

II Heol Hamlin

Exploring Abergavenny



EXPLORING ABERGAVENNY

For several years the Abergavenny and District Civic Society has been studying the streets, spaces and buildings of Abergavenny and Mardy outside the town centre. This process is known as 'characterisation', defined by the Welsh Government as 'capturing the local distinctiveness by identifying how places have been shaped over time.'

This record of what makes each part of the town distinctive, and often rather special, increases our awareness of the qualities that need to be considered and respected when new development is proposed. We hope that the planning authority will share our impressions and take account of our views. We also hope that our studies will increase residents' understanding and appreciation of their town, encouraging them to take an active interest in how change is managed in the future, or to conduct more research into aspects of the town's development.

The survey started in partnership with the Civic Trust for Wales as a pilot project to test whether community groups could carry out urban characterisation. The outcome was the Trust's *Exploring your town* manual and toolkit (2013). A County Council conservation area appraisal adopted in 2016 has also been taken into account, and this also covers the town's commercial centre¹.

We have divided the town into thirty-six character areas. This report presents the history and character of one of those areas.

Now we would like *your* contribution:

- *Have we made any mistakes?*
- *Can you add to the history of the area?*

- *Do you agree with our impressions of the area?*
- *What have we missed that should have been recorded?*

All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

Acknowledgements and copyright information

The Society is especially grateful for the survey contributions of Clive Bransom, Dick Cole, Tony Konieczny, Nigel Patterson, Anna Petts, Duncan Rogers and Jay Shipley. Dick Cole has carried out much of the research and final report writing, and accepts responsibility for any errors. None of the team had prior experience of heritage studies; all have learned much from the project.

We also thank Anna Leron and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

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¹ <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/abergavenny-conservation-area-appraisal>

Figure 1: location plan and aerial



HEOL HAMLIN

THIS HOUSING ESTATE on the eastern side of the town lies between the Gavenny river and the railway. An access road from Grosvenor Road crosses above Ross Road and the Gavenny to reach the estate.

The difficult shape and topography of the site, and possibly ground stability issues, have resulted in some irregularity in the layout of the housing, lessening





Figure 2

any sense of regimentation and allowing views of the hills beyond. The housing blocks are quite widely separated in distinct contrast to the densely packed housing in some recent private developments in the town.

On the other hand, the uniformity of the brick and limited variation of details tends towards monotony. The estate has a generally calm feel with no through traffic, allowing children to play safely in the spaces between the houses.

Historical Background

The unusual triangular shape of this housing area is determined by its location within the former junction of the London and North Western Railway Merthyr branch with the Newport to Hereford branch of the Great Western Railway. The former line had been abandoned by the 1970s and the hollow between the railway embankments was filled over many years to enable social housing to be built in the late 1980s.

Key to map

Conservation area boundary



Listed Building



Building of special local interest



Building of local interest



Metal railings



Local landmark building



Good sense of place



Terminated street view



Deflected street view



Vista, long view



Visual pinch point



Building rhythm



Important walling



Important trees or shrubs



Important hedges



Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis





Figure 4

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The access road from Grosvenor Road is about 200m long, following the line of the old railway and using the railway bridge abutments to cross Ross Road. The housing estate itself rises a little to the north and east from the level of the access road at 80m, which is about 10m above the river, which is culverted beneath.

The approach road initially affords a panoramic view across the rooftops of the town and down to the centre of Abergavenny. Beyond, and in the distance, are the majestic Blorenge and Llangynidr mountains. However, as it drops to the old track level, the view of fences, gates and garages to homes in Richmond Road is less appealing. The bridge acts as an entrance to the estate with grassed areas on both sides, one edged by bow-topped railings, the other by a softer wooden fence, marking the edges of the old embankments. A sense of space is enhanced by views of the Ysgyryd, Deri and Rholben hills beyond.

The steep outsides of the curving embankments north and south of the estate are clothed in mature woodland, marred by fly-tipping. These trees, together with those between the eastern boundary and the railway, contain the estate



Figure 5

well, minimising noise from the railway and the A465 beyond. A number of further trees, particularly silver birch, have been planted within the estate.

Within the estate, public and private spaces merge as most front gardens are open grassed areas interspersed with permeable slabs for car parking. There are occasional front gardens enclosed by low wooden fences and a few small groups of shrubs or conifers. The back gardens vary considerably in size and are bounded by timber fencing or brick walls. A few have rear access by a path. The estate is separated from the railway line by a tall sectional concrete wall.

There is one small play area with equipment and several other grassed areas suitable for young children.

There are ample parking spaces in front of the houses and off the roads, which are of a good width with speed calming humps. Given the sloping site, in places on the downhill side of Heol Hamlin cars parked in front of some houses are level with the upper floor of the houses. Galvanised steel railings protect these houses from cars and there is a long ramp access down to a large house for the disabled.

Building Character

There are about 80 dwellings, mostly two-storey houses in pairs, trios and fours, but also two blocks of four flats with an interesting staircase window arrangement. The architecture is simple and plain, the majority in a russet red, all with dark grey tiles, no bargeboards or chimneys, relieved by some pale cream rendered upper floors. Most houses have hipped tiled canopies spanning two doorways. All have brown upvc window frames but there is some variety in the colour of front doors. There is little or no evidence of personalisation by owner-occupiers.

Most units appear still to be social housing. A single property for the disabled has been unoccupied for several years. The houses have been well maintained, apart from the house for the disabled, which has been boarded-up; there are a few examples of vandalism.

Heritage Assets

None, apart from the wooded embankments that remind us of the railway history.