# Police warn new Westminster fence endangers security by restricting sightlines



Concerns have been raised over a newly installed metal security fence at the Palace of Westminster, with police officers reportedly describing the barrier as “dangerous” due to the way it obstructs sightlines to potential attackers. Lord Dobbs, former Conservative Party deputy chairman and chief of staff, brought the issue to the fore during a recent debate in the House of Lords. He highlighted warnings from officers guarding the parliamentary estate who believe the tall fence, which separates Old Palace Yard from Abingdon Street, could compromise security by limiting their ability to monitor approaching threats effectively.

The barrier forms part of heightened security measures following the 2017 Westminster terror attack, which tragically claimed the lives of five people, including unarmed police officer Pc Keith Palmer. Responding to Lord Dobbs, Lords senior deputy speaker Lord Gardiner of Kimble acknowledged the fence’s security rationale but conceded that the new measures come with challenges. He described the installation of both the fence and a costly, malfunctioning front door at one of the main entrances to the House of Lords as regrettable yet necessary. The door, which cost just under £10 million but reportedly does not function properly, has been branded “entirely unacceptable,” illustrating some of the broader issues faced in upgrading security across the historic site.

The broader £billions long restoration project for the Palace of Westminster is facing delays and substantial costs, with Lord Dobbs questioning what lessons can be learned from the current security upgrades. Lord Gardiner emphasised the importance of drawing on the experiences of other nations and major civic projects, citing ongoing dialogues with counterparts in Austria, the Netherlands, Canada, as well as domestic projects like Buckingham Palace and Manchester Town Hall, where extensive renovations have been undertaken.

The security fence controversy is not isolated. Earlier reviews recommended significant improvements to Parliament’s perimeter security after the 2017 attack, including assessments by former senior police officials who warned of vulnerabilities around the estate. These warnings underscored the difficulties in protecting a site that cannot be entirely sealed off given its function and history, with frequent comings and goings by MPs, staff, and the public.

Criticism has also come from outside the immediate security community. Renowned architect Norman Foster described the design and placement of some barriers around Westminster as a “national outrage,” raising concerns about their impact on the aesthetics and accessibility of this internationally significant landmark. Such views highlight the complex balancing act between enhancing security and preserving the heritage and openness of the parliamentary estate.

This debate reverberates in wider discussions about public event security, as seen in examples like the Lambeth Country Show in south London, where a 3-metre-high metal fence was erected to counter terror threats despite some public perception of the measures being "overkill." The broader context suggests heightened vigilance across the UK, with security officials often navigating public safety against practical and visual considerations.

Efforts to improve parliamentary security come amid ongoing scrutiny of weaknesses, such as frequently used but insufficiently secured entrances like the Carriage Gates in New Palace Yard, which have been identified as potential vulnerabilities in past attacks. Observers note that security can only be effective if all potential entry points are properly controlled and monitored, stimulating calls for a comprehensive overhaul of the estate’s protection measures.

In sum, the installation of the new fence at Westminster exemplifies the tensions between security needs, operational effectiveness, heritage preservation, and public accessibility. Officials continue to wrestle with these challenges, aiming to devise improvements that adequately protect the UK’s seat of government without compromising its historic stature or the safety and working conditions of those tasked with its defence.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/police-guarding-parliament-think-new-security-fence-is-dangerous-says-author-3D753L7LPBPSRE3JORHHCMWOQ4/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/police-guarding-parliament-think-new-security-fence-is-dangerous-says-author-3D753L7LPBPSRE3JORHHCMWOQ4/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/police-guarding-parliament-think-new-security-fence-is-dangerous-says-author-3D753L7LPBPSRE3JORHHCMWOQ4/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/police-guarding-parliament-think-new-security-fence-is-dangerous-says-author-3D753L7LPBPSRE3JORHHCMWOQ4/), [[2]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/26/secret-report-issues-stark-warnings-parliament-security-weaknesses/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/norman-foster-westminster-security-barriers-are-a-national-outrage), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/police-guarding-parliament-think-new-security-fence-is-dangerous-says-author-3D753L7LPBPSRE3JORHHCMWOQ4/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-44893375)
* Paragraph 7 – [[6]](https://www.securityinformed.com/insights/westminster-bridge-vehicle-attack-security-questions-london-sb.22679.html), [[7]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/23/parliament-security-reviewed-after-attack-michael-fallon)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/police-guarding-parliament-think-new-security-fence-is-dangerous-says-author-3D753L7LPBPSRE3JORHHCMWOQ4/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/26/secret-report-issues-stark-warnings-parliament-security-weaknesses/> - An official review into Parliament's security after the Westminster terror attack has recommended a series of major changes. Sir Jon Murphy, a former chief constable of Merseyside police, was tasked with assessing perimeter security following the March attack. He briefed the Speaker’s Security Committee about his key recommendations behind closed doors on July 3, with no hard copies allowed to leave the room. Figures familiar with the meeting said it lasted more than an hour and included a series of 'stark' warnings. Three sources have outlined the key findings to the Telegraph.
3. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/norman-foster-westminster-security-barriers-are-a-national-outrage> - Norman Foster has criticised the design of security barriers outside the Palace of Westminster, describing them as a 'national outrage'. During his keynote speech at the British Council for Offices (BCO) conference, Foster expressed his disapproval of the barriers' design, highlighting concerns about their impact on the historic site's aesthetics and accessibility. The barriers were implemented as part of enhanced security measures following previous incidents, but their design and placement have sparked debate among architects and the public.
4. <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/lord/lord-dobbs/debate/2019-02-05/lords/lords-chamber/westminster-security> - In a debate on Westminster security, Lord Dobbs emphasised the collective responsibility to assist security staff, noting that members of the House of Lords should ensure their ID passes are visible to aid in protection efforts. He highlighted the importance of cooperation between parliamentarians and security personnel to maintain safety within the parliamentary estate. The discussion underscored the need for vigilance and collaboration to address potential security threats effectively.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-44893375> - A 3m-high metal fence will surround a free community festival in south London as part of terror safety measures. Organisers of the Lambeth Country Show in Brockwell Park said police advice and the current national terror threat contributed to the decision. There will also be a first-time ban on alcohol brought into the site and more stringent security checks. The fence, dubbed by some as the 'Great Wall of Brockwell', has been described as 'overkill'.
6. <https://www.securityinformed.com/insights/westminster-bridge-vehicle-attack-security-questions-london-sb.22679.html> - The attack on Parliament in London is another reminder that a facility's security is only as strong as its weakest point. In this case, it was a frequently used gate in New Palace Yard that was left unlocked. Known as Carriage Gates, the entrance is generally monitored by police officers. Could the weakness have led to the attack? Could the attack have been prevented (or minimized) if the gate had been bolted shut? Planned 'Complete Security Overhaul' reports of a planned 'complete security overhaul' in the wake of the London attack make sense.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/23/parliament-security-reviewed-after-attack-michael-fallon> - The Metropolitan police and parliamentary authorities are examining security arrangements at Westminster after Wednesday’s terror attack. Announcing the review, the defence secretary, Michael Fallon, said it was extremely difficult to prevent 'lone wolf' attacks involving just a car and knife. He also said it was important to look again at any potential weak spots on the parliamentary estate. 'Parliament cannot be hermetically sealed. People are coming and going all the time,' he said on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme, pointing out that MPs had been called at that time for a vote in the chamber so people were coming and going through the main gates in cars or on foot.