

Mythbuster

Introduction

We are aware that a small number of local objectors have been circulating incorrect information about our project. To ensure that correct information is always available for local residents, below are some clarifying statements on the myths we have so far heard about.

Myths specific to our UK project

Myth – We will have more than 3 million visitors annually.

Truth – This number simply has no basis in fact. On our current plan, aiming to open in 2029, we project there will be 550,000 visitors to our park in our first year. As the park grows, we project there will be up to 1.47 million visitors annually once the park is fully developed. These projections are based on real time data from our two parks in France and Spain. We can control our visitor numbers because we decide how many tickets we sell and because we sell 97% of our tickets in advance.

Myth – Locals roads will be impacted by our visitors' parking their vehicles.

Truth – This is just scaremongering. It is not in our interest to be a bad neighbour to our nearby residential communities nor create a poor visitor experience because over 65% of our visitors are repeat customers. We have therefore designed secure and well-lit onsite parking that will be able to cater for all our visitors, even on the handful of peak days.

Myth – 50% of daytime visitors on public transport is not possible.

Truth – There is simply nothing else similar to Puy du Fou in the UK. Existing, more traditional theme parks were planned at a time when sustainable transport was not considered a priority, so were designed with a focus on the private car as the predominant transport mode and did not have Travel Plans designed to support sustainable travel.

By designing in a comprehensive public transport offer from the start, and with the right ticketing incentives, the target of only 50% of daytime visitors arriving by car is therefore considered to be an achievable target. We will achieve this by:

- Providing a free shuttle bus service linking the site to local rail stations and park and ride sites. (If the proposals for a new station at Ardley become reality, we will also link to that as well)
- Improving local bus services to Bicester and Banbury, including contributing towards new buses to serve the routes
- Coach trips to the site as part of groups, such as schools, clubs etc and coach packages from local towns and cities as part of a 'ticket and travel' package
- Having digital ticketing packages with links to transport options and tickets
- Creating promotional ticket options, with the aim of making sustainable travel options more cost effective than arriving by car

Myth – There is a ‘pollution plume’ from the Ardley incinerator that covers the site.

Truth – Cherwell District Council has statutory environmental health responsibilities and would be taking very significant measures if this claim was true. This myth is being circulated by a local resident who is trenchantly opposed to our project but has no relevant qualifications in the field of air pollution. Almost comically, this mythical ‘pollution plume’ quite magically misses the three local villages but only lands on our site. We are of course currently testing the air quality across the site, as is required by the planning process in the usual way, and to date we have no indications it falls outside normal legal limits. How could it possibly be in our interest to build a visitor experience where the air quality is allegedly so poor?

Myth – We cannot submit a planning application because we are a foreign company.

Truth – First, this is factually wrong and would quite obviously impact the UK’s wider ability to attract foreign investment. And second, this is irrelevant in any case as we are establishing a UK subsidiary company which will submit our planning application, build and then operate our UK park, just as we created a Spanish company to do the same in Spain.

General myths about Puy du Fou

Myth – We are not really a ‘not for profit’ organisation.

Truth – This is just factually inaccurate. We are totally independent and from our inception have always been a ‘not for profit’. Both our existing parks are majority owned by us to retain artistic, quality and brand control. When investing in new parks, we work with long-term, institutional investors as co-funders. All Puy du Fou’s profits are reinvested back into our shows and artistic development. Our partners obviously require a commercial return on their minority shareholdings, as is normal.

Myth – We have a history of cruelty to animals.

Truth – Our animals are the stars of our shows and we look after them to the highest international standard. As is normal, a destination as popular as Puy du Fou France with 2000 animals is properly scrutinised by all the relevant regional, national and international animal welfare institutions. This fake story stems from a single, discredited documentary in France from some years ago, based on four anonymous interviews by a journalist who had never visited Puy du Fou whereas we welcome dozens of journalists each year for backstage tours for TV programme or articles.

