

Police chief 'pulled plug on £12million fraud investigation into Stobart transport empire while receiving free helicopter rides'

- **Chief constable Stuart Hyde accused of quashing criminal investigation**
- **Allegedly received free helicopter flights from Stobart transport firm**
- **High Court in Manchester told firm was at centre of inquiry into sale of Carlisle Airport, which company bought from two of its top executives**

By [Jaya Narain](#)

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A chief constable quashed a criminal investigation into the multi-million pound Stobart transport empire while receiving free helicopter flights from them, a court heard yesterday.

A court was told that Stuart Hyde, chief constable of Cumbria, personally pulled the plug on a £12million fraud investigation into the haulage firm at the same time as he accepted perks from the company thanks to his close friendship with senior managers.

It was alleged the famous family firm - which was the focus of a Channel 5 TV series - was at the centre of an inquiry over the sale of Carlisle Airport.

The High Court in Manchester was told the sale was fraudulent as an inflated price of £14million had been paid for the airport which was bought for £2million three years earlier, with the money going to two top officials at Stobart.



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Stuart Hyde pulled the plug on a £12m fraud investigation into the Stobart firm, it has been alleged, after receiving free helicopter rides from them



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The court heard William Stobart, left, and Andrew Tinkler, right, ran WA Development International, which bought Carlisle Airport for £2m in 2006, before it was sold three years later for £14m to the Stobart Group

Former Stobart employee Peter Elliott told the court the airport was bought by WA Development International - a firm run by William Stobart and Andrew Tinkler - for £2million in 2006.

But in 2009 Carlisle Airport was sold to the Stobart Group for £14million - a 700 per cent increase in valuation.

Mr Elliott, 46, former aviation director at Stobart, claims an investigation into allegations the sale was the result of fraud was closed down by the chief constable.

The court was told the chief constable had a close relationship with the haulage firm and had promoted the company on several occasions.

Mr Elliott said: 'Chief Constable Stuart Hyde had a relationship with Stobart that was simply not acceptable. Stobart provided the helicopter at no cost.

‘Mr Hyde has refused to provide details of how many times they used the helicopter. Stuart Hyde was promoting Stobart in the media while there was an investigation actively going on.’



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It was alleged the famous family firm - which was the focus of a Channel 5 TV series - was at the centre of an inquiry over the sale of Carlisle Airport (file picture)

Mr Elliott told the court he did not know how many times he believed the helicopter was used by the chief constable, or whether it was used for business or pleasure.

The former aviation director - who left his £96,000 post in 2007 - said: ‘He should not have been promoting Stobart and using the helicopter for free.’

Cumbria’s chief constable was suspended in September over complaints about his management style and his ‘heavy-handed’ approach.



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Former Stobart employee Peter Elliott claims he is a whistleblower and has effectively been gagged by court orders and injunctions from telling the truth (file picture)

A subsequent investigation by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) cleared him of the allegations but he remains suspended while an investigation into gross misconduct continues.

He said: 'I remain deeply disappointed that my suspension continues. I look forward to the investigation concluding and I am absolutely committed to return to my role as Chief Constable and to serving Cumbria.'

The allegations were made in court as part of a long-running legal battle between the former aviation director and the haulage firm.

Mr Elliott claims he is a whistleblower and has effectively been gagged by court orders and injunctions from telling the truth.

He told the High Court said: 'If a transaction between a private company and a public company that has pension fund investors is done at over value it is a fraud. It is not allowed in this country.'

‘This is exactly what Robert Maxwell was doing. It goes against the very heart of the UK being the financial centre of the world.’

The Stobart Group, made famous by the cheery demeanour of its lorry drivers, has its origins in the late 1940s, when Eddie Stobart started a farming business which later expanded into the UK's best-known haulage company.

Eddie's son Edward, who died of a heart attack two years ago, took over the firm in 1976.

He retired in 2004, appointing his brother Michael as COO and Andrew Tinkler as CEO - allegations over the two executives are at the heart of Mr Elliott's case.

Judge Mark Pelling said: ‘This case results from the unhappy difference between Mr Elliott and the claimant arising out of Mr Elliot’s employment as the claimant’s aviation director.’

Last night Cumbria Police declined to comment on the allegations.

Deputy Chief Constable Bernard Lawson, from Merseyside Police, has taken over Mr Hyde’s role temporarily.

Cumbria’s Police and Crime Commissioner Richard Rhodes said: ‘The allegations raised by Mr Elliott were considered by the Police Authority’s People and Performance Committee on 20 December 2011. Having considered the allegations the committee decided not to record a complaint.’

The hearing continues.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2263741/Police-chief-Stuart-Hyde-allegedly-pulled-plug-multi-million-fraud-investigation-Stobart-transport-empire-receiving-free-helicopter-rides-them.html#ixzz2vkqw7vZT>

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