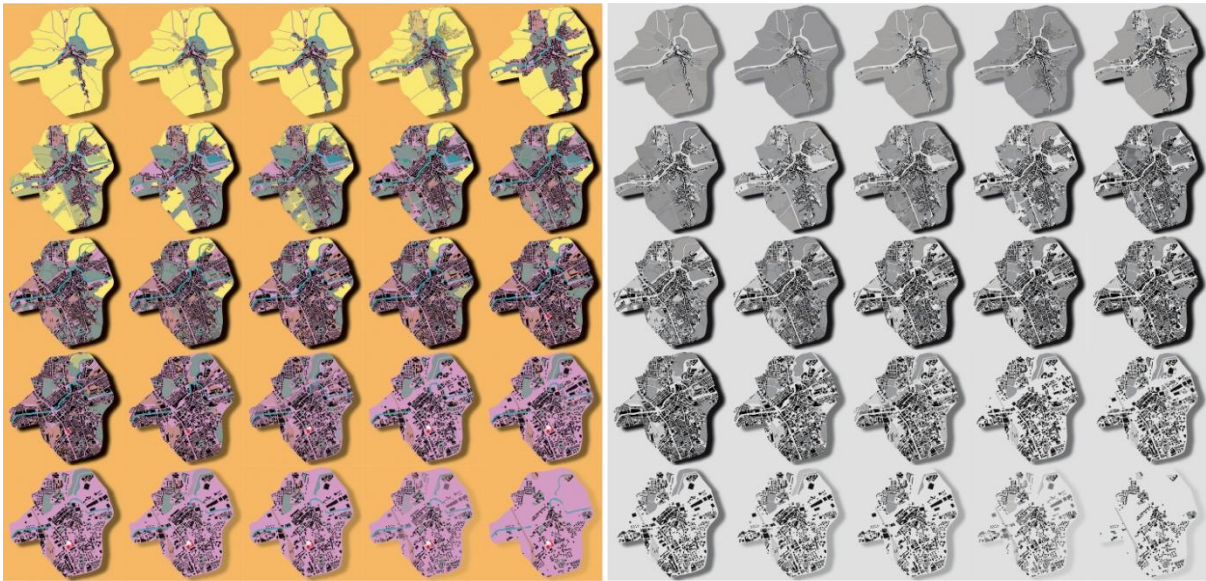


The Stockport Diptych



The Stockport Diptych 2019.

“Highway-men, traffic engineers, and city rebuilders... face a blank when they try to think what they can realistically do, day by day, except overcome traffic kinks as they occur and apply what foresight they can towards moving and storing more cars in the future.”

Jane Jacobs, “The Death and Life of Great American Cities”, 1961.

This print is an urban take on the Marilyn Diptych by Andy Warhol, using historic and contemporary OS mapping to document the change in fortunes of a Northern British town. Warhol’s original depicts the colourful life of the star on the left, contrasted with her fading demise on the right. Here the purposeful use and form of pre-planning Stockport morphs into the contemporary condition of no use and no form.



The Marilyn Diptych, Andy Warhol, 1962.

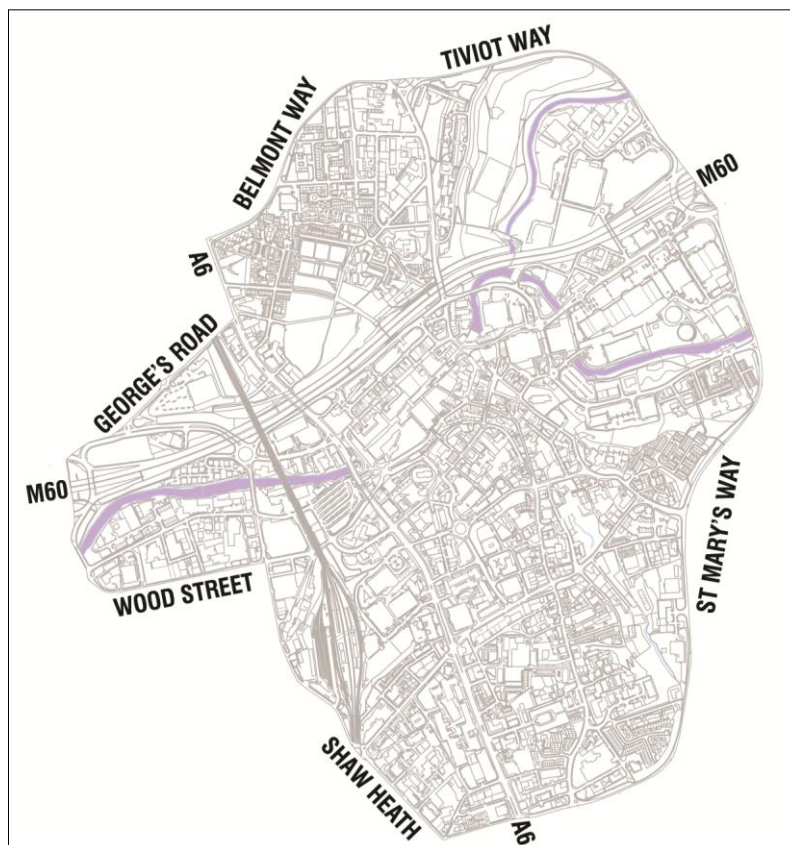
Background: What is Planning?

