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UK Delays Decision on China's London Mega-Embassy

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The UK government has postponed its decision on a contentious Chinese embassy project at Royal Mint Court, London, extending the deadline from 9 September to 21 October. Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Secretary Angela Rayner said more time was needed to assess concerns about heavily redacted plans for the proposed 20,000 sqm embassy complex.

The development, located in East London near the Tower of London, has faced significant opposition from residents and campaign groups citing human rights concerns related to

China's policies in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Demonstrations have been held outside the site in recent months.

Controversy has centred on two key buildings, the Cultural Exchange Building and Embassy House, shown as greyed out in the submitted plans. Rayner requested full clarification on these redactions, asking the project's planning consultancy to "identify precisely and comprehensively" the omitted sections. The consultancy replied that further details were "neither necessary nor appropriate," insisting that the existing unredacted plans sufficiently outlined the main uses.

Luke de Pulford, executive director of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, said the explanations provided were "far from satisfactory," warning that such ambiguity could create security risks and restrict public access to nearby historic sites, including abbey ruins that fall within the planned embassy grounds.

The Chinese embassy in the UK has urged the government to approve the project without further delay, stating that the design met diplomatic protocols and that both countries intended to develop new embassies in each other's capitals. A spokesperson said it was "an international obligation of the host country to facilitate diplomatic premises."

China purchased the Royal Mint Court site in 2018 for approximately £255 million. In 2022, Tower Hamlets Council rejected the initial planning application over security concerns, but the decision was later taken over by the central government after Labour came to power last summer.

The project has become a sensitive issue in UK–China relations. President Xi Jinping reportedly discussed it with Prime Minister Keir Starmer during their first call in August last year. Meanwhile, reports have suggested that plans to rebuild the British embassy in Beijing remain on hold until this matter is resolved.

The revised decision date of 21 October will determine whether construction can proceed, with security agencies, local campaigners, and diplomatic representatives all closely watching the outcome.