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To:
Operations Team
Heritage Protection Department
English Heritage
1 Waterhouse Square
138-142, Holborn
London, EC1 2ST

05 June 2012

Dear Sir or Madam:

THE POINT (incl. Odeon cinema), Midsummer Boulevard, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire;
Building Design Partnership with Neil Tibbatts as interior designer, 1985

Application for inclusion in the statutory list of buildings of special historic and architectural interest

The Cinema Theatre Association wishes to submit the *The Point* entertainment centre for consideration of inclusion in the statutory list. While it is the nation's first multiplex cinema it is also Europe's first such complex.

The building has been under threat of redevelopment since a further multiplex leisure centre opened in 2000 in the direct vicinity. The developers Hammerson are now submitting an outline planning application for the demolition of The Point and the redevelopment of its site:

<http://thepointmiltonkeynes.co.uk/can%20it%20be%20renovated.html>

and

<http://thepointmiltonkeynes.co.uk/our%20vision.html>

Remit:

The Cinema Theatre Association is the national body for the study and protection of historic cinema buildings. Our specialist expertise is sought by The Ancient Monuments Society, The Theatres Trust, The Twentieth Century Society, The Victorian Society as well as many local authorities on planning applications regarding alterations and demolition of cinemas. The Cinema Theatre Association also functioned as an adviser to English Heritage during their survey on cinemas in 1999.

Supporting Documentation

Enclosed with this application are:

- External photographs of the building taken 1988-2009:
 - ILL 1 The Point, Milton Keynes 1988
 - ILL 2 The Point, Milton Keynes 1990
 - ILL 3 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 4 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 5 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 6 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 7 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 8 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 9 The Point, Milton Keynes 2008
 - ILL 10 The Point, Milton Keynes 2009
 - ILL 11 The Point, Milton Keynes 2009
 - ILL 12 The Point, Milton Keynes 2009

- Plan of typical multiplex:
 - ILL 13 Plan of typical multiplex cinema from *Cinemas in Britain*

- Archigram images:
 - ILL 14 Archigram, The metropolis in Archigram 5, 1964-5
 - ILL 15 Archigram, Plug-in University 1965
 - ILL 16 Archigram, Control and Choice, spaceframe 1967
 - ILL 17 Archigram, Ron Herron, Instant City, spaceframes and projection 1969

- Press Release by Bass and AMC, 21 November 1985.

- Academic research paper on the history of the multiplex in UK by Stuart Hanson of De Montfort University, Leicester, 2010.

The Architecture of the Multiplex:***The Point* within the historic context of the cinema as a building type**

The Point in Milton Keynes was the first multiplex cinema to be built in the UK and according to the operator's press release from 21 November 1985 also Europe's first modern fully-integrated entertainment centre.

The development of multiplex cinemas was the greatest leap in the history of the cinema as a modern building type since the Cinematograph Act came into force on

11 January 1910. After this act was instituted buildings in which films were shown had to have a license to do so. Before that only a license to play music was required for the piano or orchestra that accompanied the film show. It also stipulated that the projection equipment had to be physically separated from the auditorium and located in a fireproof room of its own in order to protect the audience from the risk of fire. Because of the flammability of the nitrate film in combination with the heat generated by the light of the projection equipment fires in cinemas had become a frequent occurrence. While until then films were commonly shown in corn exchanges, theatres or other large halls that were adapted for this purpose, now buildings were being built specifically as cinemas. As a developmental stage within the history of this building type these first purpose-built cinemas are therefore of real importance.

While the Cinematograph Act gave the impetus for the purpose- built cinema to emerge, the development of the multiplex development was responsible for significant changes in the way films were viewed. While the auditoria became smaller and were no longer ornate, the foyers as a place to congregate and as a space of retail opportunities and film advertisements stepped into the foreground.

