

SOUTHEND AIRPORT BOSS QUILTS



By DAVID TRAYNER david.trayner@ngc.com
THE man who helped give Southend a thriving airport has announced he is to step down.

Alastair Welch, *pictured*, has been at the helm of Southend Airport since before the Stobart Group bought it for £21million in 2008.

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Alastair Welch seeking new challenge after soaring success

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Farewell to man who led airports' take-off

By DAVID TRAYNER

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THE man who helped transform Southend Airport and brought in record numbers of passengers has announced he is stepping down.

In a surprise announcement yesterday, managing director Alastair Welch, who has led the airport since before the Stobart Group bought it for £21million in 2008, said he would leave at the end of this month.

Paying tribute to Mr Welch after the announcement, Stobart Group boss, Andrew Thinkler, said a team had been put in place to ensure the smooth running of the airport and its continuation success.

Managing director who oversaw huge rise in passengers will leave at end of month

He said: "The transformation of the airport has been led by Alastair Welch, who has been supported by a dedicated, hard-working team.

"Alastair has decided that, with the redevelopment of the airport all-but complete, the time is now right for him to move on to new challenges.

"The business has been working closely with Alastair during the course of the last year to establish a senior management team that will take London Southend Airport forward, building on the successful platform established by Alastair and the team. Alastair will be confining the handover process until the end of July.

"I would like to thank Alastair for the contribution he has made to the development of London Southend Airport and wish him every success for the future."

Mr Welch, who joined the airport in 2007, has overseen installation of a new control tower, railway station, runway extension and terminal and welcomed the one millionth passenger.

The airport has just enjoyed its busiest year, with 721,651 using the airport - 30,000 more than the previous record of 692,000 in its 1967 heyday.

Roger Clements, who has been working for Stobart Air for some time, will take over as managing director in August, with David Lister as

airport operations director and Graham Moorhouse as chief financial officer.

Mr Thinkler said: "Roger has in recent months been working with Alastair to achieve a seamless transition, ensuring we provide the same standard of service."

Mr Welch was unavailable for comment. No one would comment on his next move.

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POLITICIANS LEAD TRIBUTES

POLITICIANS and business leaders lined up to pay tribute to the airport boss as the "catalyst" for the airport's transformation.

Nigel Holdcroft, leader of Southend Council, said: "I am very sorry to see Alastair move on. There is considerable doubt whether the airport would have secured the level of investment that it has without his determination."

Terry Cutmore, leader of Rochford District Council, in whose area most of the airport lies, said: "Before he came along, the airport had been languishing in the dol-

drums for many years. Now we are hearing about new flights on an almost weekly basis."

Denise Rossiter, chief executive of Essex Chambers of Commerce, added: "He has been the driving force behind the development of the airport."

James Duddridge, MP for Rochford and Southend East, added: "Alastair has always worked hard to ensure the vision for Southend Airport is not just an aspiration but a reality. I would like to wish him all the very best for the future."

An era of change

- AIR traffic control tower – officially opened by the Minister for the Thames Gateway, Bob Neill MP, on July 21, 2011
- London Southend Airport railway station – officially opened by the Minister of State for Transport, Theresa Villiers, on September 21, 2011
- 300m runway extension – opened in March 2012
- New passenger terminal – officially opened to passengers by the Secretary of State for Transport, Justine Greening, on March 5, 2012
- Holiday Inn Southend – opened October 2012
- New radar – became operational this summer
- The arrivals area of a phase two extension opened in May, with the project due to be completed in December