



**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ADVOCACY**  
EMPOWERING COMMUNITY VOICES

# **WHITE PAPER**

## **The imperative for early community consultation in property development in South Australia**

## **Executive Summary**

This White Paper underscores the critical importance of early and meaningful community consultation in property development projects within South Australia. It highlights the benefits of such engagement, including enhanced inclusivity, reduced conflict, improved mental health, and more favourable perceptions of developers and policymakers. Conversely, it examines the adverse effects of late or inadequate consultation, which often lead to community opposition and project delays. Through South Australian case studies, this paper illustrates the tangible outcomes of consultation timing and advocates for the establishment of a unified and proactive advocacy body to amplify local communities' voices in development processes.

## **Introduction**

Property development significantly influences the liveability, lifestyle, and well-being of South Australian communities. While such projects aim to stimulate economic growth and enhance infrastructure, their success largely depends on the extent to which developers and policymakers engage with the affected residents.

**Early Consultation:** Engaging community members from the project's inception fosters a sense of ownership, collaboration, and mutual respect.

**Late or Inadequate Consultation:** Delaying engagement until after major decisions are made often results in dissatisfaction, resistance, and legal challenges, impeding project timelines and eroding trust. Providing communities with 'options' to choose from has the same result, as the choice is restricted and notification of the conclusions of the development process are unexpected.

Public consultation must occur at the beginning to be truly meaningful to the local community.

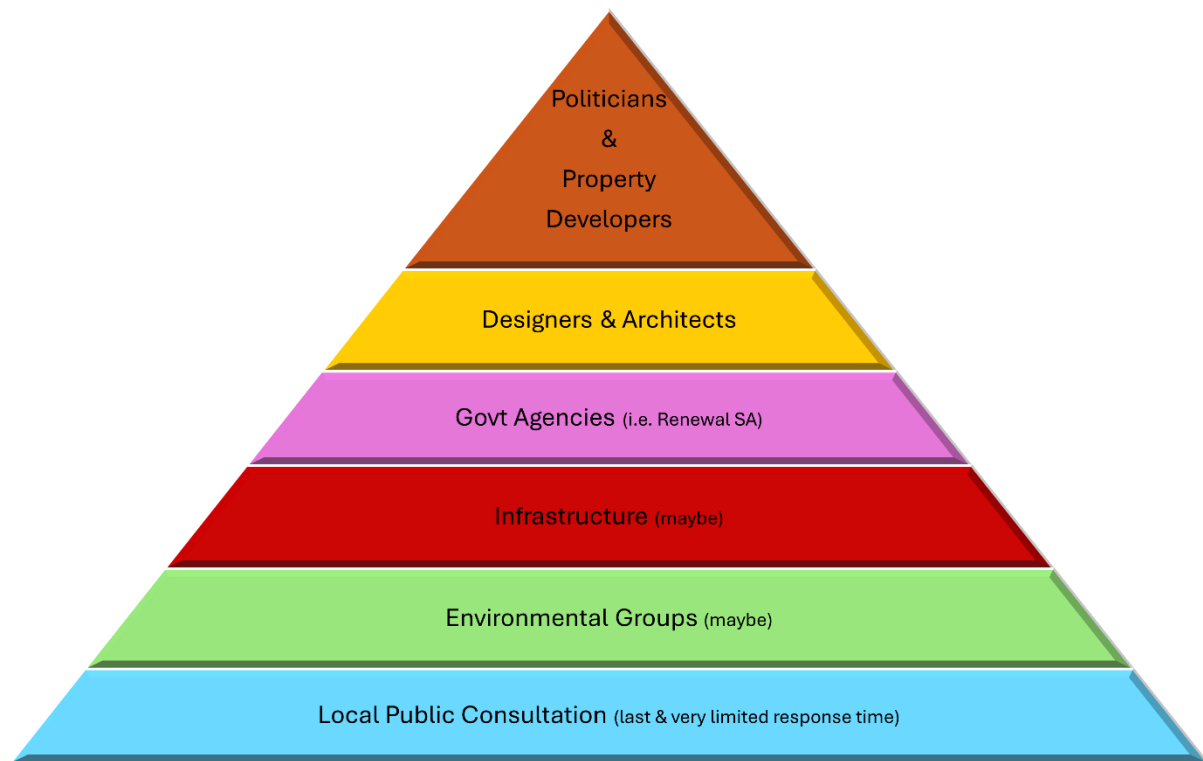
Given that individual communities may lack the resources to effectively voice their concerns, there is a pressing need for a peak body dedicated to, and actively representing, local interests. Such an organisation can unify diverse groups, provide expertise, and exert greater influence on policy decisions, ensuring that development initiatives align with community priorities and safeguard well-being.