The multiplex was introduced from the United States and there had successfully transformed the film-going experience. Unlike the traditional 'High Street' cinema that relied on one large auditorium and subordinate circulation spaces, the multiplex is often a freestanding building with multiple small 'screens' that are serviced by one large projection booth. It was originally located either on the urban periphery or in a suburban or out-of-town setting following the US model. More recent developments include them now in city centre shopping facilities. The primary space of interest is the foyer with its ticket points and concessions stands, and most significantly as a place to meet and greet other people. Richard Gray writes in his seminal book *Cinemas in Britain* (2nd edition, Lund Humphries: 2011):

A large foyer is required to sell snacks and film spin-off merchandising to cinema-goers, rather than to impress with any sense of grandeur. Statistics tell us film is largely popular with the young children and young adults. Such interiors therefore have to appeal - to accentuate the experience of an evening out, and imply fun, expectation and excitement. The multiplex foyer varies between the conventional manifestation of the 'machine aesthetic' and evoked Americana - a Las Vegas drive-by neon sky-sign-comes-indoors approach, either with full height 'stage sets' ... or cut-out film advertising, both with projected images directed towards the floor and walls.

American Multi-Cinema (AMC) had more than 20 years of experience pioneering the development of multi-screen cinemas within shopping malls and had through these highly successful ventures grown into the third largest film circuit in the United States. The firm was well prepared when it departed on the risky venture of opening a new cinema complex in the flagging UK marketplace of the 1980s. The suburban landscape of Milton Keynes with its grid street layout is reminiscent of American town planning schemes that rely on the car as the primary mode of transportation. Because of these parallels this new town was the ideal testing ground for introducing an all inclusive film venue to be located near a shopping centre but within an independent structure away from the traditional High Street.

Cinema-going in the UK had been in serious decline since the late 1950s, because of the emergence of independent TV stations. In 1984 the continuously falling numbers reached their final plateau. This was the year *The Point* opened its doors for business. The development of the multiplex completely turned this situation around and heralded in a new and to this day successful era of the cinema. Today there are 292 multiplexes in Britain. Since its all-time low in 1984 when admissions fell to 54 million cinema-going is has trebled with admissions consistently above 150 million since 2000. Because of this the multiplex is highly important within the history of the cinema as a building type.

While the connection to the American multiplex is significant, the evolution of the multiplex as cinema and leisure complex can be understood also within uniquely British architectural developments. Archigram's paper projects anticipate the high tech structural language of *The Point* as well as the multi-functional entertainment programme. Archigram were the RIBA Gold Medalists of 2002 for their contribution to architecture. David Rock the former president of RIBA stated:

The phenomenon that is Archigram (from ARCHitecture and teleGRAM) changed the world of architecture in the sixties and seventies and has influenced many world class, and less famous, architects - and architecture generally - ever since.

The group was founded in the 1960 and its members included Peter Cook, Warren Chalk, Dennis Compton, David Greene, Ron Herron and Mike Webb. The projects that they devised remained hypothetical and were disseminated by drawings and collages, hence the name Archigram. The printed sheets were very much inspired by pop art and especially the super-hero cartoon and were groundbreaking in terms of changing the architectural visual language. The projects themselves were full of an optimism for new and experimental materials and technologies such as the space frame and pneumatics. These high-tech fantasies often envisaged multifunctional and mega-structures. The mass consumer was of central concern to their project manoeuvring through 'Instant', 'Plug-In' or 'Living' Cities. Archigram turned architecture into something exciting, something to be experienced and entertainment was at its conceptual core. Architecture was no longer a static shell.

Conceptually Mike Webb's thesis project at the Regent Street Polytechnic is of particular interest within this context. It dated from 1959-62 and was called the Sin Centre Entertainment Centre for Leicester Square. It is set within the nation's cinema centre and was to include a bowling alley, cinema, theatre, dance area, coffee bars, and pubs.

Indeed *The Point* in Milton Keynes could be a segment of Archigram's *Plug-In City* with its high-tech space frame construction and neon lighting.

The development of *The Point* in the context of Milton Keynes:

Milton Keynes was conceived as the final and most ambitious British New Town of the post-war era. By 1982 the Milton Keynes Development Corporation (MKDC) had identified the need for a leisure and entertainment. The development site was in a prime location on Midsummer Boulevard directly adjacent to the shopping

centre that was completed in 1979. Although nationwide cinema-going had been in serious decline since the end of WWII, population surveys and consultations in Milton Keynes revealed that it was precisely traditional forms of entertainment such as cinema, bingo and a nightclub that the residents wanted.

