

Blowing Lydd

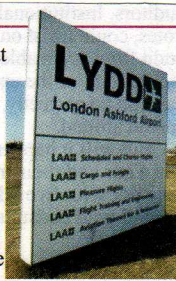
DESPITE opposition from all over, Sheikh Fahad al-Athel's plans to squeeze a busy international airport in between a nuclear power station, military firing ranges and several areas of international importance for wetland birdlife (see *Eyes passim*) has been given go-ahead.

Lydd airport in Kent is currently used by small planes such as 16-seater Trislanders; but its owner (who *Eye* readers may recall as the Saudi arms dealer involved in the Al Yamamah scandal) wants to turn it into a low cost holiday flights base for

500,000 passengers a year. That came a step closer this month when Shepway councillors granted planning permission to extend the runway and build a new terminal at the site in Romney Marshes.

This decision was made despite objections from:

- British Energy, owner of the nearby Dungeness power station.
- the Ministry of Defence, whose live firing ranges at Hythe and Lydd are close by, with flight exclusion zones limiting the landing approaches.
- Natural England, who says the proposal will adversely affect protected areas, including the area



of special scientific interest at Dungeness, Romney Marsh and Rye Bay, as well as damaging an area of outstanding natural beauty.

- Shepway council's own planning officers who recommended against the plan, noting the "significant adverse effects" on wildlife conservation areas and "materially significant" noise problems.

Why is there such enthusiasm from local Tories that they would vote the plans through despite so much opposition? It's all a long way from David Cameron's supposed intention to halt airport expansion after the party's 2007 Quality of Life commission. But local MP Michael Howard has been pally with the airport chiefs for some time and backed the plans, even speaking in favour at the planning meeting.