We have an animal welfare charter ([see here](#)) and all our staff are required to respect this. We have had Green Globe international certification since 2012 and animal welfare is part of the criteria of sustainability. We are accredited members of the French Zoo Association (AFdPZ). We work with numerous organisations ([see here in ‘Conservation Programmes’](#)) including the Fondation BioAndina, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Vulture Conservation Foundation, the French centre for the protection and breeding of the Bonelli’s Eagle and the French League for Protection of Birds. We work with all these organisations on numerous animal conservation projects all over the world to protect animal species and conservation outside their natural environment, the goal being to reintroduce species to the wild, or to boost wild populations by introducing individuals bred in zoos, mews or aquariums.

Myth – We have links to Russia.

Truth – This is an untrue conspiracy theory purposefully being circulated to besmirch Puy du Fou. In the past we have considered many countries around the world when looking at our international expansion plans, including the Netherlands, Brazil, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Austria, Morocco, Hungary, Poland, USA, Mexico, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Singapore, Japan and India. In common with many international businesses, well over a decade ago Puy du Fou explored opening a park in Russia and were caught off guard by the rapid deterioration of the geopolitical situation in Russia and Crimea. Quite properly we cancelled this initiative once the international sanctions regime was established. The Russia project never went beyond an outline concept. We have had no involvement at all in Russia since then. For absolute clarity, Puy du Fou has never received funding from Russia, either from any individual or any corporate entity.

Myth – We have a Right wing political agenda.

Truth – This is a conspiracy theory specifically being spread to try to discredit Puy du Fou. Like any reputable company, we have an excellent track record of working positively with government and local authorities in France, in Spain and many other countries representing all political persuasions from Left to Right. Puy du Fou neither criticises nor condones any political party or political organisation.

Myth – A Right wing politician controls the company.

Truth – Puy du Fou is actually run by an operational board of 10 full-time professional executive directors reporting to a chief executive and chairman, like any large international business. It is no secret that Puy du Fou was founded almost 50 years ago by a well-known ‘Right of Centre’ French politician who amongst many things has been a council leader, an MP and MEP, the equivalent of the Secretary of State for Culture in the Chirac government in the 1980s, who ran for the French presidency twice and has not held political office for nearly 15 years.

Myth – Our shows manipulate history.

Truth – Puy du Fou is an artistic organisation that creates spectacular historical shows and immersive experiences based upon the history and culture of a country and its people. The content of our UK shows, including which periods of British history we will cover, will be created by our in-house artistic team and advised by a panel of British historians we are in the process of recruiting. Their role will be to guide our creative team giving them local British knowledge, understanding, nuance and insight. We know how to create a show that connects to people’s emotions, how to design and deliver the production, but we need local advisors to help us with the relevant local history. This is exactly the same process we carried out in Spain when establishing our Spanish park, with great success according to our Spanish visitors.

History can be a sensitive topic; many historians have profoundly different views on specific historical events. In the film and TV industry, Ridley Scott, James Cameron and more recently Hilary Mantel in her Wolf Hall trilogy have been both acclaimed and criticised for their retelling of historical events or their portrayal of historical characters. There is also a separate but related argument between artists and historians who often argue about the difference between pure history and the creative licence artists need to portray an historical story in a format that works on stage or screen. This is a hugely contentious issue of debate in France whereas it is never even mentioned in Spain. The millions of annual visitors to Puy du Fou come to see amazing family entertainment based on history and just do not care about these hotly contested academic debates.

Conclusion

Unlike most companies, Puy du Fou is open to the general public. Everyone has the opportunity to see through the myths and verify everything for themselves by actually visiting and experiencing Puy du Fou. Every day we are open, tens of thousands of visitors in two countries witness the quality and popularity of Puy du Fou's work, as evidenced by the thousands of glowing reviews on social media, TripAdvisor, Google, Facebook etc. Our visitors provide the best response to these negative NIMBY criticisms.