

15 Lansdown

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?*

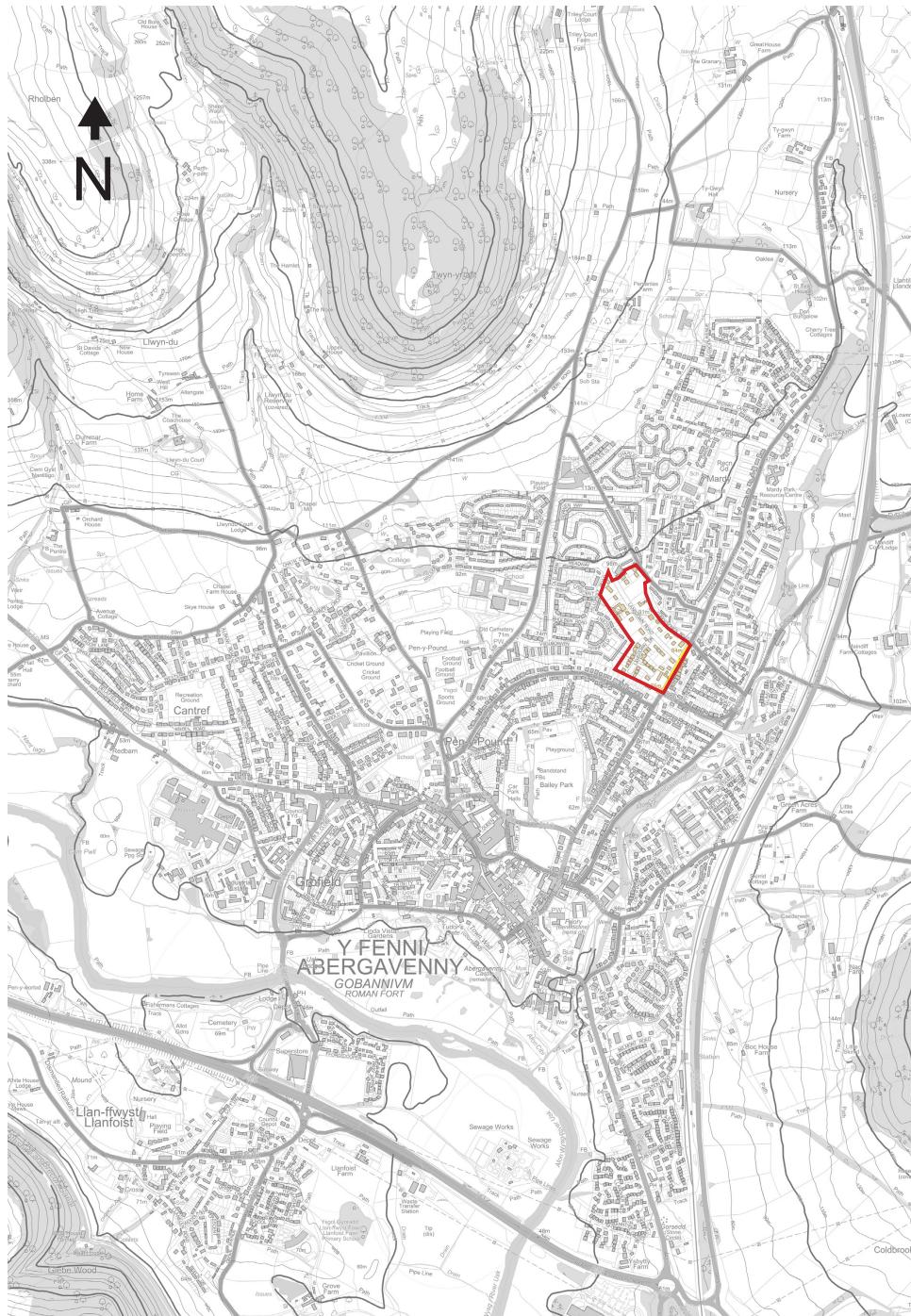
All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

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 Lerman 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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LANSDOWN

LANSDOWN ROAD HAS a south-east to north-west axis north of the former railway, west of Hereford Road and abutting the former borough boundary at Croesonen Road. For convenience the area also includes Lansdown Drive, though it has a different character.

Lansdown could be a detached portion of the Avenue character area, sharing many features typical of that area: mostly substantial houses built over a long





Figure 2: Lansdown Drive

period at a low density, but with an estate of post-war housing, a wide roadway flanked by stone walls and generous amounts of greenery.

Unlike the Avenue area, Lansdown is separated from the town centre and the surrounding countryside by extensive housing estates, mostly built by the council from the 1920s to the 1970s. It therefore stands out as something of an anomaly in its context.

Historical Background

The 1844 tithe map shows four similarly sized fields south west of Croesonen Road almost precisely comprising this character area. At that time Croesonen Road and Llwynu Lane made up an ancient narrow track connecting Ross Road and the old Hereford Road, intersecting with the new Hereford Road. The lane served Llwynu Farm, a little to the north west of the character area.