Bass Leisure was successful in putting together the bid with their emphasis on the multiplex cinema as the main attraction of the leisure and entertainment facility. Because there was to date no experienced British multiplex operator, the US firm American Multi-Cinemas was appointed to design and operate the cinema while Bass was responsible for the other components of the facility. AMC were leading the way in the multiplex business in the US and had been interested in expanding to the UK already by 1979. Alongside the 10-screen cinema that housed in a cuboid structure with a seating capacity of 2026, the leisure centre included two restaurants and bar on the ground floor of the pyramid, a nightclub above as well as a social club and children's' entertainment area. A bingo hall underground was accessible through a separate entrance. The complex as a whole could accommodate 6000 people cost £9 million.

Architectural Interest

High Tech and Postmodern

The entertainment complex of *The Point* consists of two interconnected primary architectural forms. The entrance block is in the shape of a ziggurat or stepped pyramid and housed the eating venues, the dance club and bingo hall. It is linked to the cuboid structure of the cinema complex with its ten screens and foyer.

Bass leisure and American Multi-Cinema had appointed Building Design Partnership (BDP) as architects. BDP's press release from 1988 announced:

Milton Keynes' unique entertainment centre The Point, designed by Building Design Partnership, is a 70 foot high mirrored crystal ziggurat within a bright red steel exposed lattice pyramid frame. Now an established landmark for the city, the design concept for the The Point was produced in conjunction with interior designer Neil Tibbatts and developed on BDP's Acropolis computer-aided design system.

The Point houses a discotheque, bars, two restaurants, a 1500 seat bingo, social club and children's entertainments all on a number of levels. The ziggurat acts as the front entrance emphasis for the complex and all this part is operated by Bass Leisure. The theatrical use of interior and exterior lighting is achieved via the pyramid frame which carries the lighting and acts as a display medium for rapidly changing signs and banners. At the rear is Britain's first purpose-built ten screen multiplex cinema with a seating capacity for over 2000 seats. This is operated by American Multi-Cinema and connects to the Bass section via a glazed link.

Sited on Midsummer Boulevard, the Point is directly opposite the city's successful shopping area. Hailed as a 'unique concept in entertainment', The Point provides a fully integrated entertainment venue for the rapidly expanding population of Milton Keynes and the residents of the surrounding region. 'Cinema again has a future in this country,' said film producer David Puttnam at the opening. The truth of this has

been proved by the high attendances at the cinema since its opening, stimulated by the wide selection of films and low ticket prices in an attractive environment.

The building is of great interest on a multitude of levels. It connects conceptually to the 'paper architecture' of Archigram. The Metropolis project that was featured in Archigram 5 in 1964-5 shows ziggurat structures by Leopold Gerstel, the ziggurat reappears as spaceframe structure with prefabricated units in the *Plug-In University* project of 1965. The spaceframe and projection are important parts of Archigram's projects in general and feature in different reincarnations repeatedly such as *Control and Choice* project from 1967 and the *Instant City* by Ron Herron from 1969.

The Point is also illustrative of the theories on "the duck and the decorated shed" in Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour's seminal book *Learning from Las Vegas* published in 1972 that anticipated an architecture of Postmodernism. Venturi distinguished between two types of architecture common in the "automobile-oriented commercial architecture of the urban sprawl" in terms of how they communicated their meaning.

"The duck" is an architecture that takes on a sculptural form and that is symbolic for its meaning. The building is its own symbol.

"The decorated shed" is the architecture of the anonymous box that applies symbols on the street front facade that are then read to identify the meaning and purpose of the building.

What is interesting about *The Point* is that it has both "the duck" – the pyramid – and "the shed". Rather than a two-dimensional surface treatment of the street front façade (facadism) *The Point* employs "the duck" as its decoration: The pyramid has a point and the building is called *The Point*. The building is overtly obvious in its form and instantly recognizable.

