



## CROWHURST AND THE ABERCROMBIE SCHEME

By the late 1930s it was clear that London was becoming choked with traffic. To counter the increasing traffic problems of London the Bressey Report of 1938 proposed three enormous ring roads through and around the capital. An elevated road from Barnet to Croydon was also considered. The plan would have been enormously expensive and involve the mass destruction of property. The outbreak of war halted these plans, but in 1943 and 1944 the government commissioned Sir Patrick Abercrombie to have another look at the problem.

His idea was to have at least six concentric ring roads around London with ten radial roads. These would link to twelve new satellite towns and ten airports. All that is left of this grand scheme is the North Circular Road and the present M25 (which would have been called the Express Arterial Road).

At the same time another plan for London was being formulated by Sir Edwin Lutyens and Sir Giles Gilbert Scott. This was more concerned with the aesthetic view of London and proposed new vistas of St Paul's were envisaged by opening up an avenue from St Paul's down to the riverside.

In Abercrombie's scheme there were to be four 'zoning' ring roads:

The **Inner Urban Ring** would take in Walthamstow, Leyton, Croydon (part), Wimbledon, Barnes, Brentford, Chiswick, Hornsey, Wood Green, Tottenham, Edmonton;

The **Suburban Ring** would take in Chingford, Chignell, Dagenham, Barking, Bexley, Erith, Sidcup, Bromley, Croydon, Coulsdon, Purley, Mitcham, Carshalton, Wipson, Twickenham, Kingston, Surbiton, Esher, Isleworth, Willesden, Harrow, Wembley, Hendon, Finchley, Southgate, Enfield;

The **Green Belt Ring**: Waltham Abbey, Dartford, Sevenoaks, Caterham, Epsom, Dorking, Leatherhead, Chertsey, Egham, Sunbury, Uxbridge, Potters Bar, Rickmansworth, Watford;

And finally the **Outer Country Ring**.

As well as trying to solve London's chronic traffic problem the Abercrombie scheme's aim was to encourage one million people to move from over-crowded areas of London to the new towns to be built around the city. Patrick Abercrombie was one of the founders for the Council for the Protection of Rural England and before the war also campaigned for the setting up of the Green Belt around London.

Some of the sites selected for satellite towns such as Stevenage and Harlow became a reality. Other sites proposed were Redbourn and Stapleford in Hertfordshire; Ongar and Margaretting in Essex; Meopham in Kent; White Waltham in Berkshire and, in Surrey, Holmwood and the sleepy village of Crowhurst.

Other sites considered but not chosen were:

Knockholt, which was considered too small, hilly, partly developed with no adequate rail service. Chevening; Paddock Wood; Salfords; Copthorne and Burstow Park (south of Bletchingley) which was rejected in favour of Crowhurst;

Ten airports were proposed: Heathrow; Hatfield; Fairlop; West Malling; Gatwick; Croydon; Heston; Bovingdon; Matching; Lullingstone (mainly goods traffic).

(It was considered that the close proximity of the Grand Union Canal to Heathrow would be advantageous in bringing in fuel, although it conceded that it might be necessary to pipe in fuel direct).

On 20 March 1944 seven government departments met to decide between Hartley-Longfield, Meopham and Crowhurst as to which to choose for a satellite town to the south. The departments of Town Planning, Trade, Labour and Health backed Meopham, the departments for Agriculture, Fuel and Power voted for Hartley-Longfield, while the Ministry of Transport backed Crowhurst.

If it had gone ahead 60,000 homes were planned for Crowhurst.

In May 1945 a report by Sevenoaks and Godstone Joint Planning Committee stated "...the effect would be to ruin the whole of the pleasant countryside lying between Lingfield and Oxted.... There is no doubt that a town of the size proposed would practically link up in the north with the built-up village of Holland, adjoining Oxted, and in the south with the outskirts of Lingfield... the entire countryside between Oxted and Lingfield would disappear."

"As a conception of planning, it has little appeal, in as much as it is designed to benefit one authority at the expense of others, whereas the aim of good planning should be to harmonise the interests of the authorities concerned. The proposal, therefore, should be strongly opposed."

In the end the huge cost for a cash-strapped country after the war meant that Abercrombie's vision for Greater London was not realised and the village of Crowhurst could breathe again.

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Sources:

*London A Life in Maps* by Peter Whitfield

Abercrombie Report 1946 for Greater London Plan