



## **Veterans Minister Mark Francois opens sculpture installation at London Southend Airport**

### **Searchlight Beacons reflects the wartime and commercial history of the airport**

In the week of Armed Forces Day, Mark Francois, Minister of State for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans, joined local World War II veterans and airport MD Alastair Welch to open a new sculpture installation by John Atkin at London Southend Airport today (24 June 2013).

The public art for the new terminal and hotel is part of the on-going regeneration of London Southend Airport. The airport worked with Commissions East and Rochford and Southend Councils to commission world renowned sculptor John Atkin FRBS to create artworks that reflected the airport's wartime and commercial past through to its present day activities.

Armed Forces Day takes place nationwide on Saturday 29 June. London Southend Airport MD Alastair Welch said *"We are delighted to be unveiling this sculpture which recognises some key stages in the airport's life. I am particularly pleased that we also have a lasting reminder to honour the role played by those who so bravely served here during two wars."*

John Atkin was personally funded by sculptor Henry Moore to study at the Royal College of Art and has followed in his footsteps by too becoming a globally renowned artist. He has produced landmark artworks for major events such as the Beijing Olympics as well as signature sculptures for many international regeneration projects.

The centrepiece of *Searchlight Beacons* is a trio of 3.5 metre tall beacons located outside the terminal building and illustrating the three ages of London Southend Airport – the important role played by the airfield in World War II, its growth as a commercial airport in the 1960's and 1970's (when it was the third busiest airport in the UK, after Heathrow and Manchester) and today's regeneration thanks to the investment of the Stobart Group. These periods are reflected by images of the Supermarine Spitfire, Bristol Freighter and Airbus 319 lasercut into the stainless steel of the beacons. The beacons are illuminated from the interior with LED lighting at night, creating a World War II 'searchlight' effect.

The installation also includes eight granite pod seats inspired by the shape of airplane tail fins - five by the terminal and three outside the Holiday Inn.

*Searchlight Beacons* took 18 months to complete, and utilised both traditional and digital sculpting methods – John used MAYA 3D modelling software at Loughborough University in order to precisely position the crossover intersection points of the beacons. 3D optimized topography-modeling was applied to evenly populate the aircraft shapes across the surface of the sculpture.

The Minister – who has been MP for Rayleigh and Wickford since 2001 – said when declaring *Searchlight Beacons* officially open *"Economically the airport has been a huge success, creating more than 500 new jobs for local people, and I want to thank the Stobart Group for all the money they have invested in creating such an asset for Essex. It is marvellous that we now have this sculpture which is a reminder of the history of this place going back more than 100 years. It is also lovely to see veterans here today, as recognising the heritage of the airport, including during the Second World War, is hugely important."*

Alastair Welch added *"It is also appropriate that just before the first anniversary of the London 2012 Olympics we are unveiling at one of the gateways to those Games a sculpture by John Atkin who played a key artistic role in a previous Olympics Games. We hope Searchlight Beacons will be appreciated and enjoyed by the many thousands of passengers and visitors to the airport, and also help put Southend in its quest to become a cultural capital for the East of England."*

John Atkin said *"This has been a thrilling project for me. I set out to find a way of reflecting human ingenuity allied to engineering innovation in wartime and peacetime – as well as the history and legacy of London Southend Airport with an installation that links two separate spaces associated with the airport. Being able to fuse traditional and digital methods of making in the design & development of the sculpture has been particularly appropriate given my research interests in the arts and engineering. It is wonderful to finally see it installed in the place for which it was designed – as a landmark and way finding device, as well as an artwork that shines a light on the history of Southend."*

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

Over £100 million has been invested in London Southend Airport by owners Stobart Group since it was acquired in 2008. New facilities include a train station on the London Liverpool Street (just 53 minutes into the heart of the City), an Air Traffic Control Tower, terminal building, runway extension and radar. There is also a 4-star Holiday Inn within walking distance of the terminal. To support the airport's rapid growth, work on a £10 million extension to the terminal is scheduled to open in phases and complete by Christmas 2013 - the new Arrivals area and five additional stands have just opened. London Southend Airport currently has departures each week to Amsterdam, Alicante, Barcelona, Belfast, Berlin, Edinburgh, Faro, Geneva, Ibiza, Jersey, Krakow, Malaga, Mallorca and Venice from London Southend Airport with easyJet. Aer Lingus has three daily return services between London Southend and Dublin, where travellers are able to take advantage of transatlantic connections to New York, Boston, Chicago and Orlando. More at [www.southendairport.com](http://www.southendairport.com)

More on John Atkin at [www.johnatkin.net](http://www.johnatkin.net) and [www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sota/staff/john-atkin.html](http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/sota/staff/john-atkin.html)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS & IMAGES**

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