While the cinema screens were housed within the windowless block – or shed – the iconic shape of the stepped pyramid or ziggurat was chosen for the entrance block. The ziggurat was a Babylonian structure and the word Babylon to this day has associations with a bustling nightlife. The triangular steel space frame that holds the prismatic glass stepped form is structural but also functions as an important fixture for lighting and advertisement.

Lighting and especially neon has been used within cinema architecture since the 1920s. Because cinema was primarily a form of night time entertainment, neon was often used to emphasise the outlines of the building, its tower, canopy and signage. While the façade receded into the dark, the building's form could be read in the dark: The building became its own sign. The idea for this "Nachtarchitektur" came over from Germany and was quickly and most successfully taken on by Oscar Deutsch for his new Odeon cinemas. Like with the "Nachtarchitektur" of traditional cinemas, *The Point* became its own beacon and sign for people from afar at nightfall. Lighting was a very important part of its architecture; this building was all about light shows and projection but also very much about the red triangle that was the Bass trademark.

The use of the pyramid structure for the entrance block is not coincidental or frivolous and the iconic form worked on many levels. The logo of Bass Brewery is a red triangle and was the UK's first trademark registered in 1876 under the Trade Mark Registration Act that was instituted in 1875. While the red triangular space frames are visible during the day, their dramatic illumination with red neon strip lighting could be read in darkness as a landmark beacon to the entertainment centre but was also readable as an icon of this British beer. The architecture of Postmodernism is also very much about communication.

Charles Jencks, the architectural historian and critic who has written widely on architectural Postmodernism, endorses the listing of *The Point* as an important example of its period and supports the application for its placement on the historic record.

The use of *Computer Aided Design* as a drafting and design tool

Computer aided design was still in its infancy in the early 1980s and the use of a CAD system for this project therefore of great interest: CAD led to groundbreaking changes within the architectural practice at large making hand-drafted technical drawings practically obsolete.

The use of the iconic pyramid shape within an international context

The pyramid is possibly the oldest and most recognized iconic building form historically and has been used primarily for landmark buildings and tombs/memorials. Although there were some earlier precursors dating from the late 1960s, there is a clustering of buildings from the late 1980s and into the 1990s internationally that uses the pyramid as a glass and steel construction. Arguably the most notable one was the pyramid entrance to the Louvre in Paris by IM Pei.

- Bletchley Leisure Centre, Milton Keynes, England:
 - Design to completion: 1968-75
 - Architect: Harry Faulkner-Brown
 - Sports, entertainment and leisure centre type.
 - Demolished in 2010 when new leisure centre built.

- Transamerica Pyramid, San Francisco, USA:
 - Design to completion: 1969-72
 - Architect: William Pereira
 - Landmark building that makes the city's skyline instantly recognizable.
 - Corporate headquarters.
 - Sold to a subsequent user.

- Louvre Pyramid, Paris, France:
 - Completion: 1989
 - Architect: IM Pei
 - Culture Industry: Museum as the new form of public entertainment. The new entrance was needed to cope

with the mass tourism. The iconic shape makes it crystal clear (literally) where the entrance is.

- In original use as circulation space.
- Memphis Pyramid, Memphis, Tennessee, USA:
 - Completion: 1991
 - Architect: Rosser International
 - Sports arena and entertainment facility: Chiefly catered to the phenomenal popularity of professional basketball drawing large crowds at these events. Seating capacity is 20142.
 - Boasts to be the sixth largest pyramid worldwide.
 - Empty and disused when new arena built.
- Luxor, Las Vegas, USA:
 - Design to Completion: 1991-93
 - Architect: Veldon Simpson
 - Hotel, casino and leisure facility.
 - Boasts to be the third largest pyramid worldwide.
 - In original use.
- The Pyramid, Stockport, England:
 - Completion: 1992
 - Architect: Maxwell Hutchinson
 - Designed as flagship building to the speculative “Kings’ Valley” commercial development. With an economic downturn the developers went into administration and this, the only built structure of the scheme, lay empty for a year. It was eventually bought by the Co-operative Bank who still uses it as its offices.

