

ADDRESS

PRESTON CENTRAL BUS STATION AND CAR PARK, TITHEBARN
STREET, PRESTON

Parish PRESTON
District PRESTON
County LANCASHIRE

Case UID: 167735

Date First Listed:

Formerly Listed As:

RECOMMENDATION

Outcome: Yes, list

Recommended Grade: II

24-FEB-2009

BACKGROUND:

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 fulfilled.

CONTEXT:

English Heritage has received a request to assess Preston Central Bus Station and Car Park for listing. During the late 1990s plans for the redevelopment of this part of Preston city centre - now known as Preston Tithebarn in re-development proposals - were revealed. As part of this proposed redevelopment the bus station and car park were to be demolished. A request to assess the bus station and car park for listing was subsequently received; English Heritage undertook an assessment in 1998 and drafted advice that the building should be listed at Grade II. This recommendation was underpinned by thematic research, and endorsed by English Heritage's advisory committee. However, the DCMS, following consultation, disagreed with this advice and in 2001 the decision was taken not to list the bus station and car park. A second application to list the bus station has subsequently been received recently and forms the basis of the current assessment. There is a large-scale scheme for comprehensive redevelopment of this part of the city, the Tithebarn Regeneration Area, which includes the demolition of this structure. This went to Preston's Planning committee on July 14 2009. The site is a sensitive one, therefore.

HISTORY:

Preston has long been the hub of a major bus network at local, regional and national level. During the 1960s it had four bus stations working simultaneously, together with numerous on-street bus stands for local services. Nor is this link between the city and motor traffic without wider significance: Preston's recent past has been closely aligned with the development of motor transport, since the first section of England's motorway network was opened in 1958 as the Preston by-pass. By 1965 this had become the M6 with the dramatic Forton motorway service station tower symbolising the increasing importance of road transport in post-war England. This part of Lancashire was earmarked for growth, and in 1970 Preston (together with Chorley and Leyland) became the last of the New Towns to be thus designated, as the Central Lancashire New Town. In an attempt to rationalise the local transport situation, and create an integrated passenger exchange to meet the anticipated needs of this planned expansion, Preston Corporation commissioned Keith Ingham and Charles Wilson of the local Building Design Partnership, with E H Staziker, the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, and Ove Arup & Partners to design and build a new bus station, with multi-storey car parking above, and a taxi-rank alongside. The original brief of 1959, given to

Grenfell-Baines and Hargreaves, was to accommodate 500 cars in a separate building. This figure was subsequently revised upwards in the light of predicted traffic estimates, and in the wake of the influential Buchanan Report on Traffic in Towns (1963), which projected very considerable increases in road use. A major recommendation of the report was to design cities to separate pedestrians from traffic.

At this time, many major British cities were undergoing profound changes to their traffic management, including the provision of major new road systems and associated facilities. The result at Preston is one of the most ambitious motor transport buildings of its age, an age when the car was established as the leading form of transport, and when the sophisticated American model of the Greyhound Bus was reminding Britain that the long-distance coach could play an enhanced role as a provider of public transport too. Much damage was wrought to England's historic towns at this time in the name of traffic management: it is still hard to be entirely objective about this epoch in urbanism, but nonetheless it is important to recognise its most considerable achievements.

The current building, conceived of with the spirit and scale of a modern airport terminal in mind, opened in October 1969 and it was, at that time, the world's largest bus station. During the early 1970s, an overhead pedestrian walkway was incorporated into the south side of the building which connects the car park with the Guild Hall entertainment, shopping and office complex, and integrates with the purpose-designed taxi rank at mid-point.

The designers, Building Design Partnership (or BDP), were at the time a local architectural practice founded in 1961 and which emerged out of Grenfell-Baines and Hargreaves. They were one of the first practices in this country to integrate architecture with other areas of design including graphics, interior design, and landscaping and this new approach is clearly demonstrated in the integrated design of Preston Bus Station. BDP has subsequently become a major architectural practice. The building's principal architect was Keith Ingham: it is a measure of his professional standing that he received two obituaries in a national newspaper following his death in 1995. Born in 1932 he was educated at the Leys School, Cambridge and studied architecture at University College London under Professor Hector Corfiato. Early in his career he worked for Tom Mellor before joining the practice of Sir George Grenfell-Baines (soon to become BDP) in 1956. Although he specialised in housing design, winning many awards for BDP, he was an equally talented graphic designer and therefore an ideal employee for BDP who established a reputation as one of the earliest multi-disciplinary practices in the country. Although an avowed Modernist in 1975, in support of European Architectural Heritage Year, he commissioned David Gentleman to design a series of now famous posters celebrating "Everyday architecture."

