

Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley MP
Home Affairs Select Committee
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

Sir Mark Rowley QPM
Commissioner

New Scotland Yard
Victoria Embankment
London
SW1A 2JL

3 July 2025



Proposed new Embassy of the People's Republic of China

I am writing in response to your letter of 3rd June requesting further information in relation to protest activity and security matters regarding the proposed new Chinese Embassy development on the site of the former Royal Mint in Tower Hamlets.

Before I respond to the specific questions you raise in your letter, it is important to be clear on the role of the Metropolitan Police Service in any planning application process. Local Authorities, in this case Tower Hamlets Council, as the Local Planning Authority have the ability to consult the relevant police service to provide specialist advice on designing out crime and enhancing community safety in new developments. The Met frequently responds to such requests and on average provides over 2,000 Police Safety and Security Statements (PSSS) and Safer Design awards covering 5,000 buildings, equating to over 100,000 residential units and 2.5m sqm of commercial property in London each year.

Policing has no formal powers in the Town Planning process but can submit representations. Ultimately, decisions on the suitability of a planning application, and the extent to which any input from the Met should be materially considered, is normally, a matter for local authority, the Planning Inspectorate in the case of appeals, or the relevant Secretary of State.

The planning application in this case, was initially assessed by Tower Hamlets Council under their powers as the Local Planning Authority and was then called in by the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) leading to the Public Inquiry and Planning Inspectorate's report. The final decision for planning permission currently rests with the Secretary of State.

In line with our role, the Met takes an evidence-based approach to making representations into this process. These representations can change as more information becomes available, as can occur during planning applications.

In response to the questions set out in your letter, I have grouped our response under four themes:

1. Has the Met reassessed large-scale protests at the site in the light of recent protests?

The Chinese Embassy in the UK submitted the most recent planning application in July 2024 to Tower Hamlets as the Local Planning Authority. Following this, the Met was consulted by the Council for our views. In our initial representations, we raised concerns about the proposed development. The Met was then invited to give oral representations for the Planning Committee in December 2024.

In January 2025, following the receipt of a 'Pedestrian Comfort Assessment', which was previously not disclosed to the Met, we reviewed our previous representations. This included a more detailed view of Met historical protest data and a site visit to carry out a specialist assessment to determine the number of people who could assemble for the purposes of protest at the front of the site.

The Met has also kept our assessment under continuous review. As the Committee will know there have been new protests which took place on 8th February 2025 and 15th March 2025 (estimated to be c3,000 to 5,000 protestors) and the smaller assembly of circa 500 on 14th June 2025. Our experience of these protests is in line with the representations the Met has made.

2. Did the assessment consider historical data from years prior to 2023?

The Met's assessment considered a range of inputs, this included but is not limited to:

- Historic protest numbers in both size and location across London including pre-2023 data on the scale of protest outside the current Chinese Embassy and elsewhere in London.
- The legislation set by Parliament in relation to protest including the European Convention on Human Rights to observe the rights of freedom of assembly and freedom of expression of protestors.
- The Public Order Act 2023, 1986 (and subsequent amendments).
- The relevant statutory responsibilities of the Met and Transport for London.
- The submitted Pedestrian Comfort Assessment.

As the Committee are aware protests regularly take place across London, including at other Embassies and High Commissions. The Committee will have seen high profile protests at the US Embassy and the High Commissions of India and Pakistan in recent weeks and months. Global events have an impact on London and protests is often directed towards a specific country or state and their representation in the UK in the form of an Embassy can be a focal point for that. This is nothing new and the Met is experienced in policing protests of varying size and scale with policing plans that respond to the dynamics of each event.

The legislation set by Parliament in relation to protest sets out a complex framework which policing must operate in. As the Committee know we have obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights to observe the rights of freedom of assembly and of freedom of expression of protestors. The law set by Parliament requires us to strike a balance between the rights of those participating in protest and the rights and interests of others who may be affected. Parliament has established the legal framework that balances the right to assembly and expression with the right of the public to go about their daily lives, and it is the role of the police to apply and uphold this balance in practice.

Under this framework protest organisers choose the location of any protest or assembly. The law also requires protest organisers to notify the Met and the Local Authority of a procession, but this notification requirement does not extend to a static assembly. The Public Order Act 1986 (and subsequent amendments) does provide policing with a range of powers which we have to consider on an event-by-event basis. Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 allows for police to impose conditions on any static assembly or protest when it is considered necessary following an assessment of the likelihood of, for example, serious disruption to communities or serious public disorder and each event will be considered based on the information known.

