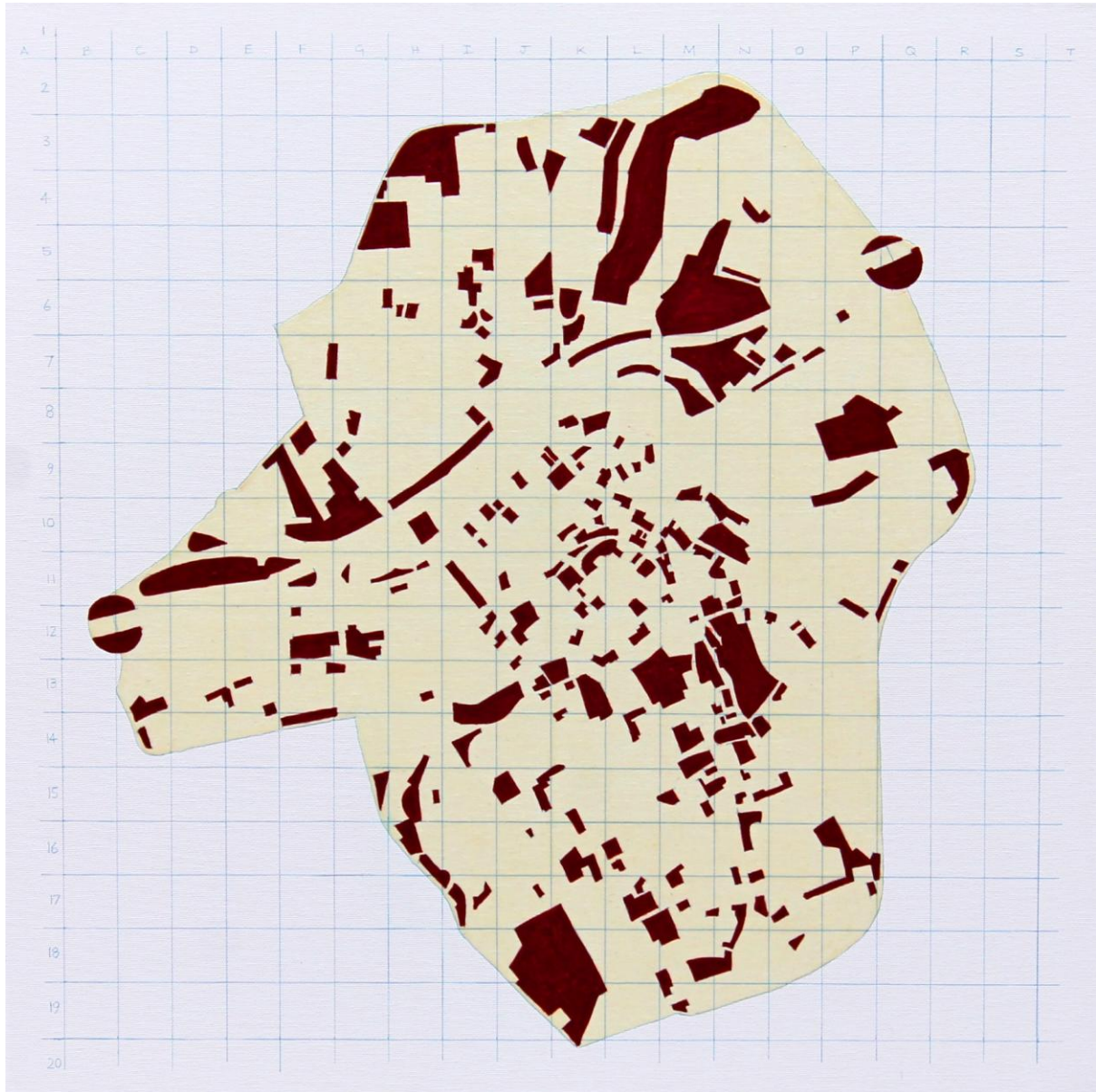


Vacancy Rash

Carbuncles on the face of an old friend.



