fashionable vegan and vegetarian lobbies are hurting consumer confidence - produce from pasture fed historic landscapes needs to have a special endorsement- perhaps country- wide, and completely unlike the infuriatingly irrelevant and misunderstood red tractor scheme. Could all the AONBs and national parks do a joint marketing "marque" venture?
- Created forest of some 400 species-rich trees with Forestry Commission 1993, 1.5has planted ,150 approx. more incl.23 Black Poplars, restored 3 woods, added scrape,535 mts. hedging
- Government grant schemes seem to me to be too complicated to make a claim
- Late-cut hay is less valued and local contractors only use big round bales
- The best way to get more species would be for you to source and provide the seeding and planting
- I don't have the resources or equipment
- We have been very fortunate to work with some brilliant advisers from local wildlife groups, government bodies and private consultants. Further funding to better the reach of these advisers through education of the public etc would be money very well spent.

## ***2.17 Joining a focus group or receiving further information on events***

When given options for keeping in touch, 86% of the survey respondents opted in to receive further information on the AONB Partnership's grassland management events programme in 2019. That's 54 people, although two of them didn't leave their contact details for us to follow up with them. And 46% (29 people) opted in to join a focus group to discuss future support for the High Weald's grassland managers.