Following our January 2025 review of our position explained above, the Met concluded that an assembly or protest in the region of 500 persons could be accommodated on the paved area in front of the site with proportionate police resource in attendance. Protests which attracted more than this were likely to have an impact on the road network. However, disruption to the road network is a feature of protest across London (as seen regularly on Whitehall), and can be managed by local authorities, Transport for London and the Met. The current Chinese Embassy allows c250 people on pavement area, numbers above which would impact on the road. However a feature of the current location is that there is additional space in suspended parking bays which allow for more space before there is an impact on the wider road network.

Our assessment is that the road junction layout adjacent to Royal Mint Court will therefore require additional police resource for larger assemblies to deliver our core policing responsibilities. While the planning authority may want to consider the impact of protest on the road network, these considerations should be raised in the process by Transport for London and local authorities along with any mitigations they may have to take e.g. road closures and diversions.

In coming to an assessment on the estimated size of protest possible outside of the site we also considered historical data (pre-2023) on the scale of protest outside of the current Chinese Embassy. This review showed

there is a history of protest relating to China, across several different sites in London of varying numbers; some exceeding the assessed level that can be held on the paved areas to the front of the proposed Embassy site.

This updated position, and the considerations set out above were presented by a senior Met officer when they attended the Planning Inspectors Inquiry session on the 13th February 2025.

As mentioned above, the Committee will be aware that two large protests took place on 8th February 2025 and 15th March 2025 where we estimate attendances were in the region of 3,000 to 5,000 attendees. These larger gatherings were to protest the proposed development of the site to become the Chinese Embassy – hence the location being at Royal Mint Court. The most recent protest was on the 14th June which had circa 500 protestors. Conditions on the route procession were put in place and the event was managed. In contrast, a much smaller assembly of circa 200 attendees took place outside the current embassy on 4th June 2025 to mark the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests.

The continuing unpredictability of future events that may trigger assembly/protest, and the numbers that may attend, is a constant consideration for any event across London and for our management of the police response and numbers of resources required. We will, of course, continue to police all protests in a proportionate way and uphold the law, liaising with other responsible bodies on specific matters like oversight of the highway, access to public transport or management of the wider public realm.

3. Representations the MPS has made to Government.

The planning process lays out the formal route for making representations on planning applications. The Met has submitted our representations via these routes, and our submissions are in the public domain – the Government will be aware of our position from this process – we have made no direct representations.

The Met's representations will, we expect, also have been reflected in the Planning Inspector's report to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

4. Assurances from Home Office and other partners on support if protests become significant.

Every year the Met puts in place centrally managed policing plans for over 3,000 events, including large protests and other major events. These vary in size and nature from small gatherings up to events in excess of 100,000 attendees. These events are in addition to thousands of other smaller events across London every year which are managed by local policing teams.

We make deployment decisions based on where it is reasonably foreseeable that there is a risk to public order. This is the case for events outside the current Embassy and would be the case if the proposed planning application was granted and the location of the Embassy moved.

The Met has well established partnerships in place for the policing of protest and managing the impact to communities, visitors and businesses. These include the British Transport Police, City of London Police, Local Authorities, TfL and other emergency services. They are engaged at an operational level on a very regular basis, including in the last three protests at Royal Mint Court.

In the event of significant and sustained large protests outside the proposed new Chinese Embassy, or the current location, the Met would consider making a special grant application to the Home Office as the Met has done since the protests related to the conflict in Gaza and Israel since the 7th October 2023. This is a tried and tested mechanism for supporting police services where demand is exceptional.

The Committee will also be aware that the Met as the capital city police service bears the pressure of most national policing activity, as well as major events such as state occasions, large-scale sporting events, and significant protest activity. The National and International and Capital City (NICC) grant - NICC grant is in principle to fund our policing this activity. However, there is a significant shortfall between the funding provided via the NICC, and the assessment of the costs associated with this activity. The Home Office's independent expert review in 2015 identified a £159m annual gap in funding (at 2015 prices), but this was not acted upon. We have assessed, taking into account inflation to date, that the gap is still over £180m. For 25/26 the Home

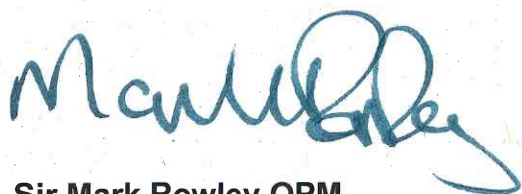
Office have provided a welcome uplift to the NICC for the first time since 19/20, but there is still a significant shortfall.

5. Security Concerns in relation to proposed Chinese Embassy

National security considerations and assessments are the primary responsibility of MI5, who will work with Counter Terrorism Policing as required.

The Committee will also be aware that People's Republic of China already has several premises in London, as well as a designated embassy. We understand that the proposal of the Chinese government is to move one or more of the functions operating from existing premises into the proposed new site.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mark Rowley', is written over the typed name.

Sir Mark Rowley QPM

Commissioner