# UK intelligence agencies silence objections as plans for Chinese embassy in east London face renewed scrutiny



British intelligence agencies were reportedly ‘gagged’ from raising objections to the planned construction of a new Chinese embassy in east London, according to newly surfaced documents. The proposed development, situated on the site of the historic Royal Mint buildings near the Tower of London, has been described by critics as a potential ‘spy campus’ due to significant security concerns. These documents reveal a troubling lack of transparency, showing that inspectors were denied access to key classified assessments from security services, which have now been heavily redacted. This has fuelled accusations that the government sought to suppress dissenting voices over national security risks in order to push the project forward.

The project was initially blocked by the previous UK government in 2022 after warnings from MI5 and the Metropolitan Police. Nonetheless, the plan was revived by the current administration at No 10, prompting ongoing controversies. A final decision on whether to approve the embassy has been deferred amid continuing tensions related to a collapsed Chinese spy trial, further complicating the policy landscape. Officials within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, responsible for the planning case, are reportedly preparing to extend the decision deadline beyond the current date of October 21. The department declined to comment on the matter. Critics have also accused ministers of refusing to allow a private inquiry that could have incorporated the secret evidence.

Local government bodies have joined the chorus of opposition. In December 2024, Tower Hamlets Council unanimously rejected the plans for the embassy, citing security risks and concerns about the potential for large-scale protests it might attract. This local decision was considered advisory, with the final approval resting with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, expected to make her ruling after a planning inspectorate hearing scheduled for early 2025. The council also raised issues regarding the safety implications and the impact on local heritage sites, reflecting the broad unease within the community.

The saga reflects a longer history of resistance. The Chinese government purchased the Royal Mint Court site in 2018 for £255 million, aiming to establish one of the largest embassies in Europe, spanning over 700,000 square feet. However, persistent opposition from Members of Parliament, local residents, and the Tower Hamlets Council led China to abandon the ‘super embassy’ plan in August 2023. This marked a significant setback after months of diplomatic tension and public debate in the UK, prompting China to seek intervention from the UK government to revive the project. The shadow of international strategic rivalry has heightened concerns, with intelligence and law enforcement officials warning that the embassy could become a hub for espionage activities.

In November 2024, the Metropolitan Police’s counterterrorism unit reiterated its objections, emphasising risks that protests against the embassy could escalate, potentially disrupting traffic and endangering public safety. The decision to block the project, however, remains contentious, with the national government’s stance appearing more accommodating than local authorities and security agencies felt was prudent.

Overall, this dispute over the new Chinese embassy encapsulates broader issues of security, diplomacy, and local governance. The tensions highlight the challenges Britain faces in balancing international relations with safeguarding national security, especially in a city as strategically significant as London. As the final decision hangs in the balance, the spotlight on this development underscores the delicate interplay between transparency, state secrecy, and public interest in matters of foreign diplomatic infrastructure.

### 📌 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)
* 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), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tower-hamlets-chinese-embassy-royal-mint-court-london-council-application-b1199108.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdd6yydmd03o), [[4]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tower-hamlets-chinese-embassy-royal-mint-court-london-council-application-b1199108.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-embassy-royal-mint-tower-bridge-rejected-tower-hamlets-council-b1044358.html), [[5]](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/08/10/beijing-gives-up-plan-chinese-super-embassy-tower-bridge/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/11/chinas-new-london-embassy-on-hold-pending-westminster-intervention)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/china-embassy-tower-hamlets-royal-mint-court-plans-b1196155.html)

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## 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.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cdd6yydmd03o> - In December 2024, Tower Hamlets Council unanimously rejected plans for a new Chinese embassy at Royal Mint Court, near the Tower of London. Councillors cited potential security risks due to large protests the embassy could attract. The council's decision was advisory, with the final approval resting with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, who was expected to decide after a planning inspectorate hearing in the new year.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/china-embassy-royal-mint-tower-bridge-rejected-tower-hamlets-council-b1044358.html> - In December 2022, Tower Hamlets Council rejected a planning application for a new Chinese embassy at Royal Mint Court, citing concerns over safety, security, and potential impacts on local heritage sites. The Chinese government had purchased the site in 2018 for £255 million, aiming to create one of the largest embassies in Europe. The council's decision was advisory, with the final approval resting with the Secretary of State.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tower-hamlets-chinese-embassy-royal-mint-court-london-council-application-b1199108.html> - In December 2024, Tower Hamlets Council unanimously rejected plans for a new Chinese embassy at Royal Mint Court, near the Tower of London. Councillors cited potential security risks due to large protests the embassy could attract. The council's decision was advisory, with the final approval resting with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, who was expected to decide after a planning inspectorate hearing in the new year.
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/08/10/beijing-gives-up-plan-chinese-super-embassy-tower-bridge/> - In August 2023, China abandoned plans to build a 'super embassy' at Royal Mint Court after opposition from MPs, residents, and the local council. The proposed 700,000 sq ft embassy would have been Europe's largest. Despite initial plans, China did not appeal the council's decision, signalling the end of the project.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/11/chinas-new-london-embassy-on-hold-pending-westminster-intervention> - In August 2023, China temporarily shelved plans to build a new embassy in London after the local council rejected the proposal. The Chinese government sought intervention from the UK government to support the project, highlighting the diplomatic tensions surrounding the embassy's construction.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/china-embassy-tower-hamlets-royal-mint-court-plans-b1196155.html> - In November 2024, police objected to China's plans for a new 'super embassy' in east London, citing concerns over potential protests and security risks. The Metropolitan Police's counterterrorism unit raised fears that demonstrations could spill into the road, affecting local traffic and safety.