New £70m investment in 1m sq ft distribution centre in southern England

FUTURE: Homes Bargains’ £70m regional distribution hub, seen here top centre in a computer-generated aerial view of Solstice Park at Amesbury, Wiltshire, and due to be operational in Autumn 2015. Just 20 acres of logistics and distribution land remain for sale from the original 160 acres at Solstice Park, for owner-occupier units to build from 20,000 sq ft to 150,000 sq ft.

DEVELOPMENT: Cliff Whitley, the development manager of Solstice Park, with 64 acres of land in the background. A 24-month construction project there, from August 2013, will see one of the UK’s largest retail discount names, Home Bargains, build a 1m sq ft regional distribution centre to serve 400 new stores across southern England. The £70m investment will see 1,200 jobs created, with hundreds more generated in the 400 new stores and from support services. Solstice Park is on the A303, on the outskirts of Amesbury near Stonehenge, the world-famous ancient monument. Solstice Park itself is a 160-acre, mixed-use business park with roadside and leisure facilities. Just 20 acres of logistics and distribution land remain for sale for owner-occupier units to build from 20,000 sq ft to 150,000 sq ft

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What's happening, at a glance

- T.J. Morris Limited, the discount retailer which trades as Home Bargains, buys 64 acres at Solstice Park, on the A303 in Amesbury, south Wiltshire.
- Distribution hub to be built; equivalent in size to 32 international soccer pitches.
- At least 1,200 jobs to be created, with hundreds more through 400 new stores and support services.
- Operational ‘go-live’ expected in September 2015, following commencement in August 2013.
- Southern management training centre to be built adjacent to the regional development centre, which 170 people a year will attend.
- Just 20 acres of logistics and distribution land remaining for sale from original 160 acres at Solstice Park, for owner-occupier units to build from 20,000 sq ft to 150,000 sq ft.

One of the fastest-growing discount retailers, and the second largest grocer in the UK, is to build a £70m regional distribution centre at Solstice Park, a flourishing business park in central southern England.

In an economic boost to the local and wider economy, an initial 1,200 jobs are to be created, with hundreds more to be generated through 400 new stores across southern England and additional support services.

In July 2013 major discount retailer T.J. Morris Ltd, which trades as Home Bargains, purchased the freehold to 64 acres of development land at Solstice Park on the A303 in south Wiltshire.

In a multi-million pound undisclosed deal contracts were formally completed between T.J. Morris and previous site owner Clowes Developments (UK), part of the Derbyshire-based property investment group called the CWC Group.

Including ancillary space, the Home Bargains distribution hub - equivalent to the size of 32 international soccer pitches - will cover 1m sq ft.

In the land deal, a 24,000 sq ft retail training facility for the company will also be built for 170 Home Bargains trainees annually, supporting local job creation in a real working environment.

Home Bargains immediately commenced works in August on the southern distribution hub, to create one of the most advanced regional distribution centres of its kind in Western Europe through its specialised electronic picking system.

The hub is programmed to be operational in Autumn 2015.

T.J. Morris, established 30 years ago by Tom Morris in Liverpool, currently has 300 stores, with 10,000 staff, and plans to expand to more than 700 stores within the next five years, selling top brands at bottom prices.

Home Bargains supplies 5,000 lines of leading products and top brands, including health and beauty products, food, toys and games, household, clothing, seasonal offers, sweets, snacks, drinks and alcohol, as well as its own Home Bargains range of affordable home style items.

The landmark deal means there are just 20 acres available for purchase of the original 160 acres at Solstice Park.

These would be suited to owner occupiers in the logistics and distribution sectors, for units from 20,000 sq ft to 150,000 sq ft.

Solstice Park is regarded by the commercial property sector as a premier mixed-use business location in central southern England because of the unique purpose-built ‘all ways’ junction on the A303 duelled trunk road.

There is also scant regional availability of build-to-suit distribution land.

Joe Morris, T.J. Morris’ Operations Director, said: “Solstice Park in central southern England is the ideal location for our new regional distribution centre; 98% of the south of England can be reached within a 4.5-hour HGV drive time.

“Our Home Bargains distribution centre will be among the most advanced in Western Europe, thanks to our sophisticated electronic picking system, with the technology developed in-house.

“We make no secret of our ambition to grow to 700 stores over the next five years, which is why Home Bargains needs to be at Solstice Park.

“The strategic logistics location at Solstice Park will provide a vitally important distribution role for us as the centre of gravity for our new stores as Home Bargains moves further south.

“The facility, a substantial £70m investment by T.J. Morris, will support 400 new stores and enable economies of scale, which will help keep prices very affordable for our loyal customers and enhance our market position as the discounter of choice. Home Bargains will continue to sell top brands at bottom prices.

“In a presentation to Amesbury Town Council, outlining in person our plans, we were grateful for the warm welcome from the local community. Home Bargains are wholly appreciative of the support we are receiving from so many quarters.

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“Hundreds of additional jobs are also being created locally through construction, fit-out and support services, as well as the 1,200-plus people who will be employed at this exceptional facility in southern England. Home Bargains will also need hundreds of new employees for our new stores.

“As a responsible employer, Home Bargains also realises the importance and sustainability of employing as many local people as possible – it will be our pleasure to do so.”

