

FROM: **NO CCTV**  
**Press Release**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**



Attn: News Desks

-- BEGINS --

## **ICO RULING REPLACES ROYSTON “RING OF STEEL” WITH MASS SURVEILLANCE ROULETTE**

After over two and a half years of deliberation, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) ruling [1] on Royston's “ring of steel” has side-stepped the real issues at the heart of the mass surveillance Automatic Numberplate Recognition (ANPR) camera network [2].

The ICO has decided to ignore the issue of tracking people suspected of no wrong doing whatsoever and has instead chosen simply to focus on one very narrow issue – that of whether, if viewed through the lens of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), a “balance” has been struck between the qualified right of privacy (Article 8), and the qualifications used by the police to ignore such rights. By simply asking the police to produce an assessment document [3] that states how they believe they can meet the broad qualifications (which the police view as exemptions) the whole issue was reduced to a meaningless box ticking exercise. The police will always claim that their latest gadgets are intended for the prevention or detection of crime, pursue a greater good and that therefore their claimed intentions trump all other concerns.

This ruling demonstrates that limiting discussion of long cherished freedoms to the narrow framework of the Data Protection Act and the ECHR/Human Rights Act amounts to little if any protection at all. The people of the UK need a way of defending their freedoms that is not mired in box ticking and the ICO has shown once again that it is not up to the job. Mass surveillance is wrong. The police have no reason whatsoever to collect, store and retain information on the movements of people who are suspected of no wrong doing.

Hertfordshire police have decided for operational reasons that they don't need all the cameras around Royston and so some will be removed. They will not however reveal which routes are still covered by blanket surveillance and which are not, creating what amounts to a freedoms roulette - as people are forced to guess where the spying cameras remain. Is this really the best that the ICO has to offer?

The ICO's ruling follows a substantive complaint into the so-called “ring of steel” of ANPR cameras around the town of Royston issued by No CCTV, Privacy International and Big Brother Watch in June 2011 [4]. The letter of complaint called into question the use of such a mass surveillance network to collect and store (for a minimum of two years) the details of all vehicles and drivers. The complaint, which was not framed from the very narrow perspective used in the ruling, focussed on the town of Royston but urged the ICO: “to address this issue now in relation to one town rather than wait until a point in the foreseeable future when it will relate to many.”

Charles Farrier of No CCTV said:

*“We find increasingly that we live in a state in which the police or the government know more about you than you know about yourself. This is not a healthy society in which to live. The network of mass surveillance number plate cameras that are used in Royston*

*and throughout the UK was constructed without any public debate. It is still the biggest surveillance network that most people have never heard of. The ICO might think it's okay to turn freedoms into a game of roulette – 'pick your route and guess whether you're under surveillance' – we do not. We will continue to contest these cameras that should have no place in a free country."*

For media requests contact Charles Farrier at [press@no-cctv.org.uk](mailto:press@no-cctv.org.uk)

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## **References:**

[1] The outcome of the ICO's ruling is reported in the ICO March e-newsletter:

<http://ico.msgfocus.com/q/1AFzluAAMi/wv#story10>

[2] More information on the UK ANPR camera network can be found in No CCTV's report 'What's wrong with ANPR?' which can be downloaded at

[http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/whats\\_wrong\\_with\\_anpr.asp](http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/whats_wrong_with_anpr.asp)

[3] A public version of Hertfordshire Constabulary's Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) is at:

[http://www.herts.police.uk/PDF/privacy\\_impact\\_assessment\\_royston.pdf](http://www.herts.police.uk/PDF/privacy_impact_assessment_royston.pdf)

At this time none of the complainants have seen the PIA used to make the final decision in the case.

[4] The full text of the 2011 No CCTV / Privacy International / Big Brother Watch complaint is available at:

[http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/materials/docs/Royston\\_Ring\\_of\\_Steel\\_ANPR\\_Complaint.pdf](http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/materials/docs/Royston_Ring_of_Steel_ANPR_Complaint.pdf)

[5] ANPR cameras work alongside a variety of databases that can be used to identify cars and their occupants. The data collected from the cameras is stored in local force databases (Back Office Facility (BOF)) that may be used alongside querying or data mining tools, and in a centralised database (National ANPR Data Centre (NADC)). License plate photos are stored for two years and photographs of cars are stored for 90 days.

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

1. No CCTV campaigns against the excessive use of surveillance cameras. Their homepage is at [www.no-cctv.org.uk](http://www.no-cctv.org.uk). For further information contact Charles Farrier at [press@no-cctv.org.uk](mailto:press@no-cctv.org.uk)

2. Privacy International is the oldest surviving privacy advocacy group in the world, and was the first organisation to campaign at an international level on privacy issues. Their homepage is at [www.privacyinternational.org](http://www.privacyinternational.org)

3. Big Brother Watch is a campaign from the founders of the TaxPayers' Alliance, fighting intrusions on privacy and protecting liberties. Their homepage is at [www.bigbrotherwatch.org.uk](http://www.bigbrotherwatch.org.uk) .

4. This press release may be downloaded from <http://www.no-cctv.org.uk/press/>