

Security, crime and disorder assessment

Issues arising from the proposal to build the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre (UKHM&LC) within Victoria Tower Gardens (VTG), Westminster, SW1P 3J

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1. Executive summary

1.1 The Government proposal is to site the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre (hereafter UKHM&LC) at Victoria Tower Gardens (hereafter VTG).

1.2 The adjacent Parliamentary estate is protected by armed police patrols and significant security measures; VTG is not and will not be. This makes VTG a softer target for extremists than the Parliamentary estate or the Security Service building to the immediate South of VTG. This attractiveness to extremists is exacerbated by the world's media having a front row seat through the TV facilities at 4 Millbank.

1.3 Both Parliament and the Security Service buildings are iconic, high value targets for Jihadist sympathisers. Demonstrating the capability to mount an attack between these two sites would provide them with a publicity coup.

1.4 Although UKHM&LC will not be a place of worship, it would be seen as a high value target because of its clear links to the Jewish faith.

1.5 A suicide vehicle borne improvised explosive device or marauding close quarters attack could easily be mounted on this location.

1.6 Measures to mitigate attacks are realistically restricted to strengthening the outer perimeters and erecting barrier style defences at the roadside. Given the lack of footpath space, multiplied by the significant increase in anticipated footfall, this proposal creates a 'perfect storm' of vulnerabilities.

1.7 The Government assertion that the proposal would not substantially disrupt normal users of the park is untenable.

1.8 The security aspects of the proposed UKHM&LC would be much easier to manage at the Imperial War Museum, which is less than a mile from VTG.

2. Scope Of This Report

2.1 This report sets out the security implications for the proposal to site UKHM&LC at VTG contained within the documents produced in December 2018 on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

2.2 The current proposal is that both the National Holocaust Memorial and the associated Learning Centre should be co-located within the southern end of VTG.

2.3 It lies south of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey, therefore requiring additional considerations, and is within the Smith Square conservation area.

3. Threat Assessment

3.1 The proposal to site UKHM&LC in such close proximity to Parliament, with the television news cameras of the BBC, Sky and ITV yards away at 4 Millbank, would make it a high value target for those individuals wishing to promote their cause on the world's stage.

3.2 In determining the level of threat to the site of the UKHM&LC it is apparent that there are two broad sources of threat.

3.3 The principal source of threat comes from Jihadi inspired terrorists. This is based on evidence of an increase in Islamist inspired attacks against Jewish targets across Europe over the past ten years.

3.4 There is recent precedent for Jihadist inspired attacks on a Jewish related museum. On 24th May 2014, Mehdi Nemmouche killed four people at a Jewish Museum in Belgium, clearly demonstrating that a clear link to the Jewish community is sufficient justification for a Jihadist attack on what was considered a soft target by comparison to others.

3.5 The Belgium attack was one of four significant terrorist attacks against Jewish targets between 2012 and 2019¹ that resulted in fatalities. The attackers were inspired by extremist ideologies or current tensions in the Israeli- Palestinian political situation.

3.6 Beyond these fatal attacks, there have been innumerable other incidents of criminal activity targeted Jewish interests, creating a significant level of fear and anxiety. This proposal risks appearing to single out the Jewish community for preferential treatment in a high-profile location.

3.7 Even though UKHM&LC is not explicitly a faith-based project the lack of sophistication amongst many of those prepared to attack Jewish interests would result in them linking this project to the Jewish faith and interests. The significant public

¹ <https://ctc.usma.edu/terrorist-attacks-jewish-targets-west-2012-2019-atlantic-divide-european-american-attackers/>

funding for this project (£75m) could be used as an excuse by those already harbouring grievances against Jewish people.

3.8 The second potential source of threat arises from extreme political ideologies. This is principally from extreme right-wing movements, but also from elements of the extreme left.

3.9 The UK has been among the countries experiencing a rise in extreme right-wing groups and individuals, who share white supremacist or Neo-Nazi ideologies.

3.10 There are indications that the extreme right is on the rise across the UK and Europe, and with it the threat to Jews and Jewish interests. For superficially political groups like the English Defence League as well as more sinister groups, a site such as UKHM&LC would be a focal point for direct action, under the noses of the Parliamentarians against whom they also hold grievances. Fuelled by social media, these groups would regard UKHM&LC as a symbolic rallying point, next to the gaze of broadcast media cameras.

3.11 UKHM&LC would offer such individuals or groups the opportunity to combine an attack against a target perceived as Jewish along with Parliament.

4 Physical factors and vulnerabilities

4.1 The proposed design of UKHM&LC reflects the building's purpose in making it an accessible space for the public to visit. Estimates suggest 1 million additional visitors to VTG going to view the memorial or to visit the Learning Centre. Peak daily footfall is estimated at 10,000, some to simply visit the Memorial, others to visit both sites.

