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Engaging for Reform



Community Alliance
South Australia

Failing Communities - the Mt Barker Lesson

The Ombudsman's report has opened up failings in the planning regime and strengthened the resolve of the Community Alliance SA to call for reform, to put the people back into planning and development. We believe the state government's failure to follow due process in this case is probably sufficient cause to trigger an ICAC investigation.

In his report the Ombudsman found a direct conflict of interest in the activities of Connor Holmes, a group of consultant planners employed by both developers and government in the rezoning of land at Mt Barker for housing. The report even notes that Connor Holmes wrote to the Minister asking for a Ministerial DPA, or the declaration of a Major Project, saying that it would be difficult to "attract the support" of Mount Barker Council.

Connor Holmes' *Growth Investigation Areas* report, identifying land to be developed under the *Thirty Year Plan*, was commissioned while they were working for these same developers, in late 2008. The government had failed to appreciate the significance of the conflict of interest in Connor Holmes's activities while working for these two masters, the developers and the government. This raises serious questions about the independence and value of the *Thirty Year Plan* itself.

Does this mean that other aspects of the *Thirty Year Plan* have also been secretly 'shaped' by these consultants to the developers? Has the selection of other parcels of land been driven by similar conflicts of interest? This could apply to land already rezoned by ministerial DPAs and the earmarking of future land for development such as at Buckland Park, Gawler, Concordia and Roseworthy.

Just as the Ombudsman has called for, the Community Alliance would also like to see the *Growth Investigation Areas* report released. How can we have 'due process' in important planning decisions when everything happens behind closed doors?

The Ombudsman's report has exposed a shocking example of abuse of process in our state government's planning and development regime. Unfortunately, the people of Mt Barker are now left facing development that neither they nor their Council wanted.

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