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## Minister rejects ban on property developers



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### COUNCIL ELECTIONS

# Minister rejects ban on property developers

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Local Government Minister Shelley Hancock has warned against labelling all property developers as “evil” while facing questions over the government’s response to Labor’s bid to ban them from sitting on local councils.

The South Coast MP instead suggested it should fall upon political parties to vet their candidates appropriately during preselection, with nominations now being fielded across several councils ahead of elections in September.

“If we start to ban certain groups of people from running for local government, where do we stop?” she said during a budget estimates hearing before NSW Parliament’s joint planning and environment committee yesterday, adding it could turn into a constitutional issue.

Asked by Labor MP Mark Buttigieg if there was a conflict of interest in property developers acting as elected officials, Ms Hancock replied, “There doesn’t have to be.”

She said, “I don’t think we should necessarily regard them as



**Shelley Hancock: not all property developers are “evil”.**

an enemy species because they’re property developers or real estate agents; they’re entitled to have a voice around the table.

“Maybe we could start to ban other groups of people, maybe teachers.” She later clarified the remark as “flippant”, and said, “Let’s not classify all property developers as ‘evil’.”

Labor local government spokesman Greg Warren is spearheading the bill, the party’s second attempt to ban property developers and real estate agents from becoming councillors after the government voted down a similar bill in the upper house in 2017.

The minister repeatedly declined to state her opinion on the bill during the hearing or speculate on what the government’s position on the bill would be.

“I cannot respond as an individual minister to a piece of legislation before the house,” she said.

Her position before the committee yesterday put her at odds with Environment Minister Matt Kean’s vocal stance on the issue. He has previously said, “It’s unacceptable that property developers are using the Liberal Party’s brand to line their own pockets.”

Ms Hancock told the committee there were already measures to “take the sugar off the table” for developers on councils, with Office of Local Government head Tim Hurst saying developers had to declare their occupation to the NSW Electoral Commission when running.

But issues of transparency were raised after Mr Hurst said the agency could not comment after receiving questions about an alleged probe into Strathfield mayor Antoine Doueihy, who the committee heard was accused of failing to declare property interests.

with Lisa Visentin