# Keir Starmer backs £50bn Universal theme park plan despite local displacement disputes



Plans for a new multibillion-pound theme park in Bedfordshire have received a significant boost from UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, yet the ambitious project faces opposition from local residents concerned about potential displacement. The project, backed by Universal Destinations & Experiences, is proposed to be built on a sprawling 476 acres of former brickworks. It is anticipated to attract approximately 8.5 million visitors in its first year after opening, slated for 2031, making it the largest visitor attraction in the UK.

Residents of Kempston Hardwick, a small hamlet near the proposed site, are particularly affected by the plans due to the presence of a row of old brick workers’ cottages. Among them is Tom Govorosa, who expressed hope for a fair offer from the media giant for his home. “I’m hoping for a lottery win,” he stated, indicating he and some neighbours are seeking compensation should they be forced to vacate. He added, “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.”

His neighbour, Andy Pardon, has even more demanding expectations, noting, “I want double the value [of the house]. What is an extra few hundred thousand to a company like that?” Despite these concerns, several properties in the area have already been acquired by Sc Collection Ltd, a subsidiary of Comcast, Universal's parent company. Land Registry records show that one terraced property recently sold for £333,500.

Universal has stated that the purchase of the remaining properties is underway, aiming to ensure a smooth transition for the project. An anonymous source familiar with the company’s plans indicated that efforts to buy out affected homeowners are in progress.

The theme park has been heralded by Starmer as instrumental in improving the UK's global standing and fostering US-UK relations, particularly in light of economic pressures stemming from previous trade disputes. This development is projected to inject £50 billion into the UK economy and create around 20,000 jobs. Plans also include the construction of a new train station in Wixams, situated between Bedford and Luton, alongside infrastructure upgrades.

Local MP Mohammad Yasin, representing Bedford since 2017, called the park “a dream come true” for the community, suggesting it will revitalise local commerce and attract tourists. Yasin has expressed intention to negotiate with Universal for local benefits, which could include discounted entry tickets for residents. He acknowledged the displacement concerns, stressing the importance of ensuring affected homeowners receive current market value for their properties.

“The average house price in Bedford was recorded at £318,000 in February this year, marking a rise from £310,000 the previous year,” according to the Office for National Statistics. In a separate analysis, law firm Taylor Rose noted a significant increase in property sales in the area, indicating a housing market on the upswing.

Despite the economic promises tied to the theme park, one unnamed resident shared deep emotional ties to their home, which has been in their family for generations. They conveyed that no amount of compensation would suffice if they were compelled to relocate, stating, “This house has been in the family for generations and it will be very difficult to move.”

Universal has assured that residents will be compensated at fair market value, but the complexity of navigating property displacements and the emotional weight of leaving long-held family homes may pose a lasting challenge for those affected by the development. As preparations for the theme park continue, the balance between economic development and community stability remains a significant focus for both Universal and local stakeholders.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/383282af-99a1-44a3-af2b-0bb25cd1e2c6> - This article discusses Universal's plans to build Europe's largest theme park on nearly 500 acres of former brickworks and farmland south of Bedford, UK, aiming to attract approximately 8.5 million visitors in its first year after opening in 2031, making it the largest visitor attraction in the UK.
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crgy70n5y95o> - This report highlights that Universal Destinations & Experiences conducted a public engagement period in May 2024, receiving over 6,000 responses, with 92% of respondents expressing support for the proposed theme park in Bedfordshire.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c6p2vrqgp9do> - This article details how leaders from six local authorities, including Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton Borough, Milton Keynes City, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire councils, collectively endorsed the Universal Studios theme park plans, emphasizing the project's transformative potential and significant job creation.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/article/2024/jun/26/universal-theme-park-bedfordshire-harry-potter-shrek-mario-kart> - This piece outlines Universal's plans to build a theme park in Bedfordshire, featuring attractions based on popular franchises like Harry Potter, Shrek, and Mario Kart, and discusses the projected economic impact, including the creation of 20,000 jobs and an estimated £50 billion contribution to the UK economy over 20 years.
5. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2024-06-27/new-universal-studios-theme-park-could-boost-uk-by-50bn> - This article reports on Universal's plans for its first UK theme park in Bedfordshire, highlighting the projected £50 billion boost to the UK economy, the creation of 20,000 jobs during construction, and 8,000 jobs once operational, with the park expected to open in 2031.
6. <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2024-07-18/universal-studios-councils-pledge-support-for-new-uk-resort> - This report details how leaders of six councils, including Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton Borough, Milton Keynes City, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire, have written to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer expressing their strong support for the proposed Universal Studios theme park and resort in Bedfordshire.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/7c90a253-0cfd-4522-8ed0-c6816cf3e555> - Please view link - unable to able to access data