

AITON ON MONDAY

with Doug Aiton



After a seven-year battle, Jim Ramsey's \$75m dream nears reality

The ripple effect

IN February 2005 developer Jim Ramsey was given the green light by the state planning tribunal to proceed with his residential development at the former Ripplside shipyards.

This was after a seven-year battle through the City of Greater Geelong and the tribunal, most notably involving the energetic objections of about 100 residents at Ripplside.

At the time of that victory, Ramsey declined giving an interview to this page. His reason was that it would be inappropriate to appear to be triumphant over the residents.

He says he certainly did not feel triumphant.

The \$75 million project is now in its early stages and should be completed in three years.

Meeting Jim Ramsey is quite a challenging experience. He is hyper-active; constantly talking and producing documents, maps, plans and files; he has a wry sense of humour which surfaces constantly, and he speaks in an accent which is a combination of Scottish and Irish but sounds like neither.

We met at his home in Grubb Rd, Ocean Grove, before he took me on a tour of the Geelong project, now named Ripplside Quay.

His home is part of his work, in that he and his wife, Liz, live on about 160 acres of land which is one of the several land developments in which he is involved. After some adjustments, the city council has approved his plans for Kingston on the northern edge of Ocean Grove to be rezoned into residences, industrial sites, shops, a school, a retirement village.

This is a 20-year project which will, in the end, transform Ocean Grove's identity and shape.

The property for the moment comprises the Ramsey home, the office of James Ramsey and Associates, several horses, a cottage for their daughter, Samantha, a pine forest, an entrance drive lined with golden elms, and a large garage, inside which lives an helicopter, which Jim pilots himself.

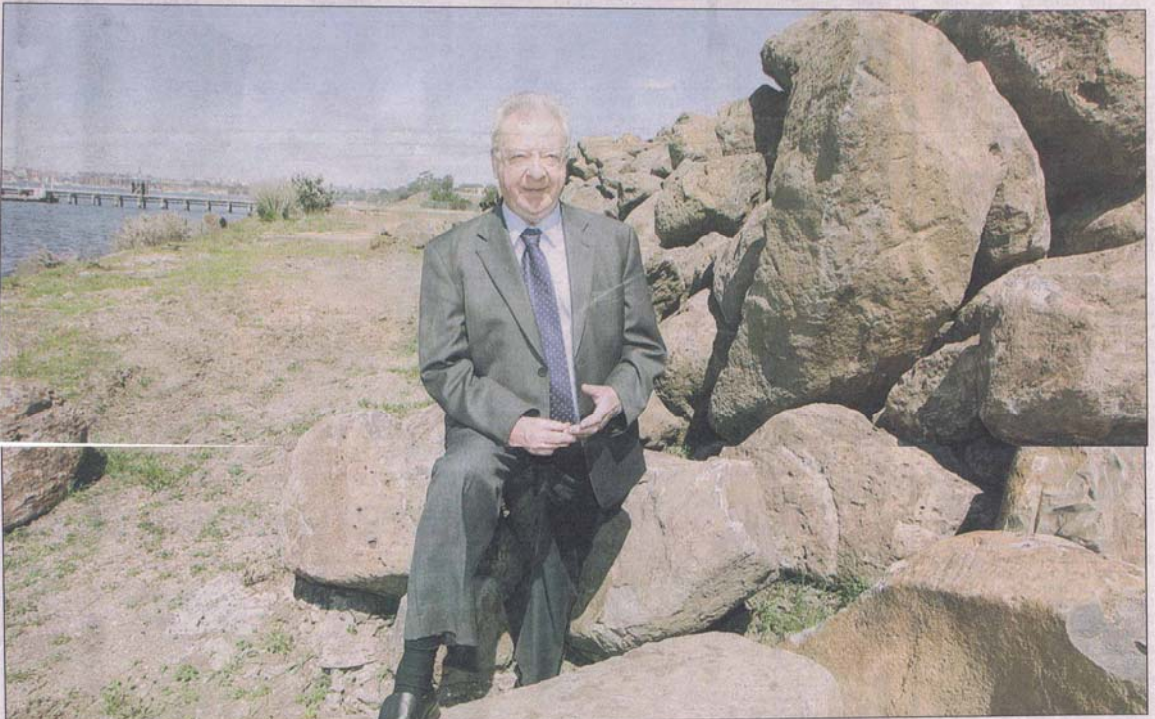
The principals of the company are Jim, Liz and Samantha Ramsey.