Stockport Council is currently spending £900m on projects to improve the town. A substantial proportion of this funding is to support a series of highways engineering infrastructure projects, including the Town Centre Access Plan and the A6 to Manchester Airport Relief Road. Its next plan, for an A6-M60 link is reported to cost £600m. Why is this?

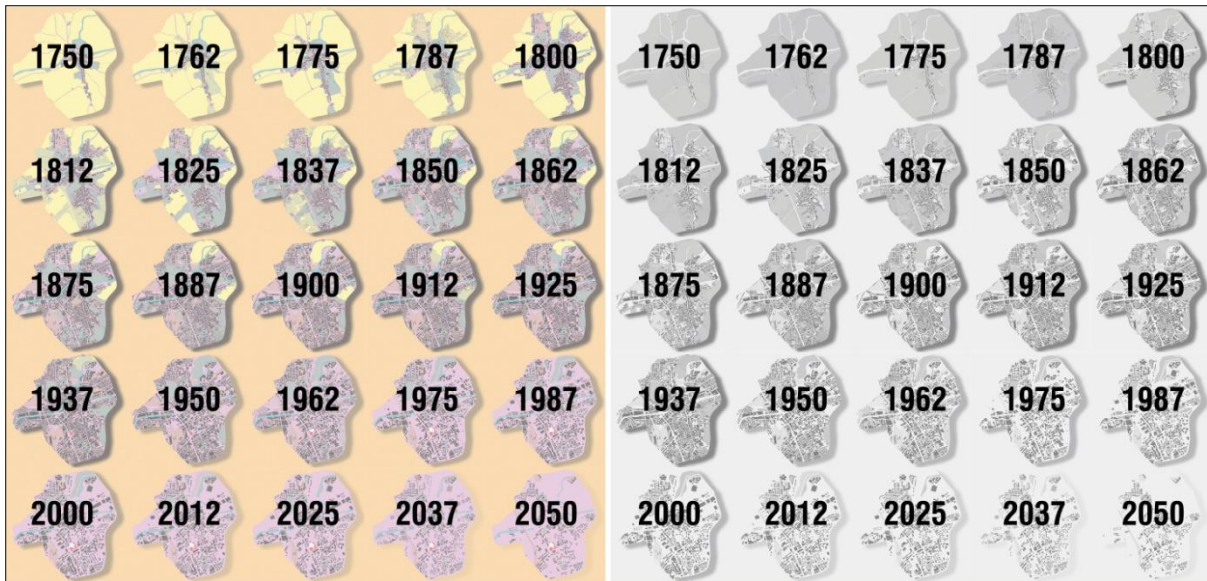
At the same time the same council expresses angst about how to make comparatively minor cuts to other budgets. Funds exist; perhaps they just need to be redirected. And what is the end game? 51% of the surface area within the town centre is now devoted to highways. This compares with 29% in York and 24.5% in Lincoln, places where we might feel more comfortable walking around. At what % coverage in tarmac will Stockport refocus its planning priorities from cars to people?

