

**Supplementary
Submission
No 1b**

INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PRACTICES

Name: Ms Dale Webster

Date Received: 5 June 2025

Submission Text: Good morning, I have added some notes to one of the attachments I included with my submission last night. Could you please replace that version with this one.

Thanks, Dale.



Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions

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Ref: CORG-2-25-26451

Ms Dale Webster
The Regional
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms Webster

Thank you for your letter to the Minister for Planning of 8 May 2025 regarding the Bendigo Showgrounds Redevelopment. Your correspondence was referred to the Minister for Development Victoria and Precincts, and then to the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events, Steve Dimopoulos MP, as the matter you raise falls within his portfolio of responsibilities. Minister Dimopoulos requested I respond on his behalf.

The Bendigo Showgrounds redevelopment is part of the broader Regional Sports Infrastructure Program which is delivering 16 new or upgraded sport and recreational venues across the state to help regional cities and towns become even better places to live, work, stay and play.

This project is being delivered by Development Victoria (DV) in partnership with Sport and Recreation Victoria and has involved close collaboration with the City of Greater Bendigo (COGB) and the Bendigo Agricultural Show Society (BASS) to ensure the Bendigo Showgrounds upgrades cater to the local community and deliver positive outcomes for the region. As you may be aware, the future Bendigo Showgrounds redevelopment includes:

- Improvements to the grass arena, including upgraded lighting and upgraded perimeter track
- Construction of a new multipurpose pavilion featuring an event space, storage, and associated amenities
- Upgrades to existing entries with new fencing and gates
- Remove and replace sections of perimeter fencing.

Works on this project are set to commence in mid-2025, which will boost local jobs and businesses during project delivery and will support the continued growth of the Bendigo region for years to come.

The vision for the Bendigo Showgrounds project is to create a modern, accessible, and resilient venue that fosters community connection, boosts local economic activity, and supports diverse events. The upgrades aim to enhance opportunities for participation in agricultural, recreation, and community activities while ensuring the venue remains a valued asset for future generations.

Regarding the planning pathway for the Bendigo Showgrounds project, the Minister for Planning will consider the project as a State Project under Clause 52.30 of the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme.

This is a State Government planning pathway which considers all planning requirements, including flood levels, elevations, environmental controls, parking, traffic, landscaping, cultural heritage, ecology and consultation.

The BASS has consulted with a range of regular user groups throughout the planning and design phase for this project including:

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confirming BASS
consulted with itself

- Major events users - including the Sheep and Wool Show, the Swap Meet, and festival organisers
- The Showgrounds Committee of Management which includes representatives from various user groups and events.

In March and April 2025, community members were invited to participate in a series of information sessions as part of the broader consultation process. These included a drop-in session at the Bendigo Showgrounds and an online webinar. Community members were also encouraged to provide written submissions via the Engage Victoria website.

All feedback received during the consultation period has been carefully considered as the project team works to finalise the design and delivery approach. Where appropriate, refinements may be made in alignment with the project's defined scope. Feedback has also been shared with BASS and other relevant authorities to ensure transparency and informed decision-making.

Thank you again for your ongoing interest in Bendigo Showgrounds Upgrade project. For the most up to date public information on the project, please refer to the DV project website: <https://www.development.vic.gov.au/projects/bendigo-showgrounds>

Yours sincerely



Date: 29 / 05 / 2025

May 30, 2025

Dear Ms Kilkenny and Ms McCann,

please see below my full investigation into the Bendigo Showgrounds redevelopment project.

[How the Bendigo showgrounds project became a sports rort \(without the sport\)](#)

Your letter is at best misleading and at worst, inaccurate. Unless your office is prepared to release documents that show proof of consultation to the standard required BEFORE major works were put out to tender it will be reported as such.

Requests for these documents and other information related to the consultation process prior to decisions on works have been snubbed by the City of Greater Bendigo, the Bendigo Showgrounds Society and the contractors who undertook the consultation process for the Bendigo Showgrounds masterplan.

I should not need to remind you that telling stakeholders who have never been given an opportunity to comment on a project WHAT you are doing - as seen with the Engage Victoria process you cited in your letter - is not consultation and certainly does not meet the standard required to approve a planning application.

Regards,

Dale Webster

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April 3, 2025

The Minister for Planning, Sonya Kilkenny

Re: Bendigo Showgrounds Redevelopment

Submitted as part of the Engage Victoria community consultation – March-April 2025

Dear Ms Kilkenny,

I am a freelance journalist who in the course of covering the Bendigo Showgrounds Redevelopment has come across serious non-compliance issues in relation to the consultation process required for this project and the inappropriate use of sports infrastructure funding.

I believe these matters to be so serious they must warrant rejection of the planning application.

