

PE1506/A

Petitioner Letter of 31 July 2014

Dear Chris

Many thanks for giving RBWF the opportunity to submit a response to Nicola Sturgeon's statement regarding Prestwick Airport. For clarity, our comments are laid out (in red) in the attached document.

We wait and hope for a positive outcome.

Kindest regards,

Alison Tait

Sturgeon: Prestwick will not be renamed Robert Burns Airport

WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2014

Glasgow Prestwick Airport will not be renamed Robert Burns Airport, the Deputy First Minister has confirmed.

Nicola Sturgeon said she has been inundated with calls and emails to rename the airport after the Ayrshire-born Bard, but fears a change of name will confuse international travellers and dent ministers' hopes of returning the cash-strapped facility to profit.

From our petition responses, **it would appear that it's** the international travellers, in the main, who are most keen on the renaming, with support coming from as far as Canada, Australia and the USA, for example;

Several people thought the renaming was an excellent idea with others saying it was long overdue and a fitting tribute to someone who has contributed so much to Arts and Culture. People with links back to Scotland were keen to honour our rich heritage and our national poet. Others felt that the Glasgow Prestwick title had always been a misnomer and that the airport not only would benefit from renaming but also from encouraging international flights and promotion of the area as a destination for long weekends or week-long package holidays. Several thought it was in line with the international pattern of naming airports after famous personages. Locally, it was felt that this would be a huge benefit to the hospitality sector which is very strong and also the tourist industry.

Just a few examples – there are many more which can be supplied, if required.

The Scottish Government took the airport into public ownership last year after owners Infratil earmarked it for closure.

RBWF are delighted that the Scottish Government acted so promptly in securing the future of the Airport and that they **are committed to the airport's** success.

Ms Sturgeon announced a further £7 million investment for repairs and improvements at Holyrood's Infrastructure Committee today, but said it could be a long time before they see a return on the investment.

The news of this investment is very welcome and RBWF are pleased that the Scottish Government are committed to the long term future of the Airport.

Ayrshire community groups and Burns societies have been lobbying for a change of name, and Ms Sturgeon said she has "had more emails and letters on this point than any other since we acquired the airport".

RBWF are not surprised that such depth of feeling has been shown in relation to the possibility of renaming. It is not only Burns Clubs and members who are keen on this change; many non-members have also added their support. We would be missing a trick not to capitalise on this ideal opportunity to rename the airport after Robert Burns.

But she said the "hard-headed, pragmatic thing to do" is keep the current name for continuity.

RBWF would disagree that continuity of name is necessarily the way forward. Many, many airports, worldwide, have been renamed after their famous, local sons. These can be found on the following web page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_eponyms_of_airports

With the popular option of having airports worldwide named after famous local people, RBWF would just like to register our expression of disappointment that an airport so close to the birthplace of our national bard cannot be named after him. However, we live in hope that this decision may be revisited soon.

Note: Salzburg Airport renamed W. A. Mozart Airport. Information freely available on the airport website includes the quote:

“In 1996, the airport adopted the name of its most famous son - W. A. Mozart.

With its 2,850 meters of runway and CAT III low visibility operations, Salzburg became more attractive for **scheduled and charter services.”**

The relevance of Salzburg is that the management consultant, Romain Py is from Salzburg and yet he is the one who seemed opposed to the idea of airports being named after National Heroes!

We would suggest that it would also be appropriate to rename Glasgow and Edinburgh airports after suitably famous people.

"As somebody who hails from Ayrshire I recognise the strength of feeling over the issue of the airport's name and I very much welcome the engagement that the senior adviser had with the Robert Burns World Federation," she said.

RBWF was pleased to have the opportunity to meet with the airport management. We were, however, disappointed that the management appeared to be solely focused on business from Ryanair and not in attracting other carriers to the airport, nor widening the prospects for the airport. Given the more recent news regarding Ryanair pulling several flights out of Prestwick, this is not good for the airport. Moves towards making the airport an International Hub would be more welcome.

"We have considered this issue very carefully, but on balance I have concluded that there are strong commercial reasons to retain the Glasgow Prestwick Airport name rather than looking to rename the airport.

"We need to keep in mind that changing the name would undoubtedly be a welcome move locally, but we need to promote and market Glasgow Prestwick Airport to airlines and passengers across the world.

Robert Burns is already a global brand and recognised worldwide. Renaming to Robert Burns International would make the airport easy to promote and market globally. With tens of thousands of Burns Suppers held worldwide every year, what better well-known brand to lead Ayrshire forward.

"Glasgow and Prestwick are both strong names, as you would expect from an airport that has been operating for such a long time, and we don't want to risk creating confusion that would be more difficult to grow the business.

Facts are chieftains that winna ding. Travellers have usually researched their travel arrangements in advance and are well aware of their destination. Just as Paris Beauvais is nowhere near Paris, travellers understand that Prestwick is not near Glasgow (**it's in a different county**). However, as the only Scottish airport with its own dedicated rail link, other Scottish towns and cities are easily accessible without confusing travellers.

"However, the importance of recognising Robert Burns is not lost on anybody, and we will commission work to develop a Burns-related theme for the terminal and consider other ways in which the rich legacy of Burns can contribute to the promotion and the marketing of the airport."

RBWF would be happy to assist with any Burns-related themes to be used in the promotion and marketing of the airport.

She added: "The airport is not currently up for sale because we are in it for the long term and our intention is to secure a return on the public investment in the airport in the long term, and market the airport for sale on the basis of the turnaround that happens.

RBWF believes that it would be so much easier to market internationally if using an already-known and well respected name such as Burns.

"So we have not set a date for that. There are too many variables at this stage and it wouldn't be sensible for me to sit here and give even a guesstimate date of when it will be possible to do.

"We're clear that it's a long-term investment, but a return to the private sector remains the end point objective.

"I was clear that we were not taking over Prestwick as some kind of ideological move or relishing taking Prestwick into public ownership. We were doing it because the only alternative was for the airport to close."

RBWF are relieved that closure was not considered an option. It would be wonderful to see the airport brought to life again as a thriving and busy international hub.

As well as recommending the name Robert Burns International Airport, we would also suggest the use of the tag-line "Scotland's Gateway" - i.e. Robert Burns International Airport – Scotland's Gateway, see below:

Robert Burns International Airport
Scotland's Gateway