DESCRIPTION:

Preston Central Bus Station and Car Park is located in Tithebarn Street within Preston city centre, and occupies a long and imposing rectangular site, created from an area to the east of Preston's city centre. It was built in 1968-69 to a design by Keith Ingham and Charles Wilson, using reinforced and pre-cast concrete with partial white tile cladding. The building is rectangular in plan, measures about 170m long by 40m wide, and it sits within a broad apron that extends on all sides to allow bus movements.

Exterior: The car park complex is set within a broad apron of tarmac. The tall ground floor contains 40 bus stands on both the east and west sides above which is a multi-storey car park on a split-level design of four decks on the west and five decks on the east. Vehicular access to and from the car park is via curved concrete ramps at the north and south ends of the building, while pedestrian

access to the building is segregated via three subways and an elevated walkway. A former taxi rank is situated at the south end of the bus station and in turn acts as a support for the elevated walkway. It is surmounted by an 80 foot tall lighting gantry. The main building has a spacious double-height glazed ground floor. This space was dictated by the desire to bring double-decker buses under the cover of the curved concrete balustrading for passenger cover. The curved concrete fronts of T-beam form a ribbed finish which is carried through into the interior ceiling of the main concourse. The north and south ends of the building are clad in white tiles, laid vertically to counter the horizontal emphasis of the building, with expanded joints to indicate floor the levels of the car-park.

Interior: The bus station has a two-storey central spine of buildings of varied facades that contain passenger facilities such as kiosks, cafeteria, information and booking offices on the ground floor, with staff offices and rest facilities on the upper floor. This central spine of related structures runs the full length of the interior and their predominantly white tile-clad surfaces, laid vertically, contrast with the more bare and exposed aesthetic of the concrete, wood and glass which forms an external curtain around them. The white tile surfaces continue to the lift lobbies which, in the consistent plastic handling of forms which typify the building, are extruded through the top floor of the car park to form strong sculptural elements. To either side of the central spine there are waiting areas adjacent to the bus stands, each divided by metal and wood barriers. There are two pedestrian subways, with a third just outside the building at its north east corner, and three public lifts and stairwells to the car park above. The floor of the bus station concourse is of black rubber tiles while the central spine is clad in white tiles to the ground floor with glazing to the offices above. The north end of the car park has an entrance ramp to Level 1 and an exit ramp from Level 2, and there is a two-carriageway entrance and exit ramp from Level 1 at its south east corner. Internal ramps connect the parking levels towards the north and south ends of the building.

ASSESSMENT:

Transport-related structures such as this are prominent and significant public buildings, warranting very careful assessment for designation. After 1840, progressively greater selectivity is required for listing for all buildings as they become more recent: for a building of this relative youth, completed in 1969, the threshold is a high one. Important considerations in the assessment of transport buildings, articulated in English Heritage's Selection Guide (2007), include their historical and technological significance, their architectural interest, intactness, rarity, and any group value. For bus stations, architectural quality and structural interest are the key considerations while, exceptionally, multi-storey car parks post c.1960 may be listable if they combine innovative planning with architectural panache. Very few comparable buildings, representing an unusual hybrid almost unique to the post-war period, are currently listed.

The first major claim that can be made for the building is one of architectural boldness. Preston bus station and car park is a recognised example of a 'Megastructure', the term coined to describe the large scaled, multi-functional urban projects of the 1960s which sought to recreate a sense of the monumental within the British town scene. It is an essay in the "New Brutalism" in it's uncompromising design, it's stark handling of modern materials, and it's powerfully sculptural form. It is dramatically and prominently sited on a concrete island which serves to isolate the structure from the proximity of neighbouring buildings and enables uninterrupted views of the whole structure to be had from many angles. From a distance the overall clarity of the design concept is very apparent; a series of billowing sculptural forms indebted to Le Corbusier's Chandigarh (in particular the Assembly building), which float above a double-height glazed concourse, tethered down by projecting lift shafts, further tethered and serviced at each end by slender dynamic concrete ramps (in the manner of the famous Penguin Pool at London Zoo), and with hard landscaping defining its

perimeter.

