

Former LDA executive Dan Stewart helps Grocon on Manuka Oval redevelopment

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A month after the ACT government abandoned controversial land swaps to facilities the Manuka oval redevelopment former Land Development Agency deputy chief executive Dan Stewart began working with major Australian property developer Grocon on the proposed \$800 million redevelopment.

Greater Western Sydney Giants AFL club is leading the consortium which made an unsolicited bid for the redevelopment project in November last year. Huge commercial and residential development is proposed, linking up with Manuka's up-market business district and Kingston Foreshore. A mixed-use development includes a boutique 4-star hotel and serviced apartments.

Mr Stewart left the LDA in August last year soon after the ACT government abandoned a contentious land swap to facilitate the Manuka oval redevelopment.

He then became director of Elton Consulting ACT, which has been working on behalf of Grocon for 18 months on the unsolicited bid to redevelop Manuka Oval.

Last year Mr Stewart was engaged on the [LDA's proposed land swap](#) which led to an outcry over Telopea Park School having to keep the school's board and parents and citizens in the dark for a period about a proposed land swap.

Eventually the government backed down on the plans for Telopea school to lose its tennis courts to make way for a relocated Manuka Occasional Childcare Centre, which in turn would make way for a rebuilt Canberra Services Club and housing development.

[Unrest also flared in July](#) within the Griffith Narrabundah Community Council after its executive agreed to another LDA request to keep quiet about another possible site to facilitate a land swap, behind the Griffith shops.

Mr Stewart said on Friday Grocon had engaged Elton Consulting for stakeholder engagement before he had left the LDA, which markets and sells land on the government's behalf. He began working on the Manuka project for Grocon in late September and early October.

He said there was no conflict of interest. The consortium had been dealing with Invest Canberra which was on the opposite side of the ACT Government's economic directorate to the LDA where Mr Stewart was working.

Mr Stewart said he did not drive the land swap deals while working for the LDA.

"I didn't push for the land swap at all, I was asked by the government to attend a meeting with Telopea Park [school] board and a meeting with parents and citizens to discuss the decision the government had taken on the land swap. We weren't pushing anything, we were implementing a decision of the government of the day," he said.

Kingston/Barton Residents Group spokeswoman Rebecca Scouller says Mr Stewart surprised residents when he attended a recent briefing on the Manuka redevelopment on Grocon's behalf. Grocon and GWS had been working with the ACT government for more than a year, residents were told.

"Dan Stewart was heavily involved in the land swap debacle and would be expected to have extensive knowledge of the Chief Minister's vision for Manuka Oval and the ACT government's strengths and weaknesses in assessing an unsolicited bid," Ms Scouller said.

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"It would seem hard to believe that this corporate knowledge was left at the door of the LDA when the deputy chief executive left in September last year.

"The [GWS] Manuka Green website states that plans were developed in response to the Manuka Oval Master Plan yet the public has never seen a final master plan," Ms Scouller said. "How is it reasonable that a developer can have access yet the public be denied?"

Ms Scouller said it was not unreasonable for the community and taxpayers to be concerned at having the former LDA executive as a primary consultant.

"This only reinforces the need for an open tender process where contestability and actual competition will deliver superior results for Manuka Oval, local residents, sports fans and Canberra's taxpayers," she said.

GWS Giants Football Club said in a statement the unsolicited bid process stipulates all interactions with government are managed through Invest ACT, which has been the case with this proposal.

A spokesman for Chief Minister Andrew Barr says people leaving the public service are required not to disclose or take advantage of official information gained during their employment.

Confidential information acquired by a member of the public service must not be used in their new employment without the approval of the relevant director general.