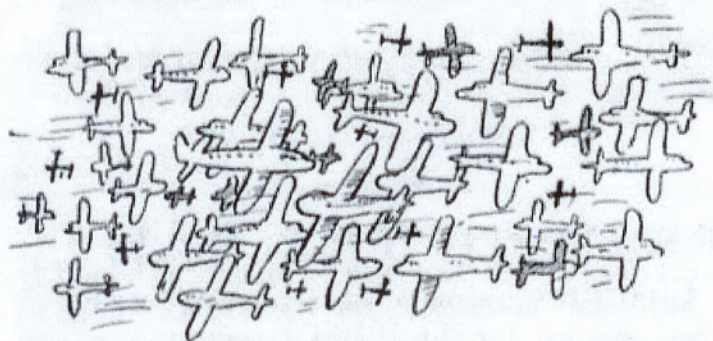


WHAT does David Cameron's predecessor and mentor, Michael Howard, think of the young leader's plan for green taxes to discourage air travel?

Probably not a lot. For, as the local MP, Howard has given his enthusiastic backing to a monstrous scheme to turn the little airfield at Lydd, in the middle of Romney Marsh, into a huge "new London airport" with 500,000 travellers a year initially – rising eventually to two million. The man behind the plan is the airfield's owner, Saudi arms dealer Sheikh Fahad al-Athel, a former business partner of Jonathan Aitken.

The proposed air terminal will be next to a world-renowned RSPB reserve and a supremely beautiful area of wilderness. Even the quango SEERA (South East England Regional Assembly), which is usually pro-development, has come out against it. So have the RSPB and the Council to Protect Rural England. But not Michael Howard or the Tory-controlled Kent County Council, who are supporting the scheme because they think it'll bring jobs to the area, regardless of the environmental consequences.

If this isn't enough to persuade Dave to have a quiet word with Howard, he should also be aware that the scheme has dire consequences for one of his party's elder statesmen. If the airport is built, Bill Deedes's home golf course at Littlestone, bang next to it, will be turned into a clone of Hounslow.



DR

"We need some 'blue sky thinking' on this"