

Club contests Southend Airport's £400,000 bill demand

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Southend Airport

A HEALTH club is embroiled in a David-and-Goliath battle with [Southend Airport](#) over £400,000 in utility bills.

The airport supplies electricity to about 20 nearby businesses which are not directly connected to the power network.

It is suing the Athenaeum Club, in Aviation Way, [Rochford](#), for £173,712 it claims the club owes for power, plus a whopping £216,870 for water.

The club denies the airport supplies its water and claims it is not liable for the electricity bill, which relates to a period when a faulty meter was installed.



The airport's lawyers have submitted a map they claim shows it supplies water to the exclusive private members' club.

But Mr Baylis has showed the Echo its own plan, detailing its mains water supply.

It also showed us reams of water bills it has paid directly to Essex and Suffolk Water.

The airport supplies power to most businesses in Aviation Way, which are not connected directly to the National Grid.

Previous owner Regional Airports notified the Athenaeum Club the meter it used was faulty.

As a result, the club was told in May 2007 it had to pay for four times as much for electricity as it been doing.

The club, which had no other supply, agreed, and its bills have quadrupled since.

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Stobart Air bought the airport for £21million in 2008 and a year later demanded the club pay extra bills dating back to 2003, when the club first opened, claiming it had taken on debts owed to Regional Airports.

However, club owner Nigel Baylis said the club had not been notified of any transfer of debt to Stobart Air.

An earlier court action by Stobart Air was thrown out in July when the firm failed to produce evidence of the debt, or proof it supplied the club with water.

A Southend County Court judge has since reinstated the claim, after the airport's lawyers submitted a water supply map, drawn in ball-point pen.

The airport is seeking an out-of-court settlement but wants to see all the club's evidence first.

Mr Baylis said: "The airport has regenerated the whole area.

We welcome that, but it obviously perceived us as a soft option.

"We haven't briefed a solicitor to conduct this because the facts are crystal-clear. We think it's unfair and greedy. When Stobart bought the airport there was no word of any of this conflict."

An airport spokesman declined to comment, saying it would be inappropriate to do so while legal action was pending.