By profession, Jim Ramsey is an architect and planner. He graduated from Oxford University in 1970, which is the closest indication he will reveal regarding his age. He then got a planning degree from Leeds University.

Ramsey was born in Stranraer on the west coast of Scotland, but grew up largely in Northern Ireland. His father, Hugh, was torpedoed in World War I and later died when Jim was about 12.

His mother, May, was a fashion buyer and often went to London, Paris and Rome. His uncle, Jim, was an architect who influenced young Jim.

Jim later worked as an architect in London, ran a



LONG TIME COMING: Geelong developer Jim Ramsey at Ripplside, the site of his dream which is now becoming a reality.

'I see money as a commodity, a tool. It's the wrong approach to think, how much will I make?'

nightclub in London's Kensington called The Dock, sold it to Richard Branson (who still has it as his London office), met and married a Ballarat girl called Liz and, eventually, because of her, came to Australia to live in 1985.

He speaks rapidly and enthusiastically and ends many of his sentences with "and so forth", or "and whatnot".

Ramsey has carried out about 50 rezonings since coming to Australia, and lost only two. He lost an early one in Williamstown to an industrial body, but since the land cost him \$450,000, and he later sold it for \$3.55 million, it was an odd sort of loss.

He usually has five redevelopments going at a time, one for each day of the week. Currently they are at Kingston, Ripplside, Batesford, Inverleigh and Bamnookburn.

"If you do it properly, you'll win," he said. "I know my



Jim and daughter Sam look over a model of the Ripplside development.

weaknesses. But I know each project upside down and inside out. The panel will always realise that we have done the work."

He concedes Ripplside was a long and tough battle. "I still wonder if they (the residents) understood what

we were trying to do. Maybe I didn't put it over properly."

Asked if anyone was now disadvantaged by Ripplside going ahead, he replied: "Other way round. The shipyards was a junk yard. In my opinion, the residents will benefit.

"I think there are still a couple of people who don't like me or the project and are still unconvinced. Most of the residents seem to have accepted it."

At one stage he faced all the residents at a meeting which became chaotic. Were they hurling abuse at him?

"Well, they were unhappy. My frustration was that I was unable to explain it."

Ramsey firmly maintains that the residents, up on top of the Ripplside cliff, will be 2.5 metres higher than the tallest building of his development, in front of them on the water's edge.

He further maintains that they will now be looking down on an attractive residential area with all sorts of modern facilities, rather than a derelict shipyard, and that they will still be able to see out to sea.

"It's a high quality residential village. It's going to improve the area."

Some of the residents, of course, might have a different perspective on this.

The apartments will cost from about \$500,000 through to penthouses at around \$2 million. He believes about one third have already been sold, even though they're not yet built.

He pointed out that with normal medium-density residential developments, the site coverage is usually 70 per cent. With Ripplside it is 46

per cent because there are parklands, walking areas "and so forth".

There is no doubt about Jim Ramsey's passion for this particular project and his work generally. He believes Ripplside Quay will be a glorious place, with views out to sea and night views of the city of Geelong and ships at sea.

He also says that at least 500 jobs will be created during the building period.

He says his work entails three stages: rezoning (which is an assessment procedure), planning permits ("nuts and bolts"), and the actual development of the land (funding, legal, plans, brochures etc.).

"They're all very different. You know, it's good fun. I don't see it as work. I really love it.

"You don't win every time. But you try. No two days are ever the same.

"You normally make a decision on the spot and, the problem is, you've got to live with it."

And, yes, he has been broke. Once it was a on project in New South Wales. But it did not particularly worry him.

"If any developer tells you he has never been broke, he's a fibber. And if you're doing this for the money, you're in the wrong game. I see money as a commodity, a tool. It's the wrong approach to think, how much will I make?"