Target stores in Wiltshire include Amesbury, Salisbury, Devizes, Royal Wooton Bassett, Calne, Melksham, Chippenham and Warminster.

David Fahie FRICS, Development Director for Solstice Park, said: “The construction of Home Bargains’ £70m regional distribution centre, creating so many valuable jobs, underlines Solstice Park’s growing stature as the location for businesses to be in central southern England.

“This is incredibly positive news for the local and regional economy as a whole and this landmark T J Morris purchase means there are just 20 acres remaining for sale, of the original 160 acres.

“With Solstice Park now firmly on the UK logistics map, these remaining 20 acres would be suited to owner occupiers requiring units between 20,000 sq ft to 150,000 sq ft and we are already working on a number of serious buy-to-build leads.”

He added: “With the excellent road links, attractive infrastructure and proximity to a strong labour pool at Amesbury, backed by a major local house-building programme of some 2,200 homes, Solstice Park is now very much a key player in the regional economy.

“What we have created here over the last 12 years is a flourishing business park which now has its own momentum.”

Steve Mitchell a Director of London-based Colliers International, Solstice Park’s agent, said: “This is the largest freehold property deal to an owner occupier of its kind in central southern England for many years and should be celebrated by everyone who cares about UK plc.

“Given the scarcity of build-to-suit land available regionally, we anticipate other firms gravitating to Solstice Park, drawn by the ‘magnetic’ effect of Home Bargains.”

Solstice Park already has another major distribution centre occupier, Muller Wiseman Dairies. Built on over nine acres, the Wiseman facility is fully operational, with 300 staff who provide 30% of the milk consumed in Britain every day.

Meanwhile the largest UK bakery chain, Greggs Plc, has purchased a plot next to Robert Wiseman Dairies, where a 24/7 super-bakery is to be built on seven acres and generating a further 200 jobs.

Philip Holford a Director of Salisbury-based joint agents Myddelton & Major, which has been involved with Solstice Park since the outset, also welcomed the sale.

He said: “The sale to Home Bargains should generate positive interest in the remaining 20 acres on Solstice Park, which is allocated for logistics and distribution, especially as there is a lack of similar land elsewhere.

“The diversity of business now at Solstice Park is remarkable, from manufacturing and research to distribution and roadside, generating valuable tax revenues for under-pressure public services in these times of national austerity.

“Having been involved in the first sale of 20 acres to the Abbey Manor Group, Myddelton & Major is looking forward to being involved with the sale of the remaining 20 acres.”

Solstice Park has direct access to the A303, for which Solstice Park built its own junctions on the A303 trunk road dual carriageway, connecting to London (85 miles) via the M3, Heathrow Airport (71 miles) and Gatwick Airport (94 miles). Solstice Park is the gateway to the South West via the A303/M5.

Solstice Park is between London and Bristol with fast access to the ports of Southampton, Portsmouth and Bristol.

Solstice Park, which opened in October 2005, is named to associate itself with nearby Stonehenge, the world-famous monument dating back to 3,100 BC and possibly built with 30 million hours of labour for solar and lunar worship.

**Occupiers at Solstice Park**

Occupiers at Solstice Park's eleven acre roadside and leisure zone, fronting the A303, include Holiday Inn, Co-Op Food, a Co-op petrol filling station, Pizza Hut, KFC, Harvester, Solstice Bar and Grill and a drive-through Costa. A McDonald’s drive-thru is under construction and should open in January 2014.

The first phase of low-carbon offices, called The Crescent and 66,000 sq ft in size, to the south-east of Solstice Park, has been completed.

Occupiers include award-winning pet health insurser Animal Friends and recruitment consultancy Stephenson Research Associates, construction company RG Spiller. Further offices will become available as demand grows.

On the north-east of Solstice Park is The Beacon Centre, of which 14 out of 15 units have been sold or let. The centre comprises industrial/warehouse and trade counter units from 1,230 sq ft to 10,000 sq ft.

Beacon Centre occupiers include Great Western Ambulance Service, exhibition display specialist ProMedia, building company David Futcher, SG Systems, a provider of anti-theft solutions, Excalibur LPA, which supplies, designs and installs energy-saving equipment, Express Motor Workshop, water cooler provider Aquaid and Longlife, an exhaust systems specialist for motor vehicles.

Adjacent is the Tintometer Group, a world leader in colour measurement and water analysis, established at Solstice Park since 2005 and who now have five buildings on Solstice Park.

Further information can be found on the website www.solsticepark.com

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Latest transactions at Solstice Park

July 31: TJ Morris Ltd purchased 64 acres on Solstice Park for a southern regional distribution hub; planning consent has been secured for 1,013,150 sq ft floor area. Work commenced on this £70 million project in August and is expected to be completed in the autumn of 2015; 1,200 people will be employed in the new distribution hub to serve the expansion of the current 300 Home Bargains stores to 700 stores, selling top brands at bottom prices.

July 26: The Tintometer (Lovibond) purchased Plot C1, a 2.70 acre site upon which to build its new 30,000 sq ft headquarters. Designs are being prepared and Tintometer hope to commence works in early 2014.

May 31: A 0.74 acre plot was sold for a McDonald’s restaurant and drive-through. Construction works commenced immediately and the building shell is programmed to be completed at the end of October; the fit-out should be completed by the end of 2013.

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