Criticism has been made of the design of this hard-landscaping intended to persuade pedestrians to use the subways. None of these are used as fully intended, with some pedestrians choosing instead to put their safety at risk by crossing the bus apron. The two most frequently used subways on the west and south sides of the bus station both give direct access to shopping centres and beyond the market area and city centre, and in this respect they could not be more ideally situated for pedestrians. The third subway, at the bus station's north east corner is, by contrast, little used. Here former approach routes from the north east have been altered by subsequent road improvements and nearby building construction, with the result that few pedestrians now approach the bus station from the north east. While it is accepted that the total separation of pedestrian and vehicular approaches, one of the key objectives of the original design and a common goal of post-Buchanan transport design, has not been realised, it needs to be remembered that this is only one aspect of the functioning of the building. In other respects it functions well as a bus station and car park, and reflects the attention being given to issues of traffic circulation at this time by architects and planners alike. Architecture is about more than just the look of a building: it is about useage too. The Preston bus station and car park is of significance as a carefully planned, integrated transport hub which does fulfil its original brief.

The building's New Brutalist architecture and monumental rectangular form is softened and enhanced by the use of white tile-cladding, curved concrete fronts to the car park decking, sweeping dynamic car park ramps, and the former taxi rank with dramatic integrated lighting gantry. The building, very unusually for a mere bus station and car park, is afforded almost unprecedented architectural treatment and is carefully sited within its own hard landscaping, served by its own underpass, and acts as a beacon to attract the public. The curved concrete fronts of the bus station successfully draw the eye into an appreciation of the immense length of the structure as the parallel decks recede into the distance: the pronounced formal qualities of the structure, indebted to Le Corbusier's late work, are an important element of its significance. These curved concrete fronts (comparable in some ways to those on London's Barbican) have also been the subject of criticism on the grounds of the costs incurred in controlling corrosion of the reinforcing bars. However, while this is recognised as a maintenance issue, it does not prevent the car park from functioning as intended. The bold forms of the building, combined with rigorous planning and attention to practical issues of circulation, result in a building of considerable aesthetic power as well as a cleverly planned complex. As a multi-functional megastructure Preston bus station, taxi-rank, and car park remains a highly distinctive building, whose elegantly designed curved car park balconies not only reduce loading but also define the building's appearance through the horizontal banding. This signature feature transforms the east and west elevations into sculptural surfaces of solid and void: they are in keeping with one of Le Corbusier's notions of architecture as "the masterly, correct, and magnificent play of forms in light."

The second major claim that can be made for the building concerns its significance as an innovative transport complex. This was recognised shortly after opening as the most interesting bus station and most significant car park built in England in the post-war period, and has gone on earning favorable notices; it is also included in the recent (2007) pioneering study of car parks, Simon Henley's 'The Architecture of Parking'. The impact motor traffic has had on modern society is huge: both in terms of the environment, and in terms of people's behaviour (a current English Heritage research initiative is exploring this further at present). Designations reflecting this huge impact are very few indeed. Preston is an appropriate city in which to find such a structure: its proximity to the country's first motorway and kindred building, Forton Service Station, has already been noted. Despite minor changes to the structure since its opening, it remains a model of 1960s

traffic planning, and it is remarkable to find an example of what was the most crucial building type of its day that is also of exceptional quality in terms of both its planning and finishes. It has recently been described by Jonathan Glancey, architectural correspondent for The Guardian, as 'a baroque cathedral for buses', and, 'cinematic, sculptural, heroic - and one of the most dramatic public buildings from the 1960s'. Whilst Alan Powers has remarked that it '...brought to surface transport the design standards applied more normally to airports."

A third area of significance is that of its rarity. Such complexes were never common. With the demolition of Portsmouth's Tricorn Centre, and the proposed redevelopment of Gateshead's Treaty Centre, mega-structures of the 1960s are becoming ever scarcer. Preston Bus Station is a building of national note in embodying civic ambition as applied to a transport building.

We appreciate that this building has been recommended for listing before, but not approved by the Secretary of State, following a consultation exercise. Views are clearly divided, and this is a building which certainly attracts strong feelings. It also faces a complex redevelopment scenario. The local authority has made its opposition to listing very clear too. Listing is the identification of special interest, and must rise above such subjectivity. In our view, the case for special interest has been strengthened through recent critical literature, and through the loss of other comparators.

In sum, therefore, Preston bus station and car park has strong claims to recognition, and warrants listing at Grade II. Architecturally striking, it is one of the most impressive civic buildings of its day, and one of the foremost testaments to the place of road traffic in later C20 life, and its impact on urban fabric. On a national level, it is an important building, one the significance of which is enhanced by recent losses elsewhere.