A Guide to the Diptych

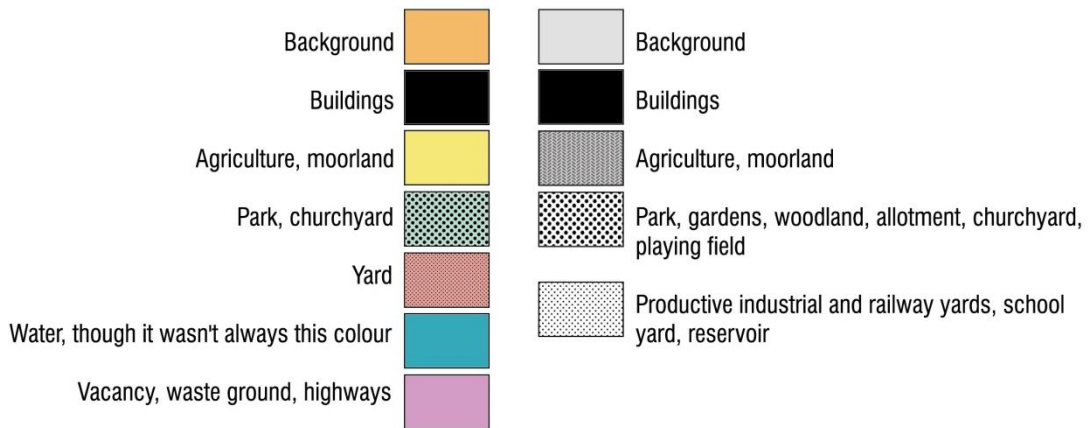
The Stockport Diptych documents the evolution of the town centre from 1750 to 2050 in two panels of 25 maps each, charting functional use on the left and physical form on the right.



Orientation map of the town's ring road profile.



Date key



Left key: use. Right key: form

Stockport: A History through Mapping

Historic maps show agriculture as the predominant land use in the 18th century, and the early mills are depicted within walled gardens. By degree this landscape is replaced with larger industrial sites and terraced housing often around courtyards. Urban parks appear, often on brownfield sites. Gap sites come and go in the later 19th to early 20th century town, the meanwhile land of redevelopment. There are many timber yards in the late 19th century. Often plot occupation in (e.g. 1890's) is the reverse of that in (e.g. 1870's), and this makes good sense in a landscape of gradual renewal - build new on open space, then decant and demolish the old creating new urban space; a continuous process.

The lipstick and teeth (red and white) only appear after 1925 with construction of the Town Hall, possibly the point at which it all started to go wrong. The figure-ground map before then confirms a lively evolving mix of urban streets and spaces, a human-scale environment. Progressively this becomes dissolved, most savagely around the 1970's with clearance for what is now the M60, but

everywhere the process of thinning down by planning is evident, and continues. The 2025 map adds Redrock, Exchange, houses west of the college, and the new Covent Garden. By this time however, gone will be unlisted buildings vacant in 2017, commercial sheds built before 1980 with asbestos or felt roofs, railway sidings, the 1970s college, Debenhams, Sainsbury's.

Where did it all go?

“Greater accessibility by car is inexorably accompanied both by less convenience and efficiency of public transport, and by thinning-down and smearing-out of uses, and hence by more need for cars.”

Jane Jacobs, “The Death and Life of Great American Cities”, 1961

If the current planning system and economic climate persists, all retail and commerce will relocate to "parks" alongside the new ring roads, maintenance of real parks will cease, and the useful landscape will become empty, or "post use". By 2050, any buildings with lightweight claddings of 30 yrs life expectancy or less will have gone, together with unused and unlisted brick and concrete buildings over 100 years old. Included in this would be Lancashire Hill flats, anything 1970s, Merseyway, Peel Centre, Redrock, half the station post-HS2, the College and Workhouse. Optimistically, most 19th century buildings might survive, and perhaps Stopford House and its distinctive piazza will get spot-listed by English Heritage following a failed 3am demolition attempt by SMBC in the mid 2030's.

Roundabout Stockport: a town of mills and houses, streets and squares, gardens and courtyards, converted by planners to a wasteland of formless buildings in residual highway space. No one wants to live work or play in this kind of environment. A town planned out of purpose.

Andy and Jim

My version is half Warhol's size. Colours are sampled from the Marilyn series. Like the original it includes an unprinted base area, though why this is I've no idea. Drawn in CAD, toned in Photoshop, laser printed on polyester fabric; the technical accuracy Andy couldn't achieve, and probably didn't want.

James Dyson is an architect with over 30 years experience in public and commercial practice, with a passion for architecture, urbanism and all things design. “The Stockport Diptych” exposes the impoverishment of contemporary planning in the town.

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