# Keir Starmer backs £50bn Universal theme park in Bedfordshire amid resident compensation disputes



UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has endorsed a significant multibillion-pound theme park development in Bedfordshire, marking a pivotal moment for the region. However, the ambitious plans of Universal Destinations & Experiences face challenges due to the presence of residents in Kempston Hardwick, a hamlet intimately intertwined with the proposed site.

Tom Govorosa, one of the affected residents, expressed his concerns during an interview with the Financial Times. “I’m hoping for a lottery win,” he remarked, highlighting the uncertainty surrounding potential offers from the US-based media corporation. Govorosa lives on the edge of the proposed park area and, along with three other locals, seeks fair compensation if relocation becomes necessary. “I’m all for the project as it’s good for Bedford, but I want to make sure they pay me properly if I have to leave,” he added.

His neighbour, Andy Pardon, echoed similar sentiments, asserting his expectation for substantial compensation. “I want double the value [of the house],” he stated. Previous sales in their street serendipitously illustrate the negotiations underway; several houses have already been purchased by Sc Collection Ltd, a subsidiary of Comcast, which owns Universal. Records indicate that a terraced property on their street fetched £333,500 last May, with Universal confirming that it has acquired six homes in the area to date.

Construction for the theme park, planned for nearly 500 acres of former brickworks, is set to begin with an expected opening in 2031. Universal anticipates that the park will draw approximately 8.5 million visitors in its inaugural year, positioning it to become the largest visitor attraction in the UK. Starmer hailed the project as an initiative that “firmly puts the country on the global stage,” further underscoring its economic implications. The government has framed the development as a crucial partnership between the UK and the US in the wake of tariff tensions initiated during Donald Trump’s presidency.

The project is expected to inject an estimated £50 billion into the UK economy, creating around 20,000 jobs. Plans also include the establishment of a new train station in Wixams, located between Bedford and Luton, along with improvements to local road networks.

Mohammad Yasin, the MP for Bedford, expressed optimism about the development during conversations with the Financial Times, describing it as “a dream come true” for the town. Yasin highlighted the potential for increased footfall to revitalise local commerce, stating that “more people will come to the town; empty shops may be filled.” He expressed his commitment to advocate for benefits to local residents, including discounted park tickets, while acknowledging the difficult situation for those facing displacement. "House prices in Bedford are going up very fast, and Universal needs to ensure [those forced to move] are compensated to current market value,” he stressed.

Currently, the average house price in Bedford stands at £318,000 as of February, reflecting a slight increase from £310,000 just a year prior, according to the Office for National Statistics. A study published by law firm Taylor Rose has indicated a 17.3 per cent rise in property transactions in Bedford from 2023 to 2024, underscoring the region's shifting real estate landscape.

While Universal has stated that affected residents will be compensated at fair market values, sentiments remain mixed within the community. One local, choosing to remain anonymous, conveyed deep-rooted emotional ties to their home: “This house has been in the family for generations and it will be very difficult to move,” they said. Despite recognising the likelihood of relocation, the individual expressed the personal toll it may take, adding, “It will be very hard if we have to leave.”

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/7c90a253-0cfd-4522-8ed0-c6816cf3e555> - This article discusses the concerns of residents in Kempston Hardwick, including Tom Govorosa and Andy Pardon, regarding the Universal theme park development and their expectations for compensation.
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/be018506-d8a8-4ae4-8293-d1eaba9f44a9> - This piece highlights the UK's endorsement of the Universal theme park project, emphasizing its potential economic impact and the government's support for the initiative.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/b1bdfe0f-d81d-4204-96ec-bca0e0973690> - This article details Universal's negotiations with UK officials over tax and infrastructure incentives for the Bedford theme park, underscoring the project's scale and potential economic benefits.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2024-07-18/universal-studios-councils-pledge-support-for-new-uk-resort> - This report covers the support from six local councils for the Universal Studios theme park in Bedfordshire, highlighting the anticipated job creation and economic growth.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6p2vrqgp9do> - This article discusses the endorsement of the Universal theme park plans by six local authorities, emphasizing the project's transformative potential and economic impact.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/article/2024/jun/26/universal-theme-park-bedfordshire-harry-potter-shrek-mario-kart> - This piece outlines the expected attractions and economic benefits of the Universal theme park in Bedfordshire, including job creation and the projected £50 billion boost to the UK economy.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/7c90a253-0cfd-4522-8ed0-c6816cf3e555> - Please view link - unable to able to access data