

30 May 1976

From Victor Pasmore to Mr Philipson, General Manager, Peterlee Development Corporation.

Dear Mr Philipson

I visited Peterlee on May 25th and at the same time attended the Press conference in connection with the article about the South West Area in the Northern Echo.

Unfortunately it was inevitable that the structural weaknesses in the housing units of South West 1 and 2 would eventually boomerang back on us. Now that remedial action is in operation the matter was bound to be taken up by the Press.

As principle designer of the South West Area as a whole, I accepted full responsibility for the technical failures in the first section. The architects were asked to structuralise radical changes from existing practice in house design at short notice and at predetermined low-cost levels. That they managed to do this at all seems to me a great achievement. But inevitably such changes could not be perfected in terms of either design or construction at the first attempt. There had to be, therefore, an experimental stage in the first instance and South West 1 and 2 was just this.

In this respect I made it clear that without an initial experiment there could have been no renewal or revitalisation of Peterlee at that time; only a continued extension of existing council house types.

Also I pointed out that the mistakes in South West 1 And 2 were progressively remedied throughout subsequent developments without in the least resorting to reactionary design and without any changes in my activity or relationship.

It was inevitable also that this attack on my contribution at Peterlee on a technical level would be used to attack the sculptural features as well. Of course it is impossible to justify in rational terms anything which depends purely on feeling, taste or fashion at any given time. But I tried to make it clear that the object of all the sculpture, including the Pavilion, was to give dignity, focus and "impact" at various central points in the environmental complex of what is virtually a Council housing estate. But, to my mind, Peterlee is not a housing estate, but an important town. If for nothing else, therefore, the function of the sculptures is justified to underline and demonstrate this.

However, in order not to add more fuel to the fire I have withdrawn a fourth small sculpture which I had planned for the landscape architect's project in South West V on the Knoll above Passfield Way. A sculptural feature is not absolutely necessary there as the oak tree by itself will do the job just as well and better.

The conference also raised the question as to my future at Peterlee. It has never been my wish to extend beyond the South West Area, which included Sunny Blunts, nor do I wish to go beyond the Agnew estates at Aycliffe. But, as the South West Area at Peterlee is now nearing completion in its last stage at South West 5, I am aware that my work there is approaching its end.

I look forward to the opportunity of meeting again.

Meanwhile yours sincerely

Victor Pasmore