

Press Release

Headington Hill Umbrella Group

Redevelopment of Cotuit Hall by the EF Group

Plans for the redevelopment of Cotuit Hall in Pullens Lane went on display on Friday [20 April 2012] and provoked a strong response from local residents. The plans envisage the creation of an International Academy which will cater for 408 pupils, 300 of whom will be residential, but with the other 108 being accommodated in the private sector.

HHUG's main concerns are

- The intensity of the development in the middle of a conservation area. Cotuit Hall used to accommodate just over 100 students when it was an Oxford Brookes Hall of Residence. To accommodate four times as many pupils and a group of residential staff as well as providing all the facilities required by a school necessitates a massive redevelopment of what is only a very small site of 1.3 hectares.
- The plans which were unveiled today to enable EF to achieve this level of density involve building three new 3-storey buildings which will virtually cover the entire footprint of the site. Residents feel that the mass and scale of this development is totally out of keeping with the nature of the area.
- There is concern also that this high density of occupation will inevitably lead to nuisances of noise, light and odour pollution as well as increased traffic along small private roads which were not designed to cope with this sort of intensive use. In turn this raises concerns about the safety of pupils who will inevitably move regularly up and down the lanes as well as those of residents and their children.
- The plans also make little provision for social or recreational spaces. Two underground social spaces are included in the plans but there is virtually no outside space available for social interaction or exercise. In school hours pupils will congregate on the limited outside space creating problems of noise and nuisance for immediate neighbours, but with so little to occupy them on site, pupils will inevitably spend much of their leisure time in the local area exacerbating the problems which are already experienced with high student numbers in the Headington and East Oxford areas.
- There are also questions to be asked about the adequacy of the existing services infrastructure ability to cope with the scale of this development

The EF group is also currently in the process of redeveloping the former Plater College in Pullens Lane as a Language School for 750 students. Before it closed, Plater College had about 150 students. In other words the two EF developments will

have taken the number of students in Pullens Lane from around 250 to 1150. While there are controls on the number of students which the two universities can have this sort of development is totally unregulated. Oxford Brookes has recently been congratulated on its decisions to cut its students numbers to limit the impact on local communities (*Oxford Times*, Thursday 5th April). However, the EF group will in effect be cancelling out this development by bring in almost the same number of new students into the area that Brookes is sacrificing.

Residents are also concerned that this development will bring little benefit to Oxford or to the UK. The EF group is a company which is registered in Switzerland and the purchase of Cotuit Hall was made by a Bermudan-based company. Nationally there has recently been much concern expressed about profits earned in the UK leaving the country and companies registered in tax havens such as Bermuda avoiding paying any tax in the UK. Is this sort of development right when our local universities are being restricted in their development?

Having seen the exhibition, David Armitage a resident of Rolfe Place said

"I am horrified by what I have seen. This is a residential conservation area comprising mainly family-sized houses. The proposed development will involve the construction of buildings ten times the size of the average house – massively out of scale with the character of the area."

Tess Boswood from Feilden Grove asked

"What's the point of having a conservation area if massive developments like this are allowed to go ahead? It's the thin edge of the wedge – soon there'll be nothing left worth conserving!"

Notes for the Editor

Headington Hill Umbrella Group (HHUG) has been formed by residents of Feilden Grove, Harberton Mead, Jack Straw's Lane South, Pullens Field, Pullens Lane and Rolfe Place to represent the interests of local residents who are concerned about the proposals which EFIA are developing for the creation of an EF International Academy at Cotuit Hall and to ensure the voices of residents who will be affected by the development are properly aired when the proposals are submitted for planning approval next month.

EF is a private international education company based in Switzerland that specialises in language training, educational travel, academic degree programmes and cultural exchange. With 400 schools and over 14 million students EF claims to be the largest English Language school in the world. It employs some 34,000 people across its 16 divisions and works in 50 countries worldwide. As a private company no information is available about its financial affairs. (Source: EF website)

Cotuit Hall was formerly an Oxford Brookes Hall of Residence. A 125-year lease was purchased from Oxford Brookes for the sum of £8 million on 5th May 2011 by REEF Ltd which is a company incorporated in Bermuda (Source: Land Registry)