

Case Name: The Point, Milton Keynes

Case Number: 1465581

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess The Point, Milton Keynes, for listing.

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	HE Recommendation
1	1466939	The Point	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
23 July 2019	Partial inspection

Context

An earlier assessment in 2014 led to the conclusion that the building was not listable. A Certificate of Immunity (COI) was granted shortly afterwards, which ran from January 2014 and expired in January 2019. At the time of the granting of the 2014 COI the building was less than thirty years old, which is no longer the case.

Planning permission for demolition was granted on 17 Feb 2015 (ref 13/01729/OUT). Outline permission for the replacement building was granted on 11 March 2019 (ref 18/00371/REM).

The building does not stand in a conservation area. It is in proximity to The Shopping Building, Milton Keynes (Grade II), which faces the building on the northern side of Midsummer Boulevard.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

The owner, the owner's representative, the applicant, the local authority and the Twentieth Century Society were invited to comment on the factual details of the case as part of the consultation process.

We received a response from the Twentieth Century Society who said that they believed that the building should be listed at Grade II. They believe that the status of the building as the first multiplex cinema in England is important and helped to revive interest in cinema going as a leisure activity. They also felt that the architecture of the building is noteworthy and that its triangular form was unique in Milton Keynes.

In advance of our consultation process a Professor of Architecture and Global Culture, at The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London sent a letter as part of the application process. In their opinion, the Point was part of an advanced pattern of architectural thinking that was attuned to American forms of consumerism and fast-moving fashions with potential obsolescence as a consequence. It is a notable example of high-tech design applied to leisure buildings and was indicative of BDP's thinking which took the forms developed by Archigram as its inspiration, as opposed to Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. The concept of a multiplex also fitted with the suburban, car-based lifestyle that was a hallmark of Milton Keynes.

Also in advance of the consultation process, we received a letter from the owner's representative in which they pointed out that the building had previously been granted a COI and that outline planning permission had now been granted for the site, in line with the local development plan.

DISCUSSION

The Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings (November 2018) state that particularly careful selection is required for buildings from the period after 1945. Post-war buildings must exhibit a high quality of design and use of materials, a degree of innovation in concept or technology and have on a high level of survival of original fabric, plan and detail. Where the interior plan, fixtures and finishes are an important element of a design, their survival can be critical to designation.

The Historic England Listing Selection Guide for Culture and Entertainment Buildings (December 2017) does not specifically deal with multiplex cinemas but notes that post-1945 cinemas are rarely of interest and that most were built as part of office developments and so should be assessed on the architectural interest of the whole building. The survival of original features and plans are important and the large number of surviving examples of the type mean that careful selection is necessary, and architectural quality is an important consideration.

The Curzon Mayfair Cinema, London Borough of Westminster (1963-1966, Grade II) is the only post-war cinema that is currently listed (other than the Renoir Cinema, London Borough of Camden, listed at Grade II as part of the Brunswick Centre), and it is noted for its impressive interior. Ernő Goldfinger's cinema, designed and built during the second phase of the commercial development (Alexander Fleming House) at Elephant and Castle, London Borough of Southwark in 1963-1967, was demolished in 1988.

As the first example of a multiplex cinema in Britain, and notwithstanding that it was one of a number planned for opening around this time, The Point has some claims to historic interest. The introduction of the multiplex cinema has been credited with revitalising cinema attendance which had been in a steady decline since the introduction of television and this fact is of note in terms of the social history of the country, despite the concept having been imported from the United States. However, in terms of the history of cinemas as a distinct building type, it can be argued that the multiplex was merely a natural development of existing cinema design, the template for which was established between the early 1900s and the 1930s. In essence this comprised a windowless auditorium and, increasingly, an elaborate entrance foyer. The design of multiplex cinemas merely substitutes multiple auditoria. The provision of multiple screens was not in itself a new concept since the division of existing cinemas to provide multiple screens had been taking place since the 1970s. Multiplexes, therefore, represent a development of the cinema-going experience, with an emphasis on generating greater custom through a larger choice of films on offer and extensive front-of-house food and beverages facilities, rather than a fundamental change in either cinema design or use. In so far as multiplex designs do depart from traditional cinema planning it is through their more usual location as part of office developments or shopping malls as opposed to forming a prominent element in the streetscape of the High Street. The Point is atypical of this trend, being a stand-alone cinema with an added entertainment complex. The unproven influence of the architectural concepts of Archigram and early use of CAD are lesser considerations in terms of historical interest. Neither its status as the first British multiplex, nor its concept as an integrated entertainment complex is of such historical interest that it warrants designation for these reasons alone. While certainly of note for its place within the development of Milton Keynes as a new town, this factor does not confer special interest.

As regards the architectural interest of the building, this resides principally in the post-modernist ziggurat of the entertainment element of the complex, since the cinema itself comprises a simple metal-clad box whose exterior form reveals little of its function. Regarding the cinema block, any ornament was concentrated on the interior, specifically the foyer, which originally had marbled columns. However, this area has been greatly altered through subsequent re-branding. Even as built, it lacked a visual coherence and cannot be regarded as ever having had the high architectural interest inherent in the spatial design and quality of finishes of a cinema such as the Curzon Mayfair or a number of post-war theatres which offer another comparison. The latter, by contrast, were built to innovative designs of high architectural merit, reflecting changes in theatre production, and as a genre their quality is increasingly widely recognised. As was intended, the ziggurat element of the design, beneath its red steel frame, provides an eye-catching focus to the complex, although its effect as a landmark has been somewhat reduced by subsequent nearby development. Leaving aside arguments around the architectural legitimacy of its largely non-structural pyramidal steel frame, the design has a notable commercial boldness, the form of the ziggurat reflecting the function within. The use of reflective glass, here on the core of the ziggurat, was adopted in larger buildings in the new town as elsewhere in the country at that date to diffuse the effect of large surfaces (including the Shopping Centre on the opposite side of Midsummer Boulevard). Although effective, it is not innovative. The ziggurat as an

