

# Echo

## COMMENT

# Farewell to our air hero, Alastair

**A**LASTAIR Welch, Southend Airport boss, has announced his departure from the job.

The debt owed to him by the town is enormous. Southend Airport is such a success story, it is hard to remember how far, how fast, it has progressed.

When Mr Welch arrived in 2007, civil aviation traffic was effectively dead.

A succession of previous managers had tried to kick-start its revival and failed.

The airport also had many enemies – not just the highly vocal protesters, but also some local politicians who thought the land would be better used for housing.

Then Mr Welch arrived and set about, one by one, solving problems that had bedevilled the airport for decades. He oversaw the sale to Stobart, the extension of the runway, construction of the airport's new terminals and railway station, and deals with easyJet and other airlines that have seen passenger numbers rise to nearly 750,000 a year.

Something else that it is easy to forget about Mr Welch is the personal risk he took.

He stepped down from a secure position as boss of Stansted, London's number three airport, to take on a provincial airport that had proved a poisoned chalice to predecessors.

The airport has ruined reputations, but in Mr Welch's case, it has built a reputation that must now stand second to none in the airport world.

Wherever he now chooses to go, Alastair Welch will always be a local hero for Southend.

■ O  
resi  
repc  
gree  
ther  
buil

**JOIN US AT**  
**echo-news.co.uk**

For breaking news