4.2 At present, although VTG is located alongside the Parliamentary estate, it is an open and easily accessible space, protected by cast iron railings and gates (approximately 5 feet tall) when the park is closed to the public at night. To the East lies the river Thames and, though a much more difficult prospect for extremists, another potential point of vulnerability for UKHM&LC if located within VTG.

4.3 The roadside boundary of VTG is Millbank (A3212), becoming Abingdon Street as it progresses North. The pavements are relatively narrow and currently without railings to separate pedestrians and traffic. This route would have been part of a cycle superhighway but was judged to be too narrow, given the volume of traffic. However, it joins two other cycle superhighways in a direct route across Westminster and so is heavily used by cyclists. The A3121 is a busy road and bus route through central London in its own right, as well as a direct emergency response route to Parliament.

4.4 There is no indication of a location where coachloads of tourists and students visiting the Learning Centre would be able to safely disembark.

4.5 The assumption that a large number of the visitors will enter VTG through entrance 1 will necessitate a significant restructuring of the anti-terrorist vehicle barriers and pavement restrictions at the Southern end of the Parliamentary Estate, as existing pavements are already narrowed and busy. Accessibility by disabled visitors will be

extremely difficult via this route. Managing groups of schoolchildren walking along the busy road would also require significant safety arrangements.

4.6 These factors combine to make the UKHM&LC vulnerable to vehicular attacks without the addition of significant improvements in the physical security of the boundaries, either by concrete blocks or barriers or other methods. There is a reference to bollards within the current proposal, but no further details are set out. It would further restrict the highway and footpaths to create such barriers. Erecting them integrally to the current fencing could cause significant damage to the trees and would require detailed survey and considerations.

4.7 A terrorist intent on causing serious harm could simply drive a vehicle at speed through the boundary fencing, between gaps in the trees, going straight into the park. With only bollards to navigate around or defeat through brute force, this leaves the area vulnerable. Once within the park area, the flat and open layout of the grass and in particular the children's playground, coupled with a hard-standing area within the visitor centre, lends itself to an explosion or close quarter attack generating significant casualties.

4.8 Such a vehicle borne attack could be achieved by approaching its target from the South. Either by crossing Lambeth Bridge, coming down Horseferry Road or straight along Millbank from Vauxhall Bridge. The roundabout on the Western side of Lambeth Bridge provides an opportunity to accelerate into VTG by breaching the fence along the Millbank side and delivering an IED or attacker directly into the children playground or paved courtyard area between the entry pavilion and the learning centre itself. This approach was employed a short distance away by Khalid Masood on 22nd March 2017.

4.9 A person borne IED would be an equally attractive option for a terrorist intent on attacking such a visible Jewish-related target, whether suicide or not. Without sophisticated security screening similar to that employed within the Parliamentary Estate, it would be easy for a person to carry such a concealed device into the memorial or learning centre and deploy it with devastating consequences.

4.10 The proposed 20-second security checks at the point of entry cannot hope to act as a deterrent to any such extremist concealing a weapon, nor give security staff a chance to identify and engage with a person presenting an overt threat.

4.11 The open nature of VTG, coupled with its proximity to the road make UKHM&LC very vulnerable to objects being thrown. This could be a brick, piece of wood, a homemade bomb or grenade. Such a missile would reach anywhere in the UKHM&LC courtyard and could also be made to roll down the steps from the courtyard into the Learning Centre.

4.12 Severe injuries could be caused by an extremist simply dropping a device onto the heads of visitors as they enter the learning centre from the mound above.

4.13 Without security checks on all persons entering any part of the park these vulnerabilities cannot be mitigated. However, objects could also be thrown into UKHM&LC from the footpath of the A3212 with relative ease.

4.14 By creating a target overtly connected to the Jewish faith alongside Lambeth Bridge also raises questions about the levels of protective security for pedestrians on the Western end of that bridge (current barriers end before VTG gate 5) and the other vehicle approach routes to VTG, given that the proposal is away from the measures implemented to protect pedestrians shortly after Masood's attack. These factors must be subject of a detailed survey and report by a Counter Terrorism Security Coordinator (CT Sec Co), which would draw all threats and risks together into a coherent and comprehensive assessment and plan.

4.15 With regard to the VTG boundary itself, implementing the necessary protective measures would have a severe impact on the mature trees and shrubs that line the Western boundary of the park. Such vehicle security measures are currently being installed along Piccadilly, on the North Western side of Green Park. These barriers are being installed to protect tourists and visitors to Green Park, which are less attractive to an extremist as a target other than numbers of pedestrians.