Background; Planning, Development and Regeneration in Stockport

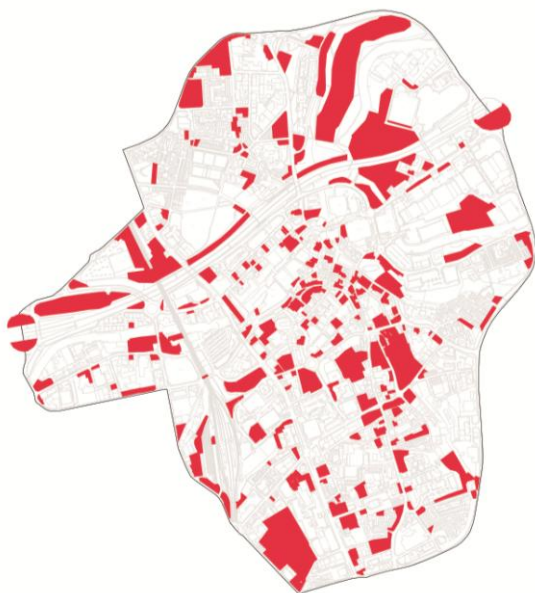
"*Vacancy Rash*" stems from research into the extent of vacant land and buildings within Stockport town centre.

At the same time as the council plans to build 19,000 homes on green belt land around the town, it presides over widespread site and building vacancy, whilst at the same time frittering away hundreds of millions of pounds on highways projects. The town centre is becoming little more than a roundabout, to which the car-bound navigate merely to connect with somewhere else.

A number of seemingly random but interwoven symptoms contribute to this condition:

- A plan under the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework to build 19,000 houses on green belt land.
- A planning requirement for two cars per new dwelling.
- Substantial site and land vacancy in the town centre.
- A private sector dismissive of building in the town, as evidenced in the outcome of the SHLAA.
- Isolated pockets of vulnerable community housing which are cut off from neighbours and services.
- A council building roads, because this is what they know, and is what they can bid for. 51% surface area of the town is already resultant from highway planning (compared with York 29% and Lincoln 24%, places you might be more comfortable in as a human being).
- The lions share of a £900m council investment programme devoted to highways, with a further M60 link to come.
- 40% of the local population at breadline poverty or below.
- The second highest retail vacancy rate in the country.
- Absence of footfall to encourage new business.
- Pressure on maintenance of parks and public spaces.
- A council which develops plans covertly, leaving public consultations to the last possible moment, with the result they're either misunderstood or petitioned against.

When planners no longer plan, private contractors are allowed to lead, and the result is suburban sprawl, often in its genesis opposed by Nimby-ism. A PLAN for central Stockport needs to be developed based on car-free pedestrian access and compulsory purchase, because the current strategies are patently not working.

