

Immovable object pings on to the radar

Alex Ralph

As if easyJet did not have enough problems, the airline's biggest shareholder registered on to the radar once again yesterday, threatening yet another protest against the airline he founded.

Sir Stelios Haji-Ioannou, right, who has hit out repeatedly at the company's strategy since stepping down from the board in 2010, said that he would vote against the re-election of John Barton, easyJet's non-executive chairman, at the annual meeting next month.

The tycoon said he was "extremely unimpressed" by the decline in revenue per seat, a key industry performance indicator that easyJet said yesterday was down 8.2 per cent on a constant

currency basis in its first quarter. It forecast that revenue per seat would decline by "high single digits, within the range of previous guidance" in the first half of its financial year.

Sir Stelios, whose family retains a 33.73 per cent holding in easyJet, the airline he founded in 1995, said that he would make a protest vote against the company's fleet expansion plan when investors gather at Luton airport on February 9 by voting a token 15 million shares against the re-election of Mr Barton.

He insisted that he was not seeking to force out Mr Barton, who was appointed in May 2013 and is also the chair-

man of Next and a director of SSP, the catering group. "In our view the best way to increase earnings per share and send the share price up again is to reduce the [number of] aircraft in the fleet from 2018 onwards."

It is not the first time Sir Stelios has taken aim at Mr Barton. He has long protested against easyJet's fleet expansion, designed to take market share, and mounted a protest vote at last year's meeting, where he called for an increase in dividends.

A spokesman for easyJet declined to comment, but the company has indicated that capacity growth beyond this financial year is up in the air.