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## **1. The Imperative for Early Community Consultation**

### **1.1 Understanding the Current Consultation Process:**

The current system of consultation for property development is structured in a way that prioritises politicians and property developers at the top of the decision-making hierarchy, while local communities - the very people most affected by the developments - are placed at the bottom with minimal influence. The following image (Pyramid 1) visually represents this process:



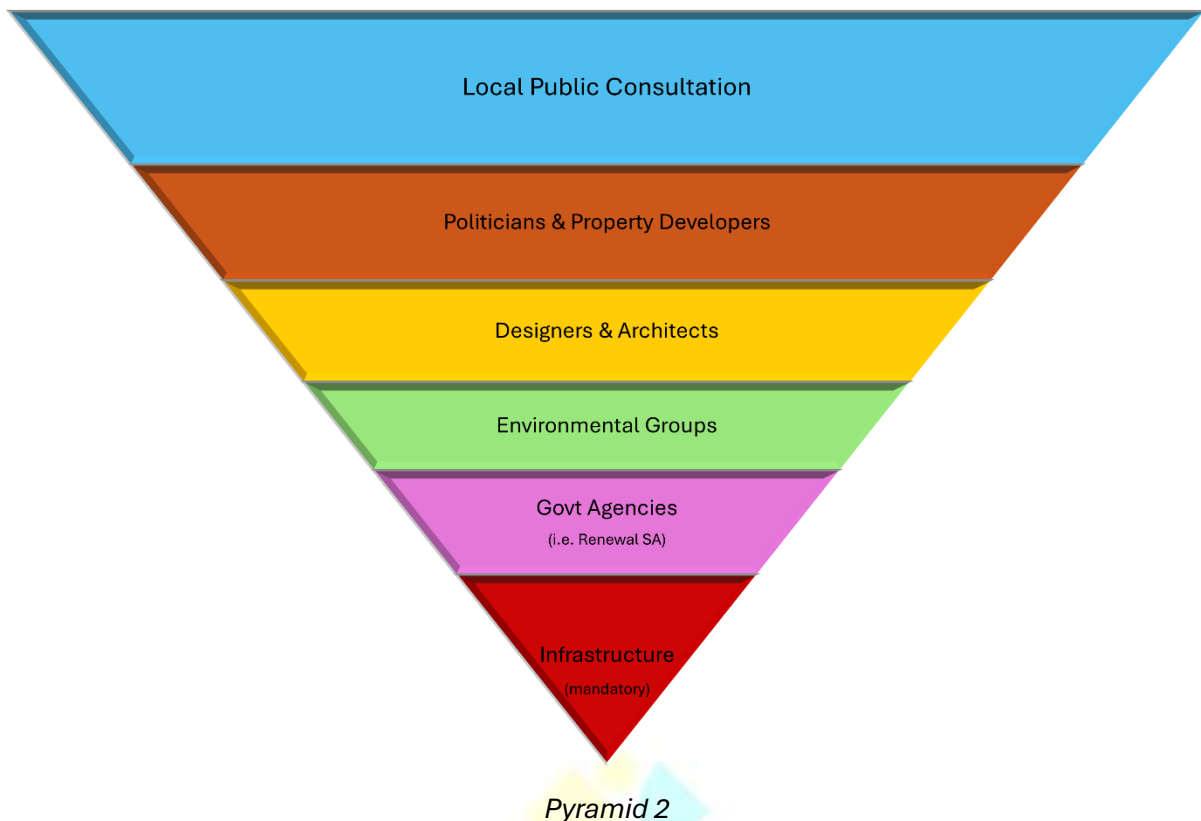
*Pyramid 1*

It is important to note that the pyramid does not imply a rigid step-by-step process but rather provides a visual illustration of the power dynamics that dominate current property development decision-making. The key issue is that politicians and developers initiate projects without substantive community involvement, leaving local residents with minimal say over developments that significantly impact their lives. This outdated approach must be challenged and overturned.

