# Metropolitan police warn super-embassy plans could disrupt London protests and traffic



The Metropolitan police have raised ongoing concerns about the impact of China’s proposed “super-embassy” in London on public safety and policing resources, despite having formally dropped their official objection to the plans. Ahead of a crucial decision by UK government ministers, the Met has highlighted that large-scale protests of over 500 people at the embassy site could disrupt traffic and necessitate additional police deployment.

In a letter sent earlier this month to the former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith and the Home Office, Deputy Assistant Commissioner Jon Savell stated that the police force “maintains concerns” about the potential for significant protests outside the embassy, which is proposed to be built at Royal Mint Court, near Tower Bridge. The embassy would cover approximately 20,000 square metres within an 18th-century Grade II-listed complex.

Savell’s letter came after two large protests took place at the site in February and March of this year, which attracted between 3,000 and 5,000 demonstrators—far exceeding the 500-person threshold the police consider safe for assembling in that location. Another demonstration is reportedly being planned for early May. Savell noted that “the road junction adjacent to Royal Mint Court would require additional police resource for larger assemblies to balance the safety of those who wish to assemble/protest and the safe free-flow of traffic, as has been borne out from the two recent large-scale protests.”

The embassy proposal has been a contentious issue locally. Tower Hamlets council initially rejected the plans in December 2022 but China resubmitted them last summer, shortly after the Labour party took power. Ministers have intervened by taking the decision out of the council’s hands, conducting a local inquiry that heard concerns from residents and campaign groups. The final approval decision rests with Angela Rayner, the secretary for housing, communities and local government.

Earlier police assessments in December 2023 indicated that gatherings of over 100 people outside the site could spill into the road, risking public safety and causing wider disruption across London. However, the Metropolitan police withdrew their formal objection in January after revisiting a technical report—which was commissioned and funded by China—that suggested up to 2,000 protesters could be accommodated safely around the embassy site. This withdrawal effectively cleared a key hurdle for the embassy plans.

Despite this, Tower Hamlets council renewed its opposition on the basis of police evidence before the Met’s objection was withdrawn. Following the police’s change of stance, the council stated it could no longer rely on that evidence. At a local inquiry conducted in February, legal representatives for residents accused ministers of attempting to “influence” the Metropolitan police in favour of approving the embassy project.

High-level government officials have publicly backed the embassy proposal. In January, Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper co-signed a letter emphasising “the importance of countries having functioning diplomatic premises in each other’s capitals.” The letter indicated that the Metropolitan police was “content” there was sufficient space for demonstrations, while conceding that “there remain differences of opinion on where protesters would most likely congregate.”

Savell’s correspondence followed a meeting with the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (Ipac), a group critical of the embassy plans and advocate for a tougher UK stance on Beijing. Ipac’s executive director, Luke de Pulford, said: “A huge amount of public money has already been wasted policing large protests at the site. It isn’t safe, and there isn’t space. Large protests will continue until permission for this wrong-headed embassy is denied. It shouldn’t have taken MPs, residents and thousands of campaigners to turn up for the police to admit the obvious, but I’m glad they have.”

Iain Duncan Smith responded to Savell’s letter by indicating he would ask the police to raise their concerns with ministers. He said: “If the national security and interference arguments aren’t enough, then perhaps the fact that Tower Bridge junction will be regularly shut down and officers drafted in from all over London to ensure safety will help the government to do the right thing and refuse this application.”

Labour MP Blair McDougall, a member of the foreign affairs committee, also commented on the police assessment, stating: “The Met’s assessment is clear: there is inadequate space for protest outside the Royal Mint Court, where not only would protester safety be jeopardised but gatherings would require significant policing resources and lead to major road disruption. As long as the right to protest is non-negotiable, the embassy must be in a location where that right can be safely upheld.”

The decision on the embassy’s future remains pending, with the government weighing diplomatic priorities amid ongoing debates over protest rights and public safety in one of London’s most historic and trafficked areas. The Guardian is reporting that the situation continues to attract substantial public interest and political scrutiny ahead of the final ruling expected in the coming weeks.

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