4.16 Security patrols would be required within VTG to prevent criminality day and night. The Holocaust Memorial itself would be a magnet for low-level criminality of the kind seen recently directed toward other London Monuments such as the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park. Vigilance would be required to ensure that the memorial was protected from graffiti and damage that will further restrict the use of VTG by the public for peaceful purposes.

4.17 It is likely that the organisation tasked with operating UKHM&LC will become permanently responsible for managing the security within the UKHM&LC site itself, within the confines of VTG itself and the interfaces with Police at the VTG park entrances. This will require significant on going investment and resources to manage.

4.18 Given the volatile nature of the Israeli-Palestinian political environment and relationship, a threat could arise in a moment as a consequence of external events that would be almost impossible to identify or mitigate and extremely difficult to brief staff about in advance.

4.19 If VTG is approved as the location for the UKHM&LC, a lower level of disruption could easily be caused by persons willing to use bomb hoaxes to disrupt the learning centre. Any such hoaxes would necessitate evacuations and searches of the building and adjacent park areas and could impact government buildings nearby.

4.20 Additionally, there is no detail about how queues could be managed within or outside the perimeter of VTG. The government proposal references pre-booked groups arriving in half hour time slots. This is the methodology applied at Buckingham Palace to manage pre-booked visitors. The large queues outside Buckingham Palace demonstrate the flaws in the assumption that queues at UKHM&LC will not provide a further soft target for extremists.

4.21 During the building and development phase, it is likely that large areas of VTG will need to be closed for the public. Large excavation equipment and building materials will be accessible at the site, which would need to be protected.

4.22 In the event of further disruptions and protests at Parliament that we have witnessed recently, a building site in VTG would represent an instant armoury for those who are prepared to use violence to make their protest. The only remedy is to severely restrict public access, or to close the park in its entirety whilst construction is taking place.

4.23 Security incidents at UKHM&LC might lead to the permanent introduction of security and bag searches at all entrances to the park and/or the complete closure of some of the current entrances to the park.

5. Assessing the risks

5.1 Given that the two biggest threats to a UKHM&LC sited within VTG are of terrorist attacks and social protest, the risk of terrorism is relatively low by comparison with the risks of protest activity. That said however, one could not have predicted the events of 22nd March 2017 and a similar risk assessment conducted prior to that date would arguably have drawn a similar conclusion and failed to properly identify the likelihood of that type of attack occurring.

5.2 A project to site UKHM&LC at VTG, with overt links to issues that speak directly to extremist narratives leaves UKHM&LC vulnerable to violent attack. For those reasons I assess the risk of such an attack as falling within the 'moderate' band of risk.

5.3 This proposed site would be a magnet to a number of protest ideologies. Events in the Middle East could readily make UKHM&LC a focal point for each end of the political spectrum.

5.4 Environmental activists have recently demonstrated a willingness to take direct, non-violent action in support of their cause. This lengthy underground construction project may inflame those activists during the lengthy construction phase, owing to the potential damage caused and loss of the public space.

5.5 VTG would need to remain completely secured during this period to prevent the 'occupation' of trees 'at risk' by environmental or climate change activists, leading to the gardens having to be closed to the public as a preventative measure.

5.6 VTG could also be used by such groups as Extinction Rebellion as a marshalling area as well as a focal point for protest.

5.7 Organised protest close to or within VTG during the building and development phase, would significantly disrupt the public's ability to enjoy the peaceful surrounding VTG provides today as access to materials to use as missiles would need to be quickly prevented by the police. The addition of substantial defences against vehicle borne attacks along the boundary would cause damage and disturbance to the mature trees and shrubs there, altering London's landscape permanently.

5.8 The security implications around public access to VTG itself will mean that anyone entering VTG will need to be screened even if the site of the UKHM&LC within VTG is target hardened significantly.

5.9 There is no information on the proposals to manage visitors within VTG in the winter months, when the public access closes at dusk. The proposal is for UKHM&LC to operate into the early evening. It is not clear how VTG will be secured and cleared at night.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The UK threat level remains at 'Severe' meaning that an attack is highly likely. Given that both Al Qaeda and ISIL have exhorted their followers to attack Jewish targets, this means that a site of this nature is a potential target.

6.2 It is the very nature of the extremist to want to gain as much publicity as possible for their cause. Locating UKHM&LC in VTG would be a gift to them.

6.3 Were UKHM&LC to be sited with the existing Holocaust exhibits at the Imperial War Museum this risk would be reduced. It is less than a mile away from VTG, with Holocaust Galleries currently in place. It has the necessary infrastructure to support significant visitor numbers in a secure environment.

6.4 The security implications of this proposal would permanently and completely change the use of this public space.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adrian Tudway'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

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(Prepared for the purpose of media briefings)