## Airport Director says regional airports cannot survive on passengers alone

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## STOBART GROUP CHIEF OVERSEES START OF CARLISLE AIRPORT WORK

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It took years of planning, endless argument, two expensive judicial reviews, and one man's vision...

But at long last, the much delayed redevelopment of Carlisle Airport got underway as a fleet of yellow dumper trucks began digging out foundations.

In less than a year, the site will be transformed by the creation of huge freight distribution depot, 790ft long by 495ft wide.

There to see the work get underway at the Crosby-on-Eden airfield was the man who has battled since 2006 to make it happen, Stobart chief executive Andrew Tinkler.

As he watched the trucks working, he spoke of his determination to see the project through, ultimately realising the dream that so many shared – of seeing the airport running passenger flights to places including London Southend and Dublin.

He said: "Personally, I have always believed that this project was possible.

"Even in March, 2006, before I bought the airport, I approached the head people at Carlisle City Council and told them about my idea. I said that to make the airport feasible we needed a freight distribution operation there to bring in the external income needed.

"Most regional airports are supported by external income and that was the only way this was going to happen."



Andrew Tinkler at the airport

From the outset, there has been determined opposition to the redevelopment plan, with many critics claiming that Stobart Group simply wanted to create a huge freight distribution business in the countryside using the mirage of a Cumbrian passenger airport as a flimsy justification.

But there has also been much popular support from individuals, politicians and many involved in the business world.

Among the most determined opponents of the scheme was Irthington farmer Gordon Brown, who argued that the planning procedure that led to the scheme winning approval had been flawed. He suggested that events surrounding the project show there is a two-tier planning system: one for the rich and powerful and another one for everybody else.

But as the dumper trucks shifted earth, Mr Tinkler was quietly satisfied that his vision – of a passenger and freight flights supported by a freight distribution business – was at the beginning of being realised.

He added: "We set out on a journey and now after some seven years, we will finally be getting to where we wanted to be. It will bring benefits for Stobart Group but it will also benefit Cumbria and the wider area and support inward investment in our economy."

The building work at the airport is likely to be completed by next September and Mr Tinkler hopes that passenger flights could be underway by late next year.

The News & Star revealed last week that preparatory work had begun on the airport and the project was due to start in earnest from the beginning of this month.

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