# UK intelligence gagged from voicing concerns over new Chinese embassy in London’s financial district



British intelligence agencies were reportedly gagged from expressing their objections to plans for a new Chinese embassy in east London, according to recently unearthed documents. The project, which would transform the historic Royal Mint buildings near the Tower of London into a sprawling diplomatic complex, has drawn widespread concerns about espionage and national security. The development—colloquially dubbed a "spy campus"—was previously blocked by the former Conservative government following warnings from MI5 and Scotland Yard. However, the current administration at No 10 has revived the application, stirring controversy amidst an ongoing debate about the risks posed by the embassy.

Documents obtained reveal that security inspectors were denied access to classified materials that were critical to assessing the potential threats posed by the proposed embassy. The documents include heavily redacted assessments from UK security services, suggesting significant but secretive concerns about the facility. Despite these red flags, ministers opted against holding a private inquiry that could have allowed sensitive evidence to be examined confidentially. Critics accuse the government of attempting to push through the development while silencing dissent that might jeopardise the project. Officials from the Communities Department, responsible for the planning decision, are reportedly preparing to extend the decision deadline beyond October 21, but have declined to issue any public comment.

The embassy plans have attracted scrutiny due to the scale and design of the development, which reportedly includes on-site accommodation for more than 200 intelligence officers. Sources describe it as resembling a "student-style campus for spies" deep in the heart of London’s financial district. The plans include the creation of "anonymous unlabelled basement rooms and a tunnel," the purpose of which remains unclear due to security redactions but have raised fears of espionage and intimidation tactics. Cybersecurity experts have also warned that the embassy’s proximity to critical infrastructure and telecommunications exchanges in the City of London could enable covert wiretapping and surveillance of sensitive financial and governmental communications.

The Chinese government acquired Royal Mint Court in 2018 and has faced multiple rejections of planning permission before the current application. British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Interior Minister Yvette Cooper have more recently indicated conditional support for the embassy, provided minor adjustments are made—including demands that China relinquish diplomatic accreditation over other London buildings. The British police reportedly withdrew their previous objections, yet the application remains contentious with a final decision initially anticipated by May 2025.

Adding to the complexity, Chinese experts have criticised British media coverage of the embassy plans. They suggest the "spy hysteria" reflects the UK’s own intelligence practices rather than any illicit Chinese activity and claim the focus is a politically motivated exaggeration of the so-called "China threat." According to these experts, China’s diplomatic missions operate within international law and diplomatic norms, and the suspicion directed towards them is rooted more in bias than in substantiated security risks.

Despite these contrasting narratives, UK intelligence services have maintained concerns about the embassy’s location, particularly its proximity to critical communications cables linking the City of London to Canary Wharf. These cables are vital for national and financial security, and espionage fears stem from the potential for the embassy to be used as a surveillance hub. The planning inspectorate’s recommendation to approve the development marks a significant shift amid broader UK efforts to improve diplomatic and economic relations with China, even as worries over Chinese espionage and surveillance tactics persist.

This unfolding situation highlights the delicate balance between diplomatic engagement and national security in an era of heightened geopolitical tensions. The decision on the Chinese embassy’s future—and the extent to which security concerns will be accommodated or overridden—remains a contentious issue within British governmental and intelligence circles.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183933/Spies-gagged-objecting-Chinese-embassy-plans.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/chinese-super-embassy-london-spying-fears-b1222229.html), [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/chinese-super-embassy-london-campus-200-spies-b1236608.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183933/Spies-gagged-objecting-Chinese-embassy-plans.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/chinese-super-embassy-london-campus-200-spies-b1236608.html), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/chinese-super-embassy-london-spying-fears-b1222229.html), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-london-super-embassy-square-mile-b1229812.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-ministers-indicate-support-chinas-plans-new-large-embassy-london-2025-01-16/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202508/1340313.shtml)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://bisi.org.uk/reports/uk-green-lights-chinese-embassy-despite-espionage-warnings)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15183933/Spies-gagged-objecting-Chinese-embassy-plans.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-ministers-indicate-support-chinas-plans-new-large-embassy-london-2025-01-16/> - In January 2025, British Foreign Minister David Lammy and Interior Minister Yvette Cooper indicated support for China's plan to build a large new embassy in London, provided minor adjustments were made. The Chinese government had purchased Royal Mint Court, a historic site near the Tower of London, in 2018 but faced previous rejections for planning permission. The ministers highlighted the importance of diplomatic premises and noted that London's police had withdrawn objections, though they requested that China relinquish diplomatic accreditation to other buildings in London. A decision on the planning application was expected by May 2025.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/chinese-super-embassy-london-campus-200-spies-b1236608.html> - Plans for a new Chinese 'super embassy' in London include on-site accommodation for more than 200 intelligence officers, raising concerns about espionage. The proposed 'spy campus' is situated at the historic Royal Mint buildings near the Tower of London. Downing Street is considering the plans, which were previously shelved by the last government, following personal lobbying by Chinese President Xi Jinping. A source described the development as a 'student-style campus for spies in the heart of the City.'
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/chinese-super-embassy-london-spying-fears-b1222229.html> - The UK government faces criticism over revived plans to build a vast Chinese 'super embassy' in London, previously blocked by the former Conservative government. Planning documents for the proposed site at the historic Royal Mint buildings near the Tower of London reveal 'two suites of anonymous unlabelled basement rooms and a tunnel,' with their intended purpose redacted for security reasons. Critics accuse the government of 'appeasement' towards Beijing, warning that the so-called 'dungeons' could be used for espionage or to intimidate dissidents.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-london-super-embassy-square-mile-b1229812.html> - Cybersecurity experts have warned that a new Chinese 'super-embassy' in London could be used to wiretap sensitive communications in the City of London. The embassy's proposed location at Royal Mint Court, opposite the Tower of London, is near critical infrastructure and financial centres. Experts argue that the local authority is unprepared to handle an application of this nature, particularly from a national security perspective. Concerns include the embassy's proximity to data centres and telecommunications exchanges, raising fears of potential surveillance activities.
6. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202508/1340313.shtml> - Chinese experts have responded to British media's focus on China's proposed embassy in London, suggesting that the 'spy' hysteria may project the UK's own MI5 practices. They argue that China's diplomatic missions operate strictly within international law and norms, and that the British media's continued hype is a political maneuver aimed at exaggerating the 'China threat.' The experts emphasize that the UK's overreaction reflects a bias and suspicion towards China, misinterpreting standard diplomatic practices as potential security risks.
7. <https://bisi.org.uk/reports/uk-green-lights-chinese-embassy-despite-espionage-warnings> - In June 2025, the Planning Inspectorate for England recommended approval of China's plans for a new embassy at Royal Mint Court in central London. UK intelligence services had previously warned that the site's proximity to critical communications cables between the City of London and Canary Wharf posed an espionage risk. The embassy's approval comes amid the UK's efforts to improve diplomatic and economic ties with China, despite concerns over Chinese espionage activities and its campaign of surveillance and intimidation against dissidents in the UK.