# Universal Studios to transform Bedford into UK’s largest theme park by 2031



The English town of Bedford, located just a few miles north of London’s outer suburbs, is set to become home to the UK’s sixth Universal Studios-branded theme park, marking a significant transformation for this historically industrial market town. The UK government recently approved an investment plan for the project, which aims to create one of the largest theme parks in Europe by attracting over 15 million visitors annually, potentially surpassing Disneyland Paris, currently the continent’s biggest attraction.

The new 700-acre park will be constructed on the site of the former Stewartby brickworks, once the world’s largest brick factory, famous for its 167 towering chimneys. The brickworks contributed to Bedford’s rich multicultural heritage, drawing workers initially from Italy and later from India. Despite the brickmaking industry’s closure in 2008 and subsequent demolition of the historic brickworks to make way for housing, the site’s flat landscape is regarded as an ideal foundation for the theme park development.

Universal’s proposal has received strong local support, with 92 percent of Bedford residents expressing a favourable view of the plan, the highest rate of positive response the company has seen for any project. The company has pledged to incorporate elements of Bedford’s industrial heritage into the park, including the use of local bricks, as part of its broader strategy to celebrate the town’s identity. This development is also aligned with wider regional infrastructure improvements, notably the East West Rail project, which is expected to significantly enhance Bedford’s connectivity to cities such as Oxford, Milton Keynes, and Cambridge by the mid-2030s.

While the construction, expected to take six years, will bring its share of disruption, the initiative is poised to provide economic stimulation to an area currently facing challenges like above-average youth unemployment. Alongside the theme park, Bedford may soon gain a professional football club. The Winklevoss twins, American investors, are planning a £3.5 million investment in Real Bedford, a local non-league football club purchased by bitcoin podcaster and Bedford native Peter McCormack.

Local enthusiasm for the theme park is demonstrated by community member Harriet Masterson, who compared Bedford’s upcoming attraction with the original Universal Studios: “Obviously they’ve got the weather,” she said. “But we’ve got the culture.” As Bedford prepares for its transformation into a major entertainment hub, the town appears set to revive its industrial legacy while opening a new chapter focused on tourism and cultural vibrancy.

The Financial Times is reporting that the Universal Studios theme park in Bedford is expected to open its doors in 2031, heralding a new era of development and economic opportunity for the once industrial town.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/fb09b1f0-e7b1-460a-bbe9-b2cb0af62c2f> - This article reports on Bedford's transformation with the development of a Universal Studios theme park, approved by the UK government, aiming to rival Disneyland Paris by attracting over 15 million visitors annually. Scheduled for completion by 2031, the park will be built on the defunct Stewartby brickworks site, previously the world’s largest brick producer. High local support, with 92% approval, reflects Bedfordians' enthusiasm for revitalizing the area's economy and celebrating its industrial heritage.
2. <https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/universal-studios-open-first-european-theme-park-near-london-2025-04-08/> - This article details Universal Studios' plan to open its first European theme park and resort in Bedford, north of London, by 2031. The project is anticipated to generate 20,000 construction jobs and 8,000 permanent roles across hospitality and creative sectors. The park is projected to draw 8.5 million visitors in its first year, rivaling Disneyland Paris. This expansion marks Universal’s sixth global location, adding to its existing parks in the U.S., Japan, Singapore, and China.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/article/2024/jun/26/universal-theme-park-bedfordshire-harry-potter-shrek-mario-kart> - This article discusses Universal Studios' plans for a theme park in Bedfordshire, England, featuring attractions based on popular films, video games, and stories, including Harry Potter, Shrek, and Mario Kart. The project is expected to attract millions of visitors annually and includes a 500-room hotel and dining area open to those without a theme park ticket. Construction is forecast to create 20,000 jobs, with 8,000 jobs initially upon opening, and is estimated to bring nearly £50 billion of economic benefits to the UK.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2024-jun-27/new-universal-studios-theme-park-could-boost-uk-by-50bn> - This article reveals that Universal Studios' proposed theme park in Bedfordshire could boost the UK economy by nearly £50 billion. The construction of the project would create 20,000 jobs in the long term, with 5,000 workers on site at its peak. Once operational, the resort would initially create 8,000 new jobs in a range of roles. The research also outlined that the project would deliver a boost of over £49 billion to the regional and wider UK economy.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/be018506-d8a8-4ae4-8293-d1eaba9f44a9> - This article reports on the UK government's announcement of a major deal with Universal Destinations & Experiences to establish a multibillion-pound theme park in Bedfordshire. The project is expected to deliver a £50 billion economic boost and create approximately 28,000 jobs—20,000 during construction and 8,000 in hospitality and creative industries once operational in 2031. The theme park, anticipated to draw 8.5 million visitors in its first year, will be the UK's largest tourist attraction.
6. <https://apnews.com/article/616ec0d28706470ae92e30b529c955e5> - This article discusses Universal's plans to build its first European theme park and resort just outside London, marking a significant expansion for the entertainment company. The new park will be constructed on a 476-acre former brickyard site in Bedford, approximately 50 miles north of London, with completion expected by 2031. The project is projected to create 28,000 jobs and boost local economic growth. Prime Minister Keir Starmer praised the initiative for bringing opportunity and joy to Britain.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/fb09b1f0-e7b1-460a-bbe9-b2cb0af62c2f> - Please view link - unable to able to access data