The Point, leads the development in the 1980s and predates the Louvre pyramid by several years. It is a landmark in Milton Keynes and an iconic building.

The architects and designers

Building Design Partnership

Building Design Partnership (BDP) was founded in 1961. The firm is most notable for its interdisciplinary approach and profit sharing. In 1962 BDP officially declared its commitment to “the principle of equal status for all professionals”. (Bill White, *The Spirit of BDP*, Preston: BDP, 1987. p 22). By 1968 it not only employed architects but town planners, civil and structural engineers, building services engineers, electrical, heating and ventilating engineers, traffic engineers, landscape architects, graphic designers and industrial designers as well as cost consultants. The most surprising component of this architectural and engineering practice is possibly the fact that sociologists were also employed as part of the team.

The experimental nature of the firm included also the early use of Computer Aided Design. The use of the Acropolis CAD system for the design of *The Point* was significant enough at the time for it to be mentioned in the press release for the building's opening.

Notable architects that have worked for BDP are Leon Krier and Mike Webb. This is of interest within the context of *The Point* in terms of the High Tech / Postmodern context, as well as the experimental nature of a building that claims to be Europe's first fully-integrated entertainment centre and is connected to the ideas of Archigram and particularly Mike Webb's Sin Centre design mentioned above in this report.

The connection between BDP and Archigram is significant. The Archigram Archival Project website states:

Building Design Partnership (BDP)

One of the largest multidisciplinary architectural practices in post-war Britain. Through the agency of David Rock, one of the partners, who ran BDP's London office and later became President of the RIBA, BDP provided sponsorship for Archigram's magazines in return for advertisements placed in *Archigram 2*, 1962 (Project no. 100.2); *Archigram 3*, 1963 (Project no. 100.3); *Archigram 4*, 1964 (Project no. 100.4); and *Archigram 5*, 1964 (Project no. 100.5).

<http://archigram.westminster.ac.uk/collaboratorlist.php#384>

BDP has grown to be one of Europe's largest interdisciplinary practices. Last year the firm celebrated 50 years of success with an exhibition opening on 24 May 2011 at the RIBA.

Neil Tibbatts

Neil Tibbatts founded the Birmingham based Tibbatts & Company in 1979. The design and architectural firm specialized in nightclub, restaurant and pub designs. His clients included Bass and Whitbread as well as Mecca who he helped reinvent their corporate identity within the nightclub sector. Looking back on his lifetime accomplishments as an interior designer the industry sector described him as an "Innovative Designer with Unparalleled Influence" (*Night Magazine*, 29.07.2006):

The talented and prolific designer made his name with ground breaking nightclub projects before moving on to explore projects in the bar, leisure, hotel and retail sectors. But more than through the venues he created, Neil's legacy will also be that his company has provided a breeding ground for design talent, with many of the UK's best interior designers serving early apprenticeships under his watchful eye.

Selected bibliography

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Summary

The Point is a groundbreaking building on many levels:

- While it claimed to be Europe's first fully-integrated entertainment centre, the building is of great importance because it includes the nation's first multiplex cinema. The adoption of the multiplex as a building type in Britain has played a remarkable role in the rebirth of going to the cinema as a social activity and has been the subject of serious academic research. On 12 April 2011 it was featured in the Channel 4 documentary "Great British Brands" for the significant role it played in reinvigorating the cinema industry in the 1980s.
- In terms of architectural history and theory it is of great interest because it illustrates both concepts of Archigram and those within architectural Postmodernism.
- It was built by BDP, an experimental practice that has managed to mature from an experimental, idealistic and interdisciplinary practice to a European-wide architectural and engineering firm while maintaining many of its original groundbreaking concepts of staffing.
- The entertainment block as a whole is externally as originally built and there have been few changes to it, if at all. The pyramid entrance block is a

landmark and while there are other glass and steel pyramid structures internationally, this building form is indeed rare.

- The use of CAD is also important and illustrated an important shift within the architectural office from manual draftsmanship of plans to computer driven design.

The Cinema Theatre Association is seriously concerned that *The Point* remains unprotected and exposed to the pressures of redevelopment of the site.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.