

Case Name: The Point, Milton Keynes COI

Case Number: 1416721

Background

English Heritage has been asked to assess an application for a Certificate of Immunity from Listing (COI) for The Point, Milton Keynes. An application to list The Point was received in June 2012 and a recommendation not to add the building to the List was agreed by the Secretary of State in March 2013. An application for outline planning permission to demolish the building and develop the site (13/01729/OUT) was submitted to the local planning authority on 16 August 2013.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	N/A	The Point entertainment complex, Milton Keynes (COI)	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
none	No Visit / Data from other sources

Context

The circumstances of the building are understood not to have changed since the original site visit in October 2012 and a further visit is, therefore, not considered necessary. Additional photographs of the interior of the cinema foyer and auditoriums have been supplied by the consultants on behalf of the owner. Site visit photographs can be seen on case 1411617.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The applicant, local planning authority and amenity societies were all consulted.

The Cinema Theatre Association (CTA) made the following substantive comments:

CTA POINT 1

The CTA query whether The Point should not be considered for listing at Grade II rather than Grade II* on the basis that although conventionally a building has to be 30 years or older to be considered for listing at Grade II, this is not the case consistently. Two examples of buildings less than 30 years old being listed at Grade II are cited: The Bristol Shot Tower and The Express Lift Testing Tower in Northampton. The CTA also asserts that construction of The Point began in 1984 and that it will be over 30 years old at the start of 2014.

EH RESPONSE 1

The DCMS Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings (March 2010) states that 'buildings of less than 30 years old are normally listed only if they are of outstanding quality and under threat.' Both the examples of Grade II buildings cited were regarded as exceptional cases of unique industrial buildings and were both originally recommended at Grade II*. The word 'normally' in the guidance allows for some flexibility in the

grade but the general principle remains and is a well established one. Due to the high level of interest and survival required for the listing of such a young building, EH does not feel that the building merits listing at Grade II even were this an option within the DCMS guidelines. It is our understanding that construction began in August 1984, which is the start date used for designation considerations, and which means the building would not reach 30 years of age until August 2014.

CTA POINT 2

The CTA contests our assertion that the multiplex marks a relatively late stage in the evolution of the cinema and constitutes only a minor development in cinema design. It argues that the multiplex took on a physically different form and internal arrangement from the traditional cinema requiring sophisticated internal architectural planning for increased and more complex circulation and centralised projection. It contends that the multiplex is also distinct in terms of town planning as it was located outside the town centre as part of an automobile-accessible urban shopping experience. Lastly it repeats the contention that the multiplex is distinct from the traditional cinema because it revitalised and altered the cinema going experience in Britain.

Stuart Hanson is quoted in the *Historic Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. (33.2, 2013, p278), stating that 'As the first complex of its kind in Britain, it is clear that The Point did establish the template for multiplexes that followed – siting, design, features, programming – especially in the first 10 years after it opened. Though the necessity of function dictated that The Point's ambitious design was rarely repeated, multiplexes have sought to present cinema in a distinctive new form ... it is not an understatement to say that no other multiplex complex has been as adventurous or distinctive as The Point.'

EH RESPONSE 2

Whilst it is accepted that the multiplex, by offering greater choice of films in a single building, revitalised cinema attendance and that certain design features dependant on the provision of multiple screens, such as the centralised projection room, differ from those of traditional cinema design. We do not agree, however, that this constitutes a unique building type which, therefore, confers special historic interest on The Point as its first British example. We accept that the multiplex is an innovation in the history of cinema design which is of some interest but the actual cinema component of The Point has no architectural expression being merely a steel-clad box in form. A useful comparator would be The Royal National Theatre where form and function are carefully considered in creating a building with multiple auditoriums. The design, construction and fittings are all of a very high order creating a building of more than special architectural interest.

It is accepted that there is a degree of specialist interest in the layout of the cinema to enable centralised projection but this innovation carries insufficient weight to constitute special interest without, in this case, the intrinsic high quality of design, finish and materials, as well as intactness, necessary for listing post-war buildings. Both components of The Point have been refurbished internally, and importantly the internal plan of the pyramid, which defined how large numbers of people were channelled towards the cinema screens and catered for, has been lost.

The contention that multiplexes fundamentally differ from traditional cinemas in being located away from town centres would appear to be contradicted in the case of The Point which is in the centre of Milton Keynes, albeit with the provision of ample car parking, a general feature of the town's planning. Stuart Hanson's statement that The Point established the template for multiplexes that followed is undermined by the fact that other multiplexes were in construction at the same time thus limiting The Point's sole claim to innovation. Moreover, the template for the multiplex was actually established in its prior development in the USA.

