

- 4 JUL 2008



ENGLISH HERITAGE

EAST OF ENGLAND REGION

Wattsdown Ltd c/o Barker Parry Town  
Planning Ltd  
33 Bancroft  
HITCHIN  
Herts  
SG5 1LA

Our Ref: 165940  
Direct Line: 01223 582741

03 July 2008

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990  
Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest

Cinema, 166, LONDON ROAD, ST ALBANS, ST ALBANS, HERTFORDSHIRE

I am writing further to our previous correspondence about the application to list the above building.

The Secretary of State, after consulting English Heritage, the Government's statutory adviser, has decided not to add the above building to the list. The reasons are:

- \* The design of the façade is muted and does not possess the special architectural interest displayed by other contemporary designated cinemas in the Art Deco style.
- \* The interior decorative scheme of the 1930s Capitol designed by Robert Cromie has been largely lost.
- \* The later C20 subdivision of the auditorium and extensive remodelling of the cinema has resulted in the loss of the proscenium arch, sense of auditorium space and historic fixtures and fittings.

It therefore is not of sufficient special architectural or historic interest to merit listing.

If you consider that the decision has been wrongly made you may write to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport within 28 days of the date of this letter to request that the Secretary of State review the decision. An example of a decision made wrongly would be where there was a factual error or an irregularity in the process which affected the outcome. You may also ask the Secretary of State to review the decision if you have any significant evidence relating to the special architectural or historic interest of the building which was not previously considered. Further details of the review criteria and process are contained in the annex to this letter.

I have enclosed a copy of our Adviser's Report for your information.



BROOKLANDS 24 BROOKLANDS AVENUE CAMBRIDGE CB2 8BU  
Telephone 01223 582700 Facsimile 01223 582701  
[www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)

*The National Monuments Record is the public archive of English Heritage*

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gaynor Roberts', written over a circular stamp or mark.

Gaynor Roberts

Heritage Protection Co-ordinator, East

gaynor.roberts@english-heritage.org.uk,

Data Protection Act 1998

The information you provide, including personal details, and any information obtained from other sources will be retained by English Heritage, in hard copy form and/or on computer for administrative purposes and future consideration, where applicable. English Heritage will not release personal information to a third party if its disclosure would contravene any of the data protection principles in the Data Protection Act 1998

### Annex: Review Criteria and Process

A review will only be carried out in the following circumstances:

(1) there is evidence that the original decision has been made wrongly. Examples would include:

- where there was a factual error, eg. the wrong building was listed; or
- where there has been some irregularity in the process which has affected the outcome, eg. relevant considerations were not taken into account or irrelevant considerations were taken into account.

(2) there is significant evidence which was not previously considered, relating to the special architectural or historic interest of the building, as set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. An example would be where new evidence relating to the date of a building has been discovered which might make a material difference to the architectural or historic interest of the building.

Having conducted a review, the Secretary of State will either affirm or overturn the original decision. It is important to understand that the original decision will stand until the Secretary of State has made a decision on whether the original decision should be affirmed or overturned. If the original decision is overturned, this will not have retrospective effect.

Review requests which are received after 28 days from the date of this letter may be considered in exceptional circumstances.

The address for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH.

English Heritage (Listing)

Adviser's Report

03 JUL 2008

ADDRESS

Cinema, 166 LONDON ROAD, ST ALBANS

Parish ST ALBANS  
District ST ALBANS  
County HERTFORDSHIRE

Case UID: 165940

Date First Listed:

Formerly Listed As:

### RECOMMENDATION

Adviser: Ms Gibson

Outcome: No, do not list

Recommended Grade: ~~NL~~

12-MAY-2008

Advice Text: After examining all the papers on this file and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled.

### CONTEXT

English Heritage has been asked to assess the former Odeon cinema in St Albans for listing. The building lies within the St Alban's Conservation Area and is locally listed. In the past decade there have been planning applications for the demolition of the cinema and redevelopment of the site for housing, refused by the local planning authority. Two subsequent planning appeals were won by the District Council. In the latest appeal of June 2007 (APP/B1930/E/07/2034914/NWF) the Planning Inspector considered that the loss of the cinema was not contrary to policy and acceptable in principle. A new planning application proposing the demolition of the cinema has been submitted and is due for determination in mid June 2008.

The cinema was assessed as not listable in the 1990s during the thematic listing survey of cinemas on the grounds that it had been too altered.

### HISTORY

Historic map and documentary evidence indicate that a previous cinema was located on the eastern half of the site. This earlier cinema, known as the 'Alpha', was a small picture palace built in 1908 by Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, a pioneer in the production of animated cartoons. Following the 1909 Cinematograph Act, which was passed in response to a number of fires in cinemas, local architect Percival Blow was commissioned to improve the Alpha in 1910. From 1918, it was known as the Poly but renamed the Regent in 1926 after further remodelling. Melbourne-Cooper relocated to Blackpool and the Regent burnt down in 1927, the site being cleared and the currently extant cinema, known as the Capitol, constructed in 1931. The building was intended to be designed by Percival Blow, but it was I. Martin Hadfield who produced the final plans and renowned cinema architect, Robert Cromie, who designed the interiors.

The Capitol was double in size to the Regent and built in Art Deco style. Photographs of the 1930s (Architecture Illustrated, 1932) indicate that the building had a rich interior, decorated with extensive geometric 'Marb-L-Cote' (a type of wall covering) motifs on the walls, painted gold and red, and Art Deco style light fittings and grills to the organ and ventilation system. Hadfield's exterior is more muted, but possessed Art Deco grills to the window, panelled and lined render and two stepped pediments. In 1945, the cinema was taken over by the Odeon chain and many of the Capitol's interiors were said to be replaced with Odeon style fittings. In the later C20, the auditorium was

extensively reconfigured into a multi-screen facility. It may be that the proscenium was lost at this time, if not earlier. Certainly, a mezzanine floor was inserted above the former stalls which were converted into three screens, a corridor and a bar to the rear. The former circle seating was extended towards the re-positioned screen and the foyer was also reworked.