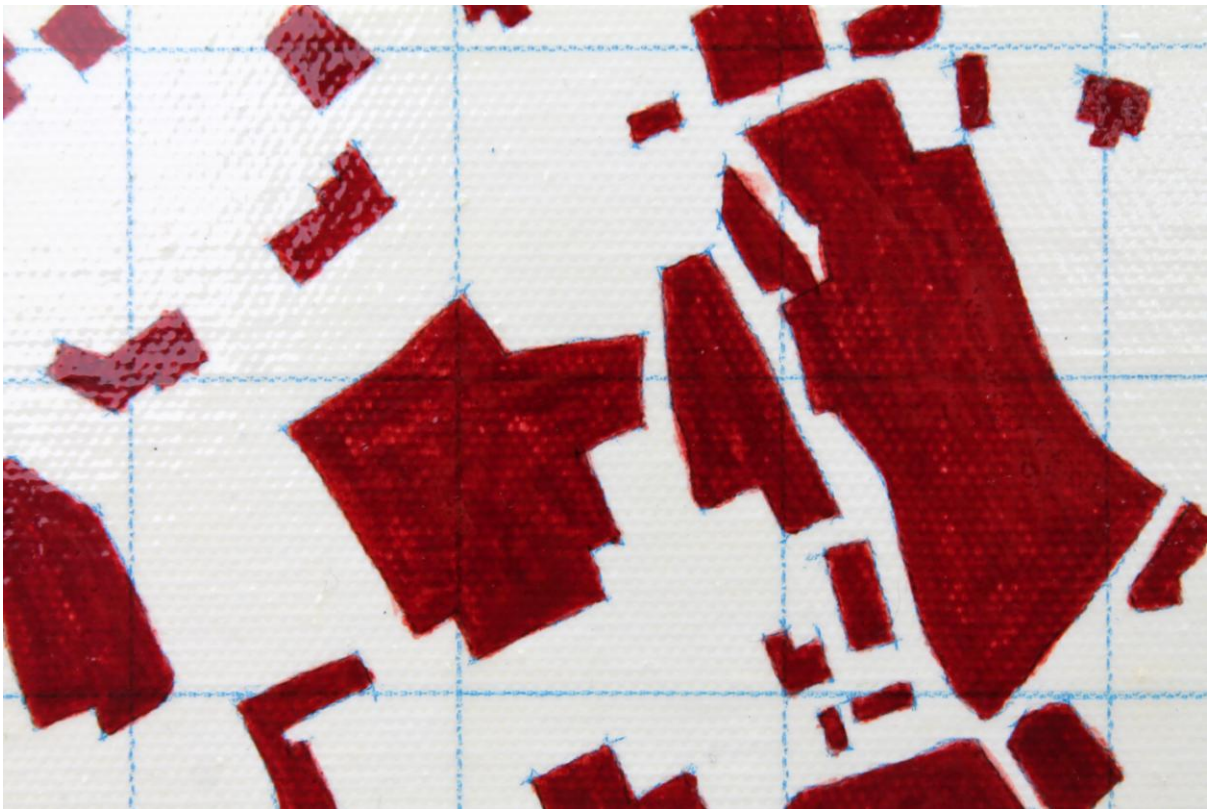


L: Map of Vacant Stockport. R: Map of Highway + Vacant Land in Stockport

Painting

Vacancy Rash is a commentary on this situation, mapping empty land and buildings within a town centre ring road formed by St Mary's Way, Tiviot Way, Belmont Way, St George's Way, King Street West, Shaw Heath and Longshut Lane.

It is made of "authentic" materials. The cartesian grid and town plan is mapped in blue engineering pencil as a reminder that this town centre vacancy is managed, if not planned, by those in power. In representation of the haemorrhaging of life from the town, it is painted in blood; stage blood, tragi-comic, eight coats and still partially transparent. Finally, the territory enclosed by the ring road is yacht varnished. In certain reflections promotional gloss renders Vacancy invisible, and like marketing this varnish has an apparent thickness, 6 coats, but it can still be seen through, and in time with continued exposure to light will inevitably be subject to yellowing, and crack up. I have resisted the temptation to cover the whole with a final coat of whitewash to represent the public consultation processes employed by the council.



Anthropomorphism

The outline formed by the town centre ring road is oddly anthropomorphic, a character I like to call the Stockport Planner. This invites the picture to be considered simultaneously as landscape, abstract and portrait.

Sadly the Planner has contacted a disease which may be terminal.

Find out more

Vacancy Rash is the second in The Stockport Planner series. To see the first and to find out just how quotidian road building in Stockport has become click here:

[The Stockport Planner](#)

To find out why building on Stockport's green belt is unnecessary and what the alternatives are click here:

[Defragmenting Stockport](#)

To find out what Stockport is like follow this walk:

[Stockport, A Ramble](#)

James Dyson, July 2017