

Case Name: The Point, Milton Keynes

Case Number: 481073

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.

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. Site visit photographs can be seen on case 475407.

Asset(s) under Assessment

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

Annex	Name	Heritage Category
1	The Point entertainment complex, Milton Keynes (COI)	Listing

Visits

Date	Visit Type
none	No Visit / Data from other sources

Annex 1

The factual details are being assessed as the basis for a proposed addition to The National Heritage List for England.

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 fore-court over a basement. The building originally contained a bar and restaurant area on the ground floor, a bingo hall in the basement and 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

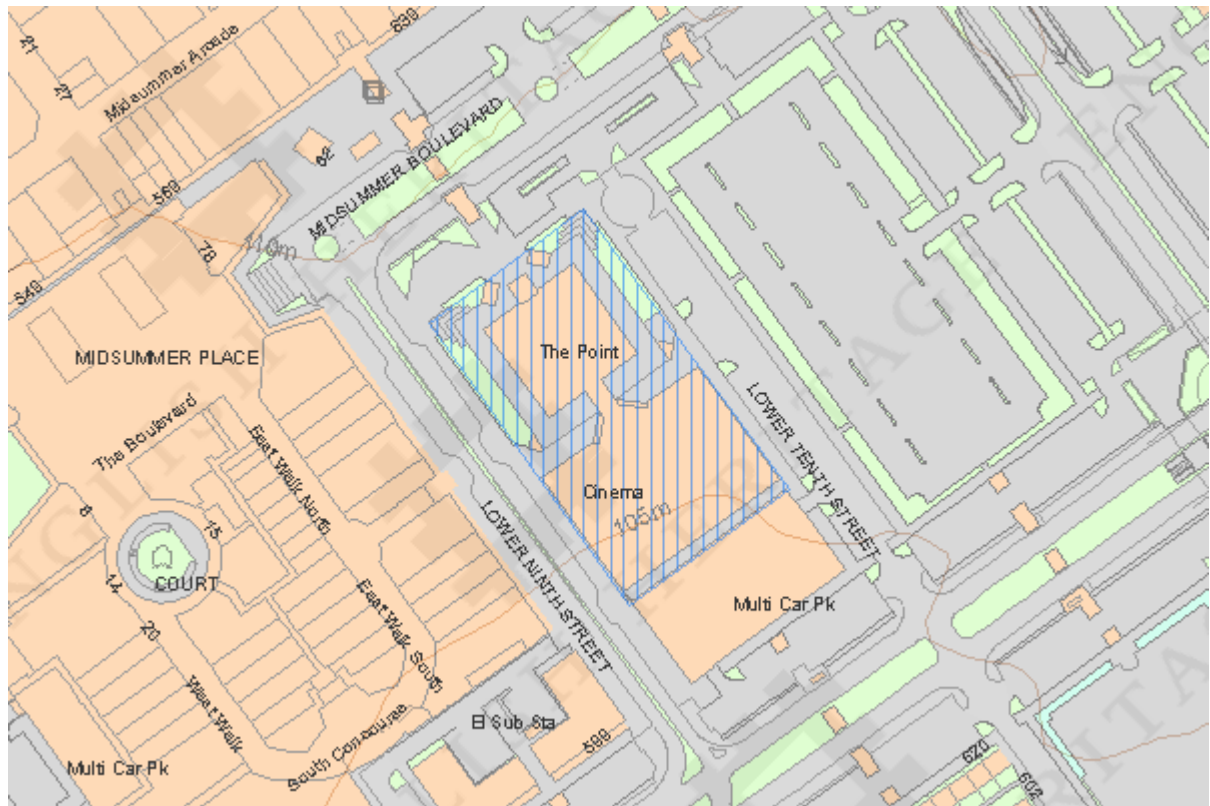
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Map**National Grid Reference:** SP8546638833

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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be to scale. For a copy of the full scale map, please see the attached PDF – 1417374_1.pdf.