architectural form had been previously explored in such buildings as the accommodation blocks at the University of East Anglia (Denys Lasdun 1964-1968 - listed Grade II*), the Brunswick Centre, LB Camden (Patrick Hodgkinson, 1967-1972 - listed Grade II) and the Alexandra Road Estate, LB Camden (Neave Brown, 1968-1978 - listed Grade II*). Another similarly conceived building to the Point, the brown Perspex pyramid at the nearby Bletchley Leisure Centre (1970-1973, now demolished), was turned down for listing in 2008.

Beyond this, however, the use of materials, the quality of the detail and the quality of the surviving interiors fall short of the high standards necessary for listing post-war buildings. The use of high quality materials, a key factor of the listed Central Milton Keynes Shopping Building (Grade II), is largely absent here while the detailing of the external freestanding steel frame is somewhat crude. In addition, the building has suffered notable alterations. The point raised by the Professor of Architecture and Global Culture, at The Bartlett School of Architecture, that the design took its cues from America as well as the work of Archigram may well be true, but the intended design was compromised in execution. From the outset the design was altered from its intended glazed pyramid for budgetary reasons and during construction the rather unsightly glass-fibre ventilation ducts were added in lieu of the intended air conditioning. Externally, the building remains largely as built, on its terraced podium, but the main entrance and secondary entrance to the bingo hall have been altered and the neon lighting to the metal frame has been removed. This last, although minor in terms of actual fabric has had a major effect on the essentially night-time character of the building. Coupled with the change of function from a cinema with a night club this has deprived the building of its quality of night and day architecture which extended activity in the city centre and was one of the building's original characteristics. The interiors, other than the bingo hall, have been radically altered in terms of usage, layout and decorative schemes. The original open plan character of the ground floor with its various restaurants and bars flanking the thoroughfare to the link building and cinema has been lost, and access to the cinema closed off by the current arrangement of office accommodation.

The Point is a building of strong local interest as the result of a public consultation by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) on the new town's requirements for an entertainment centre, resulting in a mixed-use venue incorporating the country's first multiplex cinema. However, this significance is not sufficient to warrant listing on historical interest alone. Because of the limits imposed on the original design and the subsequent degree of alteration, it lacks the special architectural interest to merit listing, and in particular falls short of the higher standards required to list buildings of this recent date.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled. The Point, built in 1984-1985 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, does not meet the criteria for listing. It cannot be recommended for listing.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The Point, built in 1984-1985 to provide a mixed-use leisure centre for the new town of Milton Keynes, including the first example of a multiplex cinema to open in Britain, is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

Degree of Historic interest:

* as the first purpose-built multiplex cinema to open in Britain, The Point has some claim to historic interest. 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 only a minor development in cinema design.

Degree of 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 it was not built to a consistently high standard nor with high quality materials and detailing;

* the building, apart from the basement bingo hall, has undergone significant refurbishment and, in the case of the ziggurat, change of use. Consequently, little survives of the original interior features or layout, while additional minor alterations to the exterior have eroded its character further.

Group interest:

* although the building has some group interest with the Central Milton Keynes Shopping Building (Grade II), this is not enough to compensate for the lack of architectural or historic special interest.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. We have carefully reassessed The Point and recommend that it should not be added to the List. Although we acknowledge that the building has some interest as the first multiplex in the country, the quality of materials used and extent of alteration are such that it does not have the requisite special architectural or historic interest for a building of this date to be listed.

20 September 2019

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: The Point

Location: 602 Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes, MK9 3NB

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 (for example 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 80ft pyramid of mirrored glass with a windowless silver block at the rear containing the cinema. This was modified under budgetary pressures to a 70ft 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 1959-1962 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.

The cinema area of the building, including its foyer is now unused. The bingo hall continues in operation and other areas of the ziggurat block have mainly been converted to office use.

Details

A mutliplex cinema complex, including a bingo hall, restaurant and bar of 1984-1985 designed by Neil Tibbatts and the Building Design Partnership (BDP).

MATERIALS and PLAN: 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. The ground floor formerly had a restaurant to left of the entrance on Midsummer Boulevard and a bar to the right. Both of these have now been converted to office space, although many of the fittings remain. To the south-east and at a lower level is the multiplex cinema.

EXTERIOR: 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. The frame adjoins the top corners of the glass boxes and extends 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 staircases, accessed via walkways, which link the terrace on the first glazed level to the ground floor. Access to the basement bingo hall was originally 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 louvered steel cladding.

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.

INTERIOR: 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 appears to remain largely as designed but the survival of original fittings is unclear.

The spacious, full-height foyer has been remodelled around 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. One of these was inspected (2019) and revealed that rows of seating have been removed. The interior is understood to have been altered by successive operators before the closure of the multiplex.

Selected Sources

Books and journals

Pevsner, N, Williamson, E, *The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*, (2000), 495

Websites

'How Multiplex cinemas saved the British Film Industry 25 years ago', accessed 23-07-2019 from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/nov/11/multiplex-cinemas-the-point-milton-keynes>

Map

National Grid Reference: SP8546438836



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