CTA POINT 3

CTA emphasises the rarity of the ziggurat as a form. It accepts that listed examples exist including the accommodation blocks of the University of East Anglia, the Brunswick Centre and the Alexandra Road Estate but argues that these are concrete structures and that The Point is unique in being a glazed steel-framed version of the form and put to use for an entertainment building.

EH RESPONSE 3

It is accepted that the ziggurat is a relatively unusual design form, irrespective of materials, but this does not in itself confer listing status. Again this is just one aspect of its potential architectural interest and has to be considered alongside other factors including quality of overall design, materials, quality of build and intactness. The ziggurat form employed here is actually somewhat vestigial, consisting of three blocks placed on top of each other, more for effect than function, a fact emphasised by the acknowledged marketing relationship between the red metal framing and the red Bass triangular logo. The listed examples, given above, display a far greater relationship between form and function as they allowed flats on multiple storeys to all have their own patios.

It is instructive that the earlier Bletchley Leisure Centre (completed 1975), although arguably a far more striking use of the ziggurat/pyramidal form was not recommended for listing.

CTA POINT 4

CTA reiterates its argument that the design was influenced by the architectural theories of Archigram and in particular the Sin Centre project by Mike Webb.

EH RESPONSE 4

No additional evidence of this contention is put forward other than the suggestion that Alec Stevenson who designed The Point must have been more than familiar with Archigram's drawings and that the pyramid form resembles some of these drawings. This is insufficient to alter our view that the case is unproven and even were it to be established it would only constitute a relatively minor point of interest.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

With due regard to the Consultation responses received and discussed above, English Heritage is satisfied that the conclusion of the original assessment that The Point did not meet the criteria for listing remains valid. It is therefore recommended that a Certificate of Immunity from Listing be issued.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The issue of a Certificate of Immunity from Listing for The Point, Milton Keynes, built in 1984-5 to provide a mixed-use leisure centre for the new town of Milton Keynes and including the first example of a multiplex cinema to open in Britain, is recommended for the following principal reasons:

* Historic interest: as the first purpose-built multiplex cinema to open in Britain, The Point has some claim to historic interest since the importation of this marketing strategy from America, with its choice of films under one roof and enhanced refreshment facilities, is credited with the revival in fortune of cinema attendance after its post-war decline. However, in terms of the history of cinema, the development of the multiplex represents a relatively late stage in its evolution and marks, despite some innovation in internal layout, only a minor development in cinema design;

* Architectural interest: a single leisure facility, comprising two separate buildings linked by a covered walkway, of which the cinema element consists of a metal-clad box, lacking special interest in either its interior design or exterior form. The ziggurat pyramid, originally housing the other leisure facilities, has some claim to architectural interest for its eye-catching, commercially-orientated, function-driven design, but because of budget constraints was not built to a consistently high standard nor with high quality materials and detailing;

* Alteration: the building, apart from the basement bingo hall, has suffered from continual refurbishment and, in the case of the ziggurat, change of use. Consequently, little survives of the original interior features. The original design of the cinema foyer has been changed and the overall functional plan has been compromised by the insertion of office space into the ground floor of the ziggurat. Additional minor alterations to the exterior of the building have eroded its character further.

Countersigning comments:

We have considered this COI case with great care. Milton Keynes has claims to interest for its approach to town planning and the cinema complex is part of this American tradition. For a building constructed in 1984 the bar for listing is very high indeed and we agree with our previous assessment that the Point does not pass that threshold. However historically significant the Point may be, there is little architectural expression in the cinema block itself that reflects its function, and alterations to key areas of the plan and fittings of both components are a major consideration. [REDACTED] 25.11.13

Second Countersigning comments:

Agreed also. We have carefully and recently considered this building for listing and the DCMS agreed with our recommendation, in March 2013, that The Point was not of listable quality. Having considered the case again, including detailed comments provided by the Cinema Theatre Association, we remain of this view and are therefore recommending that a COI is granted.