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### **1.2 The Need for a New Consultation Model:**

To create a more equitable and community-focused planning system, the consultation process must be restructured so that local communities are the first stakeholders engaged in development discussions. The following image (Pyramid 2) illustrates such a model for consultation:



While the pyramid visually demonstrates a new model, it is not meant to suggest that the process must follow each step precisely. Instead, the key takeaway is that property development discussions must be fundamentally restructured to prioritise local communities first. This means shifting the balance of power so that the people who live, work, and engage in these areas have real influence before any significant planning or development decisions are made.

By placing communities at the top, we ensure that their insights, needs, and aspirations shape development projects from the outset, rather than being an afterthought.

By reversing the consultation hierarchy, this model empowers the local community and ensures that developments align with the interests of those most affected. Additionally, it provides the community with time to consult with advocacy organisations like Community Development Advocacy SA Inc., which can assist in representing their concerns at a political level.

In addition, it provides planning authorities with critical feedback and potentially excellent ideas that can be incorporated within the planned development, quite often saving time and money.

The long-term objective of Community Development Advocacy SA Inc. is to achieve legislative reform that mandates early-stage community consultation before any development plans move beyond conceptual discussions.

## **2. Drawbacks of Late-Stage Consultation**

Engaging communities only after key project decisions have been finalised can lead to tokenistic participation, where residents feel their input is undervalued. This often results in mistrust, conflict, and potential legal challenges, delaying projects and increasing costs.

For example, the Newport Quays development faced significant community opposition due to perceptions of inadequate consultation, leading to eventual project cancellation<sup>1</sup>.

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## **3. Case Study Illustrating Benefits of Early Consultation**

### **3.1 Mikawomma Reserve Development**

**Context:** The development of Mikawomma Reserve in Woodville Gardens aimed to create a public space that reflected Indigenous culture and provided stormwater management.

**Engagement:** Extensive collaboration with the local community, including the Kaurna people, influenced the reserve's design, incorporating native plants and culturally significant artworks.

**Outcome:** The project resulted in a multifunctional reserve that serves both environmental and cultural purposes, earning multiple awards for its innovative design<sup>2</sup>.

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## **4. Late Consultation Resulting in Opposition**

### **3.2.1 Newport Quays Development**

**Context:** The Newport Quays project aimed to redevelop Port Adelaide's waterfront with residential and commercial properties.

**Engagement:** Community members criticised the development for insufficient consultation and for designs that did not align with local heritage values.

**Outcome:** The project faced significant opposition, legal challenges, and was eventually cancelled, highlighting the consequences of inadequate community engagement<sup>1</sup>.

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### **3.2.2 Port Dock Development**

**Context:** The Port Dock development in Port Adelaide faced significant delays, with construction stalled since October 2023.

Engagement: Residents expressed frustration over the lack of communication and prolonged inactivity, describing the site as an "abandoned eyesore"<sup>3</sup>.

Outcome: The absence of timely and transparent consultation led to community dissatisfaction and negative perceptions of the project.

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## Conclusion

The evidence presented in this White Paper demonstrates that early and meaningful community consultation leads to better project outcomes, reduced opposition, and improved social cohesion.

The current consultation hierarchy (*Pyramid 1*) prioritises developers and policymakers at the expense of local communities, leading to frustration and conflict. A restructured model (*Pyramid 2*) that places community engagement at the forefront will ensure that developments reflect local needs and values.

Community Development Advocacy SA Inc. calls for legislative reform to mandate early-stage consultation, ensuring that South Australian communities have a real voice in shaping their environments.



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# CDASA

## References

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<sup>1</sup> Newport Quays Opposition. (n.d.). City of PAE. Retrieved from <https://www.cityofpae.sa.gov.au/>

<sup>2</sup> Mikawomma Reserve Development. (n.d.). Wikipedia. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikawomma\\_Reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikawomma_Reserve)

<sup>3</sup> Port Dock Development Delays. (2024). Adelaide Now. Retrieved from <https://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/south-australia/port-dock-development-an-abandoned-eyesore-fedup-neighbours-say/news-story/5440073537554d1e70f7f1bd77c8459d>