



City of Westminster

Cabinet Member Report

Decision Maker:	Cabinet Member for Sports, Culture and Community
Date:	30 January 2019
Classification:	For general release
Title:	Commemorative Green Plaque to mark the site of the formation of GCHQ, the UK's intelligence, security and cyber agency at Watergate House, 13-15 York Buildings, Adelphi, London, WC2N 6JU
Wards Affected:	St James's
Key Decision:	No
Financial Summary:	The Green Plaque Scheme is funded by sponsorship. Sponsorship has been secured for this plaque
Report of:	Richie Gibson, Head of City Events, Promotions and Filming

1. Executive summary

Watergate House was the first home of GCHQ, one of Britain's three intelligence agencies. It was established on 1st November 1919 as the Government Code and Cypher School (GC&CS), and was formed from a merger of the Admiralty's 'Room 40' and the War Office's 'MI1(b)', signals intelligence units created at the start of the First World War to decode secret communications.

2. Recommendations

That the nomination for a Westminster Green Plaque to commemorate the site of the first offices of GCHQ at Watergate House is approved in full.

3. Reasons for decision

As the first home of one of Britain's three intelligence agencies, Watergate House is a building of historical interest, and its status as a former top secret location forms a significant part of the heritage of the city. This year marks 100 years since the formation of GCHQ and a Green Plaque provides the opportunity to commemorate the important role it played in post First World War history.

The Special Operations Executive (SOE) has a Green Plaque at 64 Baker Street.

4. Policy context

The Green Plaques scheme aims to highlight and improve awareness of Westminster's diverse cultural heritage and social history.

5. Background

5.1 Early history of Signals Intelligence

MO5b (later MI1b), an intelligence section in the War Office had the first success against German codes, mainly due to the French who had years of experience of Signal Intelligence. MI1b did not develop as a Signals Intelligence Centre as the army preferred to have units intercepting communications locally at the General Headquarters on each of the battle fronts.

Soon after the outbreak of the First World War, Sir Alfred Ewing, Director of Naval Education led the Admiralty's effort against enciphered German naval communications in Room 40. He brought together a small team of German speakers and although they had no initial success against German encryption, their work in sorting and classifying the intercepted messages laid the foundations for radio traffic analysis. This would eventually prove to be as valuable a tool for Signals Intelligence as for those trying to break encrypted communications: intelligence was produced by studying the external signs showing the way in which the Germans communicated.

Room 40's work to break encrypted communications was helped by the Russian Navy who provided a copy of the German High Sea Fleet codebook, which they found on a German Light Cruiser, the Magdeburg. Shortly after Room 40 was able to provide a quick turnaround service of decrypted messages.

We can look at the Admiralty and War Office as they stood at the end of 1914 and see the first shoots of what would become a permanent Signals Intelligence organisation in 1919 and grow into the GCHQ of today.

5.2 Watergate House

The major role played by the Admiralty in Signals Intelligence in the First World War led Cabinet to approve a recommendation by Lord Curzon's Secret Service Committee that a peacetime cryptanalytic unit should be formed.

The task was given to the Director of Naval Intelligence, then Captain (later Admiral) Sir Hugh Sinclair. The Government Code & Cypher School (GC&CS) was established on 1 November 1919 from around 25 cryptanalysts from the Admiralty's Room 40 and the War Office's MI1(b) cryptanalytical bureau and around the same number of clerical staff. Thus GC&CS started life in offices at 178 Watergate House.

Its function was to provide advice on the security of codes and ciphers used by the British government and to assist in their provision. It was also given a secret directive to study of the methods of encryption used by foreign powers.

Under the leadership of its first Head, Alastair Denniston, GC&CS picked up seamlessly where Room 40 and MI1(b) had left off, producing a stream of intelligence reports on the intentions of foreign states, and creating codebooks and other cryptographic material for government ministries.

5.3 Moving on

During 1921, a special committee chaired by Sir Eric Geddes ("the Geddes Axe") enforced considerable financial stringency throughout government. As part of the cost cutting, Geddes scrutinised the accommodation of government departments and the GC&CS offices at Watergate House were considered too expensive. Geddes ruled that it should move to cheaper accommodation at Queen's Gate, Kensington and Watergate House was relinquished in 1921.

6. Financial implications

The cost of installation and administration will be covered by GCHQ. There is no cost to Westminster City Council.

7. Legal implications

Listed Building Consent is not required for Watergate House.

8. Consultation

The building owner has been consulted and has given permission for the plaque to be installed.

If you have any queries about this report please contact Claire Appleby on 020 7641 3388 or cappleby@westminster.gov.uk.

Report author: Chris Stanton

Telephone: 020 8763 2044

Email: seebee.stanton@virgin.net

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Location plan of Watergate House showing the proposed location of the GCHQ Green Plaque at 1:1250 scale.

Appendix 2

Photo montage showing the proposed location of the GCHQ plaque at Watergate House.

Appendix 3

Wording and layout of the proposed GCHQ Green Plaque. The plaque includes a combination of dots and underlines. The dotted and underlined letter spell '1 hundred years' when noted in sequence and the Morse Code spells 'secret'.

For completion by the **Cabinet Member for Sports, Culture and Community**

Declaration of Interest

I have <no interest to declare / to declare an interest> in respect of this report

Signed: _____ Date: _____

NAME: **Councillor Iain Bott** _____

State nature of interest if any

.....
(N.B: If you have an interest you should seek advice as to whether it is appropriate to make a decision in relation to this matter)

For the reasons set out above, I agree the recommendation(s) in the report entitled

Commemorative Green Plaque to mark the site of the formation of GCHQ, the UK's intelligence, security and cyber agency at Watergate House, 13-15 York Buildings, Adelphi, London, WC2N 6JU

Signed

Cabinet Member for Sports, Culture and Community

Date

If you have any additional comments which you would want actioned in connection with your decision you should discuss this with the report author and then set out your comment below before the report and this pro-forma is returned to the Secretariat for processing.

Additional comment:
.....
.....

If you do not wish to approve the recommendations, or wish to make an alternative decision, it is important that you consult the report author, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Strategic Director Finance and Performance and, if there are resources implications, the Strategic Director of Resources (or their representatives) so that (1) you can be made aware of any further relevant considerations that you should take into account before making the decision and (2) your reasons for the decision can be properly identified and recorded, as required by law.

Note to Cabinet Member: Your decision will now be published and copied to the Members of the relevant Policy & Scrutiny Committee. If the decision falls within the criteria for call-in, it will not be implemented until five working days have elapsed from publication to allow the Policy and Scrutiny Committee to decide whether it wishes to call the matter in.

Appendix A

Other Implications

1. Resources Implications

1.1 There are no resources implications arising from this report

2. Business Plan Implications

2.1 There are no Business Plan implications arising from this report

3. Risk Management Implications

3.1 There are no risk management implications arising from this report

4. Health and Wellbeing Impact Assessment including Health and Safety Implications

4.1 There are no health and safety and wellbeing issues arising from this report

5. Crime and Disorder Implications

5.1 There are no crime and disorder issues arising from this report

6. Impact on the Environment

6.1 There are no environmental issues arising from this report

7. Equalities Implications

7.1 There are no equality issues arising from this report

8. Staffing Implications

8.1 There are no staffing issues arising from this report

9. Human Rights Implications

9.1 There are no issues relating to responsibilities under the Human Rights Act 1998 arising from this report

10. Energy Measure Implications

10.1 There are no energy measure issues arising from this report

11. Communications Implications

11.1 The council's media team are aware of the proposed Green Plaque

Note to report authors: If there are particularly significant implications in any of the above categories these should be moved to the main body of the report.