

David Jones Jr on the future of the FJ site



This stunning image of the Fletcher Jones' silver ball was taken by Deakin University fine art academic **Mark Rashleigh** who has kindly given us permission to reproduce it here. It depicts the tower with its ladder and railings intact.

OPINION

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] A Heritage Victoria prepares to inspect the dilapidated Fletcher Jones factory in Warrnambool next Monday (7/4), the grandson of Fletcher Jones said his family would be delighted to see something "creative" happen with the site.

In so saying, however, **David Fletcher Jones Jr** said that his family fully appreciated the complexity of the situation that has developed since the current owner, Daramking (owned by failed Geelong businessman Ian Ballis), went into receivership in 2012.

"I am anxious to stress that we recognise how challenging this all is," Mr Jones said in an exclusive interview with *Bluestone*.

Mr Jones is the son of the late David and Isobel Jones and lived in Warrnambool until his teenage years. As a result, he is keenly aware of the connection that many people feel to the Fletcher Jones factory site because of the high esteem in which his grandfather was held.

"How the site looks today is very sad," he said.

"Everyone would like to see something better done with it."



THIS MODERN clothing factory at Warrnambool, west of Melbourne, symbolises industry's trend towards garden surroundings.

Fletcher Jones factory, Warrnambool circa 1950's.
Photo source: Land of the Southern Cross Australia.
Published by The Australian Publicity Council.
Private collection.

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[/dropcap]r Jones, who with his sisters, Susan and Anne, oversees the philanthropic [FJ Foundation](#), said the debate around the future of the site reinforced that there was no easy answer and a solution would require a "thorough engagement with the council and the community".

"Quite a complex and thoughtful solution is going to be needed," he said.

"And we would be excited if something thoughtful and appropriate could be done."

While Mr Jones did not wish to specify what sort of development he would like to see on the site, he agreed that a

project that linked to the broader community would certainly reflect the values of his grandfather.

The Jones' family have had no direct involvement in the FJ factory site since the company was sold in 1995, but the personal links remain strong.

The water tower was designed by Fletcher Jones' son, **Ralph**, who was a consulting engineer and is now aged in his 80s. The Pleasant Hill gardens, meanwhile, were designed by Fletcher Jones' brother-in-law **Darby Boucher**.

The heritage-listed water tower, gardens and other key elements of the iconic site have been central to recent discussions between Heritage Victoria, the Warrnambool City Council, the administrators and the mortgagors as to who has responsibility for maintaining these historic elements.

A [Save the Silver Ball and Fletcher Jones Gardens](#) group has also added a strong element of grassroots community activism.



[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #ABCCAB;"] I
[/dropcap]n the meantime, the various tenants occupying different parts of the building are still paying rent and, in most cases, repairing what they can as the building continues to crumble around them.

The **Triton Woodworkers Club**, for example, pays around \$9000 a year for a space directly under the silver ball that is substantial in size, but leaks like a sieve whenever it rains.

The club has rigged up an improvised internal drainage system that keeps most of the rain off their equipment – if not the floor – but an outsider can't help wondering why they are being charged anything at all, especially as a not-for-profit community group who, simply by being there, help to keep the vandals out.

So where does the long-term solution to the site lie?

Hopefully a constructive plan will emerge from the talks between the various parties, but, in the meantime, it is worth revisiting a key recommendation of the 2003 consultants' report, commissioned by the council, into the site's future.

It suggested the council, even if it no longer owned the site, keep the dialogue open between the community, any developer and the council to ensure its future life was in keeping with community expectations.

[To date, this has not happened](#). This may change and, if it does, we may be on our way to the "thoughtful and appropriate" solution that such a high-profile and important site deserves.

[box] **Postscript:** According to the Warrnambool City Council, it spent almost \$160,000 on the Fletcher Jones site between 2002 and 2008. A breakdown of this figure was unavailable, but it included repairs on the silver ball after an assessment in 2004.[/box]



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Fletcher Jones site taken off the market



EXCLUSIVE

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #A5CECD;"] T
[/dropcap]he Fletcher Jones site has been withdrawn from sale, pending a change to its zoning by the Warrnambool City Council.

Real estate agent **Mark Wilson**, from Wilson Real Estate, told Bluestone that the site had been withdrawn from sale by administrators just after Christmas in anticipation that it would be rezoned from industrial to mixed use.

"There are still 'for sale' signs all over the property and I am sure if a cashed-up buyer walked in tomorrow they would not be turned away, but it is not on the market right now," he said.

Mr Wilson said a change of zoning would hopefully make the site a more attractive prospect for a potential purchaser because it allowed for greater flexibility.

"That is certainly the aim," he said.

The present Industrial 3 zoning allows for such things as small scale retail, workshops, mini factories and office space.

The derelict site was listed for sale again in July last year, at which time [the council indicated it might be prepared to change the zoning](#) if it was presented with a compelling plan.

Despite the withdrawal from sale indicating such a plan may be afoot, the Warrnambool City Council told Bluestone that it has not received a submission for the zoning to be changed.

The 2.3ha site was owned by Geelong businessman **Ian Ballis**, who developed the Mill Markets, but has been under administration since July 2012 as part of his company,

Daramking.

Administrator **Ken Sellers**, from SellersMuldoonBenton, is handling the affairs of Daramking, but was unavailable for comment.



The former owner of the Fletcher Jones site, Ian Ballis, who developed the Mill Markets before going into receivership in 2012. Image: Jeremy Lee, ABC Radio. Click on the image to hear Jeremy's story from 2008.

[box] Bluestone Magazine is part of a [growing grassroots campaign](#) to save the best of the Fletcher Jones site in Warrnambool from being lost through neglect. We support a sensitive development of the site that respects its social and physical history and preserves the iconic gardens and silver ball for future generations.[/box]



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