In 1995, the cinema closed and has remained vacant since; the seating in the lower screens has been removed and the building generally is in a poor condition.

#### DESCRIPTION

A cinema, built in 1931 by I Martin Hadfield with interiors by Robert Cromie, initially known as the Capitol, taken over by the Odeon chain in 1945 and remodelled in the later C20. Constructed of brick, the near symmetrical rendered façade is arranged in 5 panels, four of which are slightly recessed. Stepped pediments mark the original entrance and exit doors. To the left a late C20 plastic canopy is above a sequence of C20 doors, the openings for which are probably a later alteration. Above the canopy, and in the far panel to the right, are tripartite windows with Art Deco style grills. The 1930s entrances and both windows have fluted plaster applied to the heads. The rear and side elevations are blind brickwork.

#### INTERIOR

Some fluted plasterwork and textured 'Marb-L-Cote' wall decoration remains in the foyer, which has been remodelled and possesses mostly late C20 furniture. To the right is the entrance to the former circle with original handrails to the staircases. A mezzanine floor has been inserted between the circle and stalls to create a separate unit. The seating has been extended further towards the re-positioned late C20 screen. Some 1930s light fittings, ventilation grills and 'Marb-L-Cote' wall decoration remains. Fragmentary survival of paint indicates a scheme of red and gold. To the rear, the original projector room has no fixtures and fittings of interest.

Directly in front of the main 1930s entrance is a double flight of stairs leading down to the former stalls area. The positioning of the stairs and handrails with scrolled ends are contemporary. Extensive late C20 reworking is apparent in the stalls which are subdivided into three screens serviced by a corridor to the rear with a bar to the back of the corridor. There are no apparent historic fixtures and fittings remaining and the 1930s decoration scheme and proscenium arch are lost.

#### ASSESSMENT

Progressively greater selection is required when assessing buildings which post-date 1840 for designation. A recent thematic survey of cinemas resulted in the addition of many to the statutory list, providing useful comparators for this building type. Key factors for consideration are the completeness of the auditorium and retention of wall decoration, the presence of foyers, bars and other front of house facilities, survival of decorative elements and most importantly, the quality of the exterior and the palpable survival of the overall sense of space.

Cinemas are iconic buildings of the early C20 and between 1920-40 approximately 4,000 cinemas were built throughout the country. Most belonged to a chain, such as Odeon or Gaumont, who had their own designers. The St Alban's cinema was not, however, built as an Odeon and thus cannot be judged as an example of the chain's architectural style but rather in the generality of cinema buildings of this period.

Designated Art Deco cinemas of the 1930s include the grade II \* ABC Regal in Uxbridge (E. Norman Baily, 1930-31) and Plaza, Stockport (W. Thornley, 1932-3) and grade II Forum in

Camden (Beard and Bennett, 1934) and Rex at Berkhamsted (David. E. Nye, 1938). All designated examples possess considerable exterior architectural quality in their design and use of materials, but crucially, have intact and exceptionally decorated interiors. The Rex, for example has been partitioned, but retains a richly decorated Art Deco proscenium arch and surviving fibrous plaster decoration in shells and wave motifs.

Although the interior was designed by Robert Cromie (1887-1971) a prolific cinema architect with 6 listed cinemas to his name, the St Albans Odeon does not possess the special architectural interest of contemporary designated examples. The façade when constructed had some streetscape prominence, but the recessed panels and stepped pediments are unambitious, the only truly decorative element being the Art Deco grills to the end windows and fluted plaster heads. Internally, there has been considerable loss of the 1930s decorative scheme. Although some of the paint-work and 'Marb-L-Cote' detailing can be discerned on the walls of the former auditorium and in the foyer, Cromie's striking interior scheme has been largely lost. Similarly, some handrails, light fittings and doors remain but significant features such as the proscenium arch and most of the foyer furniture have been removed. Critically, the extensive sub-division of the auditorium has effectively obscured the plan of the original cinema space; it is difficult to visualise the interior of the 1930s auditorium or the impact it would have had on the viewing public.

Conclusion: The former Odeon cinema does not possess the exterior architectural quality to merit listing and the interior has been extensively remodelled resulting in the loss of the 1930s decorative scheme, plan, fixtures and fittings. It does not fulfil the criteria for listing buildings of this type and age.

#### Reasons For Designation Decision:

The former Odeon cinema in St Albans is not recommended for designation for the following principal reasons.

- \* The design of the façade is muted and does not possess the special architectural interest displayed by other contemporary designated cinemas in the Art Deco style.
- \* The interior decorative scheme of the 1930s Capitol designed by Robert Cromie has been largely lost.
- \* The later C20 subdivision of the auditorium and extensive remodelling of the cinema has resulted in the loss of the proscenium arch, sense of auditorium space and historic fixtures and fittings.

#### VISITS

08-MAY-2008 Full inspection

English Heritage (Listing)

Adviser's Report

03 JUL 2008

COUNTERSIGNING

First Countersigning Adviser: Mr Calladine

Comments: A modest cinema architecturally, its striking interior decorative scheme has been lost and the interior layout seriously altered. It does not merit adding to the List. 03 June 2008

Second Countersigning Adviser:

Comments:

HP Director:

Comments:-----