██████████, 27th November 2013

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: The Point entertainment complex, Milton Keynes (COI)

Location: The Point, Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes,

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Milton Keynes	Unitary Authority	Central Milton Keynes

History

In 1982 the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) published a report entitled 'Milton Keynes City Centre Entertainment: A Development Activity'. This followed public consultation which had revealed that inhabitants of the New Town felt that it lacked 'conventional entertainment (e.g. cinema, bingo etc)'. The report set out the requirement for a leisure and entertainment complex on a city centre site and invited proposals from interested developers. A joint proposal from Bass Leisure and the US company American Multi-Cinema (AMC) for a leisure complex boasting a multiplex cinema with bingo hall, restaurants and a night club was accepted for a site next to the shopping centre on Midsummer Boulevard. AMC saw this as an ideal initial venture to import the multiplex concept that had been developed in the suburbs of American cities and which they had been interested in introducing to Britain since 1979. This presented something of a risk since British cinema attendance had reached an all time low in the early 1980s but Milton Keynes with its estimated catchment area of 1.5 million people and car friendly environment was seen as a perfect location for the introduction of the multiplex with its key attributes of customer choice, ease of access and glamorous surroundings.

The concept and design of the building was largely the work of interior designer Neil Tibbatts of Tibbatts and Company who specialised in nightclub, restaurant and pub designs and included Bass as clients. Building Design Partnership (BDP) were employed as consultant architects and engineers. Alec Stevenson of the Manchester branch of BDP was the lead architect on the project. The original concept was for an 80 foot pyramid of mirrored glass with a windowless silver block at the rear containing the cinema. This was modified under budgetary pressures to a 70 foot ziggurat structure (while retaining the pyramid concept in the use of a framing pyramidal steel structure, partly since this reflected the red triangle logo of Bass) with three terraces containing the two restaurants, bingo hall and night club (managed by Bass) and retaining the windowless rear cinema block. This included ten cinema screens with a total seating capacity of 2,026. It is asserted that the design was influenced by the work of Archigram, a 1960s avant-garde architectural group emanating from the Architectural Association who produced futuristic, high-tech, theoretical projects which were influential in some architectural circles. In particular, the final design for The Point is somewhat redolent of Mike Webb's thesis project at the Regent Street Polytechnic from 1959-62 called the 'Sin Centre Entertainment Centre' for Leicester Square. However, any influence from Archigram was not mentioned in any articles in the building press at the time and is perhaps largely circumstantial, based on Mike Webb's involvement with BDP: the influence of Archigram must be regarded as unproven. The design is also of interest as a relatively early use of architectural computer-aided design (CAD) in the production of the drawings.

Construction on the scheme, costing £9 million, started in August 1984 and it opened in November 1985 when it was described by the owners as the first multiplex cinema in Britain and Europe's first fully-integrated entertainment centre. A year after opening the operator changed to United Cinemas International (UCI). After initial commercial success, there followed a steady decline in attendance from the early 1990s. Following subsequent competition from Cineworld's larger Xcape complex which opened in 2002, in 2003 UCI sold its interest in the cinema to the easyGroup who operated the cinema on the budget principles of its airline. The interior of the foyer was stripped out in line with the budget concept which, however, proved unsuccessful and in 2006 operation of the cinema was taken over by Odeon Cinemas who refurbished the building.

Details

The Point entertainment complex consists of two separate buildings linked by a short glazed walkway. To the north-west is a three-storey, steel-framed, glazed ziggurat set on a paved terrace and forecourt over a basement. The building originally contained a bar and restaurant area on the ground floor, a bingo hall in the basement and a night club on the upper storey, with its lighting rig housed in the uppermost block. In 1995

the night club was converted to a health club and subsequently a community centre, while the ground floor now contains a restaurant and office space. To the south-east and at a lower level is the multiplex cinema.

The ziggurat is framed by a pyramidal, red-painted, steel frame consisting of square section trusses (originally lit with red neon lights at night but the lights have been removed) with ball feet, adjoining the top corners of the glass boxes and extending horizontally and vertically to provide a decorative framework to the ziggurat. The frame also extends to provide an entrance canopy with a billboard over it. Some of the vertical elements of the steel frame terminate in small metal spheres set just off the ground. Structurally, the ziggurat is a separate steel-framed building, independent of the outer decorative steel structure, and clad in reflective glass panels set in metal frames with rubber fillets. Mounted in pairs on the terraces on the side elevations of the ziggurat and surrounding paved lower terrace are angular ventilation ducts with fibre-glass cladding. These were a late addition to the design when, due to budgetary cuts, the intended air-conditioning was replaced by a forced ventilation system. The main entrance, on the north-western elevation, is set into a glazed recess. The entrances themselves, including the door furniture and the surrounding glazed panels, are replacements. On the south-east side of the building are a pair of steel spiral stair cases, accessed via walkways, which link the terrace on the first glazed level to the ground floor. Access to the basement bingo hall was via two external stairs set into the paved fore-court in front of the ziggurat, flanking the entrance. These have wedge-shaped glazed canopies over the stairways. The current entrance (eastern of the two) is marked by a steel arch with a corrugated steel hood supported by plain tubular steel columns, whereas the other has ceased to function as an entrance and has had a newspaper kiosk inserted within it. The rear of the basement area, facing the cinema has louvred steel cladding.