SOURCES:

Manplan (Architectural Review), July 1970, p.33-4.

'Building study; bus station and car park', The Architects' Journal, 6 May 1970, p. 1129-48.

T. Calladine & K. Morrison, Road Transport Buildings: A report by RCHME for the English Heritage Post-1939 Listing Programme (1998), p.98 & 123.

Simon Henley, The Architecture of Parking (2007), p.98-9.

Jonathan Glancey, 'A Baroque Cathedral for Buses', The Guardian, 1 October 2007.

Alan Powers, 'Obituary: Keith Ingham', The Independent, 3 May 1995.

Lesley Jackson, 'Obituary; Keith Ingham', The Independent, 26 May 1995.

ASSESSMENT:

Preston bus station and car park fulfils the criteria for listing at Grade II as a building of special architectural or historic interest in a national context.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION:

Preston bus station and car park is recommended for listing at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

* The bus station, car park, and taxi rank, opened in 1969 to the designs of BDP, remains a little-altered and remarkably good example of integrated 1960s traffic planning that still functions as originally intended.

* The curved concrete front to the car park decks are signature features of the design and focus attention on the building's great length, whilst creating an elegant light and dark horizontal banding effect along the entire main east and west elevations.

* The building displays an unusual blend of New Brutalist architecture that is mellowed by an

inspired application of upturned curves to the main elevations, sweeping car park ramps and contrasting small-scale taxi rank.

* It is a notable example of an integrated bus station and car park, embodying the increasingly important place of motor traffic in the modern city.

* It represents an important stage in the evolution of integrated architectural and design practice in post-war England, pioneered by Building Design Partnership with architecture, interior design, landscaping, graphic and typographic design working to a common end, and is an important work from this prominent practice.

VISITS

16-FEB-2009 Full inspection

COUNTERSIGNING

Countersigning Comments: Agreed: Preston Bus Station reflects a level of architectural achievement rarely associated with bus transport. Its design brings elegance to what might otherwise be a lumbering, mundane structure. It merits designation in the national context. 14.v.09

Second Countersigning Comments: Agreed also: careful thought has been given to this case, and its claims to special interest carefully articulated. It is very strong architecturally, and is one of the most expressive buildings from an age of civic modernity and vision. 23.vii.09

HP Director Comments:

Proposed List Entry

PRESTON

TITHEBARN STREET

PRESTON CENTRAL BUS STATION AND
CAR PARK

II

Case UID: 167735

Proposed LBS UID: 506545

A bus station with multi-storey car park above, also incorporating a taxi rank. It was commissioned by Preston Corporation, designed by Keith Ingham and Charles Wilson of Building Design Partnership, with E H Staziker, the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, and Ove Arup and Partners, consulting structural engineers. Opened in 1969.

MATERIALS: reinforced and pre-cast concrete with partial white tile-cladding and glazing.

PLAN: The building is rectangular, measures about 170m long by 40m wide, and sits within a broad rectangular apron that extends on both sides to allow bus movements. There are curving car park ramps at the north and south ends of the building and an island taxi rank at the south end of the bus station. The perimeter of the site, and access, is defined by raised areas of hard landscaping re-using granite setts.

EXTERIOR: The tall, double-height, ground floor (responding to the height of a double-decker bus) contains 40 bus stands on both the east and west sides above which is a multi-storey car park on a split-level design of four decks on the west and five decks on the east. Vehicular access to and from the car park is via curved concrete ramps at the north and south ends of the building while pedestrian access to the building is segregated via three subways and an elevated walkway. A former island taxi rank with round-ended waiting platform with concrete roof of similar design above, and an 80 foot high lighting gantry, is situated at the south end of the bus station. The bus station has a glazed ground floor while the car park decks above have curved concrete fronts of T beam form. The north and south ends of the building are clad in vertically laid white tiles with wide joints and breaks in the grid pattern at each floor level. Supporting columns have a beach pebble aggregate that is exposed by grit blasting. Four rectangular lift shafts, each clad in white tiles, protrude above the upper deck of the car park.