My research has shown that there is little doubt that the pavilion to be built as part of this project is the same as that proposed for the Commonwealth Games table tennis competition.

Evidence given to a senate inquiry in 2023 shows that no stakeholder consultation informed the decision to allocate sport and infrastructure funding for the building of the pavilion then. (Federal Hansard: https://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Read_Listen/ParView/video/1669001)

A statement made by member for Northern Victoria Wendy Lovell in Victorian Parliament just a year before strongly indicates the pavilion's actual intended use was a market shed to be used by Sunday market traders, for which Ms Lovell was attempting to secure more appropriate Regional Development funding. (Victorian Hansard: <https://hansard.parliament.vic.gov.au/isysquery/68ac33d7-5402-4e64-b8b1-3929ee360c08/2/doc/>)

I note that even Development Victoria's own planning documents refer to the new pavilion as having no sporting or active recreation purpose. ["Construction of a new modern, multipurpose pavilion that includes a market hall, event space, and storage facilities."](#)

While sports and infrastructure funding is being used to fund a pavilion with no sporting purpose, the sporting group users of the showgrounds will be disadvantaged by the planned works to the point where certain events will no longer be able to be held there.

The reduction in the size of the arena by removal of the sand track and placement of the fenceline approximately 6m inside its current position takes away vital usable space when hosting large equestrian events.

Additionally, a lure coursing representative told me their dogs would "break their necks" if they attempted to hold an official competition on the reduced area.

The decision to reduce the size of the arena was made with ZERO consultation with these major stakeholder groups.

They first learnt of the changes when turning up to this consultation process hoping to have a genuine say, only to be told by Development Victoria representatives that the work had already been put out to tender and planning process started.

The lack of transparency displayed to date is the reason I began investigating the project.

In the course of my reporting, I have encountered obstruction from all parties involved, from both the City of Greater Bendigo and the Bendigo Agricultural Society refusing to release a copy of the publicly funded Bendigo showgrounds master plan, to State Government departments fobbing off questions and ignoring emails put through as media inquiries.

Examples of questions that have been ignored range from simple matters about the planning process to more serious ones about the basis for the decision to allocate sports infrastructure to build a new pavilion, what sporting or active recreation group will be using the new pavilion and what percentage of the overall usage will the sporting activity comprise.

There has been no explanation as to why sports infrastructure funding is being used to build a market shed when actual sporting infrastructure at the grounds – stabling that is vital for equestrian events – is falling down around users' ears.

The line that keeps coming back from Development Victoria is that the government consulted with the Bendigo Agricultural Show Society and the society represented all user groups.

The Bendigo Agricultural Show Society is listed as a project partner for the showgrounds redevelopment.

A planning project applicant consulting itself should not satisfy the consultation requirements of a clause 52.3 planning application unless the project partner demonstrates it has held a genuine consultation with stakeholders.

The feedback I have received from user groups indicates the show society did nothing more than spitball the idea to reduce the size of the arena around the 25 people sitting at its own board table.

The role of the City of Greater Bendigo in blocking access to the Bendigo Showgrounds Master Plan also needs to be highlighted.

In 2019, according to a media release from the Victorian Government quoting Regional Development Minister Jaclyn Symes, the City of Greater Bendigo was given \$50,000 in public money to lead a project to develop this document.

The money was for "extensive community consultation with diverse user groups".

Ms Lovell confirmed in parliament in 2022 that this work had been completed saying, *"in December 2019 the council released a detailed master plan and business case, which identified a nine-stage plan to improve and grow the showgrounds over an extended time frame"*.

Every request for a copy of the master plan – by community or media – has been deflected by council to the Bendigo Show Society, with council saying it is not their project.

The show society, in turn, has refused to release the document or ignored requests for it.

As the only document that can substantiate whether any consultation outside the offices of the council or show society occurred, and a Freedom of Information will take months to complete, I submit that the planning process for the Bendigo Showgrounds redevelopment should be put on hold until the master plan is made publicly available.

If it turns out that the City of Greater Bendigo did not use the grant money it was given for community consultation, the whole project needs to be put back on the table.

As it stands, my research indicates that equestrian and lure coursing events with all the economic benefits they bring will be lost to Bendigo as a result of this project.

In summary, from what I have been able to ascertain the lack of consultation that is a genuine substitute “[for notice, the consideration of objections, and the ability to appeal a decision at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal](#)” and the project not meeting the criteria for the program it has been funded under amount to legal obstacles that should prevent approval of this planning application.

All of the above has been reported in the following articles:

<https://www.theregional.com.au/post/questions-raised-over-bendigo-showgrounds-consultation-and-grant-funding>

<https://www.theregional.com.au/post/sporting-group-blows-whistle-on-showgrounds-consultation-failure>

Regards,

Dale Webster

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