# UK delays decision on Chinese ‘super embassy’ amid security fears and political pressure



The UK Government has postponed its decision on whether to grant China permission to build a new “super embassy” near the Tower of London, extending the deadline for Housing and Planning Secretary Steve Reed to December 10. This delay follows heightened concerns over national security and economic resilience, underscored by intense political pressure and public opposition.

A parliamentary committee has strongly urged Mr Reed to block the plans, warning that the embassy’s proposed location poses significant risks. The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) highlighted that the site’s proximity to critical infrastructure—fibre-optic cables, data centres, and telecoms exchanges serving Canary Wharf and the City—could expose the UK to eavesdropping in peacetime and sabotage during crises. Committee chairman Matt Western MP noted reports of expansive basement rooms and tunnels, raising fears that the embassy could facilitate an extensive hub for Beijing’s intelligence-gathering and intimidation efforts across Europe. He urged the government to prioritise long-term national security considerations, warning of severe consequences should relations with China deteriorate further.

The scrutiny of the embassy application comes amid ongoing political fallout from the collapse of a high-profile Chinese spying case in the UK. The case involved two British men accused of passing sensitive information to Beijing, but it was dropped amid controversy, with officials blaming one another for failing to appropriately classify the national security threat posed by China. MI5 Director-General Ken McCallum has publicly underscored that China represents a persistent and serious threat to the UK, highlighting activities such as cyber espionage, intellectual property theft, and efforts to infiltrate political institutions. He recently cautioned MPs against espionage tactics deployed by China and other foreign actors, emphasizing the corrosive impact of such interference on democratic sovereignty.

The embassy plans had initially been rejected by Tower Hamlets Council in 2022. Beijing did not appeal this decision but resubmitted its application shortly after Sir Keir Starmer’s Labour Party victory last year, presumably anticipating a more favourable reception. The Government then called in the planning application, elevating the decision to ministerial level.

Housing Minister Steve Reed has indicated the Government awaits full, unredacted plans from China before making a final ruling, suggesting that initial submissions did not satisfy transparency requirements. The government had previously extended the decision deadline from August to October before this further delay to December.

Opposition voices remain highly critical. Shadow Home Secretary Chris Philp accused the Government of being paralysed by fear—"too scared of the public” to approve the embassy yet “too scared of the Chinese” to reject it outright. This sentiment reflects wider geopolitical anxieties, as US lawmakers on the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party have also voiced concerns that the embassy’s location could jeopardise sensitive London financial infrastructure through potential surveillance and interference.

Cybersecurity experts and local campaigners have echoed these warnings, suggesting the embassy could enable sophisticated wiring and wiretapping of central London. Residents and human rights activists have raised alarm about the scale of the project on a five-acre site at Royal Mint Court, opposite the Tower of London, fearing it would become a formidable base for Chinese intelligence activities in Europe.

In sum, the Government faces the complex task of balancing diplomatic relations, national security, and public concerns as it weighs the long-term implications of permitting the largest Chinese embassy in Europe. The extended deadline reflects the sensitivity and gravity of the decision, which will be a critical test of the UK’s approach to managing security risks amid growing geopolitical tensions with Beijing.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-delays-chinese-embassy-ruling-second-time-2025-10-16/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/china-embassy-london-security-risk-tower-hamlets-b1212362.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/44b81def2e1e12c88cdd0abd78965990), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-mi5-warns-politicians-they-are-targets-russia-chinese-spying-2025-10-13/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-expects-have-full-sight-china-embassy-plan-before-decision-minister-says-2025-10-14/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/china-embassy-london-security-risk-tower-hamlets-b1212362.html)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-london-super-embassy-square-mile-b1229812.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/), [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-delays-chinese-embassy-ruling-second-time-2025-10-16/), [[6]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/china-embassy-london-security-risk-tower-hamlets-b1212362.html), [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-london-super-embassy-square-mile-b1229812.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/china-super-embassy-decision-put-back-to-december-HV6EL5FKYJL5LGQRCE35BQRL2M/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-delays-chinese-embassy-ruling-second-time-2025-10-16/> - The UK government has postponed its decision on China's proposal to build the largest embassy in Europe near the Tower of London. The new deadline is December 10, 2025, following growing political pressure over national security concerns, especially after the collapse of a trial involving two British men accused of spying for Beijing. The proposed embassy has faced strong opposition from local residents, lawmakers, and Hong Kong pro-democracy activists, amid fears it could be used for espionage activities.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/44b81def2e1e12c88cdd0abd78965990> - In a rare public address, MI5 Director-General Ken McCallum declared that China represents a consistent and serious threat to the United Kingdom’s national security, citing cyberespionage, intellectual property theft, and attempts to infiltrate UK politics. This statement follows the collapse of a high-profile spy case involving two men accused of passing sensitive information to Beijing. The case's dismissal sparked political controversy, with officials blaming each other for the prosecution’s failure due to reluctance in classifying China as a national security threat under oath.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-expects-have-full-sight-china-embassy-plan-before-decision-minister-says-2025-10-14/> - The UK government expects to receive full and unredacted plans for China’s proposed new embassy in London before making a final approval decision, according to Housing Minister Steve Reed. The embassy, planned to be the largest in Europe and located near the historic Tower of London, has raised security concerns amid fears it could be used for espionage. The government delayed its original August decision deadline to October 21, citing a lack of detail from Beijing.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uks-mi5-warns-politicians-they-are-targets-russia-chinese-spying-2025-10-13/> - MI5, the UK's domestic intelligence agency, has issued a rare public warning to British Members of Parliament (MPs), cautioning them against espionage efforts by Russia, China, and Iran. The statement highlights these nations' attempts to undermine UK democracy through tactics such as blackmail, phishing, cultivating personal relationships, and political donations. MI5 Director General Ken McCallum emphasized that foreign interference not only threatens national security but also corrodes democratic sovereignty.
6. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/china-embassy-london-security-risk-tower-hamlets-b1212362.html> - US lawmakers warn China’s proposed embassy near Tower of London could ‘risk sensitive infrastructure like London’s financial services’. Senators on the US Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party warned the proposed site in Tower Hamlets risked “interference and surveillance” from Beijing and “risks for sensitive infrastructure like London’s financial services”. The committee, led by Republican John Moolenaar, hinted the plans should be dropped, saying: “We must work to urgently address this issue and work with our allies to protect national security.”
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-london-super-embassy-square-mile-b1229812.html> - Cyber experts have warned the UK Government that a new Chinese ‘super-embassy’ could “wiretap” central London if the project is given a green light. It comes as China has said it wants to redevelop the five acres of land at Royal Mint Court, opposite the Tower of London, into the largest embassy in Europe. But the plan has sparked a huge backlash from local residents, as well as human rights campaigners and several prominent politicians, over national security fears.