INTERIOR: The bus station has a two-storey central spine of buildings that contain passenger facilities such as kiosks, cafeteria, information and booking offices on the ground floor of varying facade design, and staff offices and rest facilities on the upper floor. To either side there are waiting areas adjacent to the bus stands, each divided by metal and wood barriers. The passenger concourse is fully glazed and the lower half of the main facades is enclosed by a sliding door system, with two doors for each bus stand. Above the door heads a wooden perimeter glazed destination board runs the entire length of the main elevations and contains original bus stand numbers and destinations. There are two pedestrian subways, with a third just outside the building at its north east corner. All have white tiled walls and black rubber-tiled floors. There are three public lifts and stairwells to the car park above. The floor of the bus station is of black rubber tiles while the central spine is clad in vertically laid white tiles to the ground floor with glazing to the offices above. A rich, brown, oiled iroko wood is used for seats, doors and barrier rails. The ceiling to the passenger concourse has its soffits of the pre-cast concrete floor units exposed. Other carefully designed and original features survive including purposely-designed signage, custom-made oiled timber handrails and Swiss-style clocks.

The north end of the car park has an entrance ramp to Level 1 and an exit ramp from Level 2, and there is a two-carriageway entrance and exit ramp from Level 1 at its south east corner. Ramps connect the parking levels towards the north and south ends of the building. A later elevated walkway, as originally

planned, connects the Guild Hall shopping and entertainment complex with Level 1 of the car park at the building's south end, passing above and integrated into the taxi rank building.

HISTORY: Preston has long been the hub of a major bus network at local, regional and national level; the nation's first motorway was the Preston by-pass, opened in 1958, and the area was in the forefront of developments in road transport. During the 1960s Preston had four bus stations working simultaneously, together with numerous on-street bus stands for local services. In an attempt to rationalise the situation and create an integrated passenger exchange to meet the needs of what in 1970 became the Central Lancashire New Town (a growth area combining Preston, Leyland and Chorley), Preston Corporation commissioned Keith Ingham and Charles Wilson of Building Design Partnership, with E H Staziker, the Borough Engineer and Surveyor, and Ove Arup & Partners, to design and build a new bus station, car park, and taxi rank. BDP was a local architectural practice which has subsequently become a leading firm; this is among their most prominent commissions. The building opened in October 1969 and was, at that time, the world's largest bus station. Building on such an ambitious scale, and to such high design standards, has resulted in a structure more reminiscent of a post-war airport terminal than a mere bus station and car-park. It's overall concept was anticipated by nearby Blackpool, which had previously built a bus station with integrated multi-storey car-park above on the eve of the second world war in Talbot Square. Before the Second World War Blackpool, like Preston in the post-war period, was in the forefront of English towns seeking innovative solutions to increased levels of traffic. During the early 1970s an overhead pedestrian walkway was added to the south side of the building connecting the car park with the Guild Hall entertainment, shopping and office complex. The taxi rank and waiting area at the south side of the building has fallen into disuse in recent times. Numerous other minor alterations have been undertaken in order to provide users of the bus station with modern facilities and a safe environment. Preston bus station and car park is an important example of a 'megastructure', a large-scale civic commission expressing the increasingly important role of motor traffic in later C20 life.

SOURCES: Manplan (Architectural Review), July 1970, pp.33-4.

Building study; Bus station and car park, Architects' Journal, 6 May 1970, pp. 1129-48.

T. Calladine & K. Morrison, Road Transport Buildings: A report by RCHME for the English Heritage Post-1939 Listing Programme. RCHME. 1998, p.98 & 123.

Simon Henley, The Architecture of Parking. Thames & Hudson, 2007, p.98-9.

Jonathan Glancey, 'A Baroque Cathedral for Buses', The Guardian, Monday 1 October 2007.

Alan Powers, 'Obituary: Keith Ingham', The Independent, 3 May 1995.

Lesley Jackson, 'Obituary: Keith Ingham,' The Independent, 26 May 1995.

REASONS FOR DECISION: Preston bus station and car park is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

* The bus station and car park remains a little-altered and remarkably good example of integrated 1960s traffic planning that still functions as originally intended

* It is architecturally inventive and shows the influence of late Le Corbusier in its dramatic sculptural effects

* It is a successful and bold example of a 1960s 'megastructure' combining several functions and that was designed to recreate a sense of the monumental within the British town scene

* The curved concrete front to the car park decks are major architectural features of the design and focus attention on the building's great length whilst creating an elegant light and dark horizontal banding effect along the entire main east and west elevations

* It represents an important stage in the evolution of integrated design in England pioneered by Building Design Partnership with architecture, interior design, landscaping, graphic and typographic

design working to a common goal.

* The building displays an unusual blend of New Brutalist architecture that is mellowed by an inspired application of upturned curves to the main elevations, sweeping car park ramps and the curved ends of the former taxi rank.