The interior of the ziggurat has been remodelled several times and its original layout has been largely lost. Few elements of the original fittings appear to survive other than the steel-framed staircase up to the first-floor nightclub and metal spiral stair to its original lighting gallery. The layout of the bingo hall presumably remains largely as designed but the survival of original fittings is unclear.

The multiplex cinema comprises a windowless, steel-framed, flat-roofed rectangular 'box'. The glazed foyer with a sloping glazed roof was originally connected to the ziggurat via a steel-framed glazed canopy with a pitched roof but this has been closed off. The building is clad with smooth metal panels, although some of these appear to have been replaced with Perspex or glass.

The interior of the cinema was not inspected but photographs of the foyer and auditoriums have been provided by the consultant. The interior is understood to have been altered by successive operators. The spacious full-height foyer has been remodelled round the original steel columns which have marbled bases and splayed circular capitals. The auditoriums are of uniform appearance and have two designs of raked tip-up seating and plain plastered walls with box-like dado panelling to the aisles.

Selected Sources

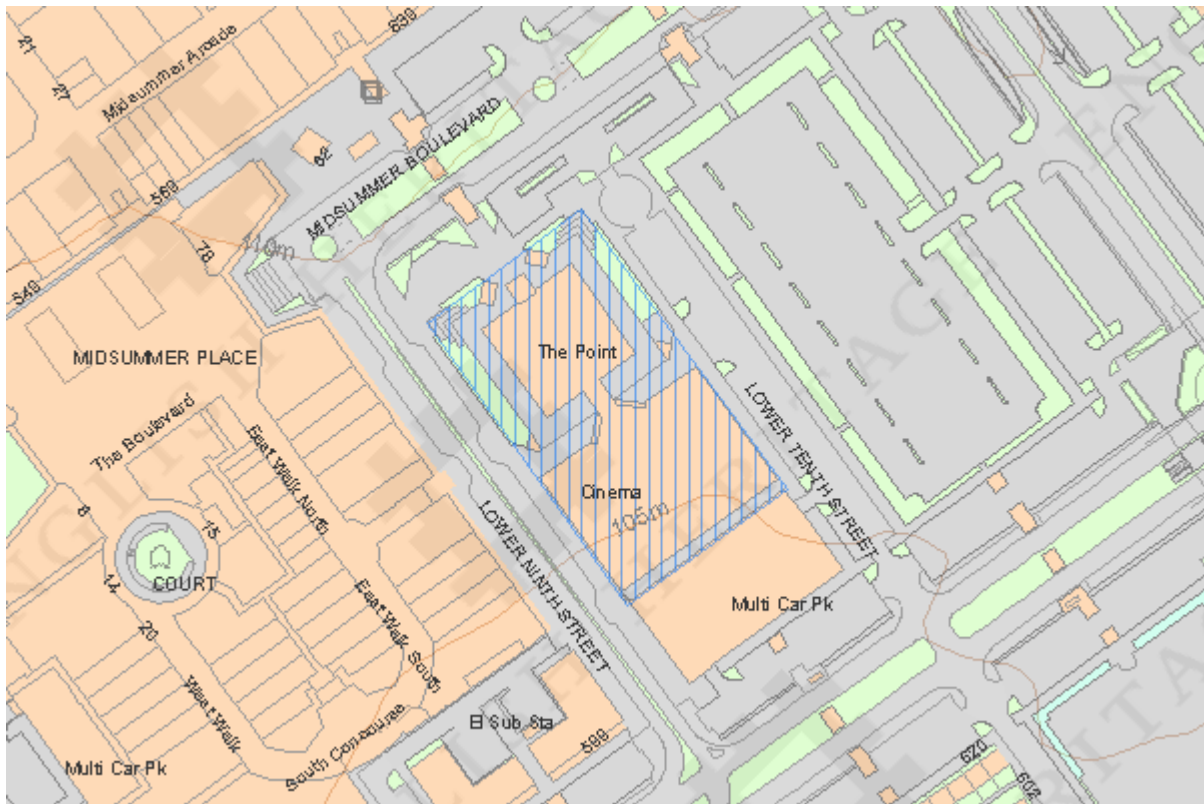
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Map**National Grid Reference: SP8546638833**

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