By 1880 the field nearest the railway had become the garden and small parkland of Tan y Bryn (now Dan y Bryn) and the other three fields had been

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



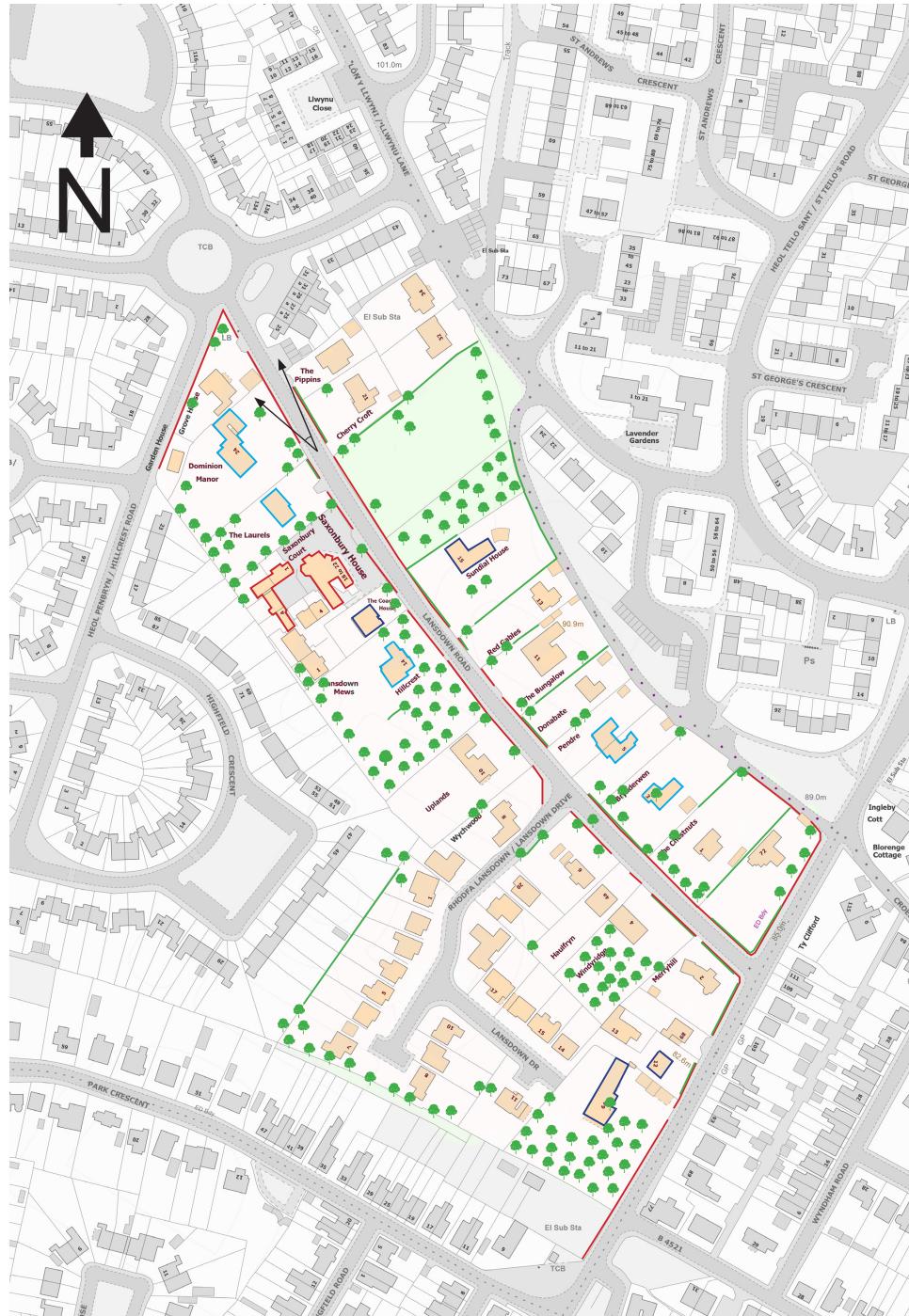
Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis



parcelled into eight undeveloped sections astride a new road with footways and an avenue of trees. The Ordnance Survey map shows the road extending into the next field, though uncompleted.

This extension is not shown on the 1901 map, though the boundary of the furthest house, Nell's Grove (later The Grove, Dominion Manor and now Grove Mansions) extended to the footpath that then linked Llwynu Farm with Ysguborwen and the town, and became Hillcrest Road fifty years later. Apart from Nell's Grove, Havering House (now Saxonbury), its adjoining house (now Coach House) and Hill Crest had been completed on the south side of Lansdown Road.

The 1920 map shows one further house on the south side and five on the north side at the Hereford Road end. By 1939 there were three more on the south side and three more on the north side. By the 1960s the council estates to the west had been completed and five more houses added to Lansdown Road.

In about 1970 around fifteen houses were built at Lansdown Drive in the grounds of Dan y Bryn, reached from Lansdown Road. Eleven homes have been added to the area since then and there is scope for more.

Lansdown was made available for building at about the same time as Avenue Road was made available for the same market – a market for substantial houses in large plots that was clearly limited despite the prosperity of the town at the time. Prosperity dipped between the wars and development in both areas was slow. In the second half of the century the plots became smaller and landowners preferred to sell land for small speculative estates like Lansdown Drive. Large houses like Saxonbury have often become homes for the elderly or been subdivided into apartments.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area lies between the 90m and 100m contours and between the Gavenny river and the Deri, with the almost straight Lansdown Road rising at about 1 in 20. The road is at least 6m wide with generous tarmac footways on each side, a fortunate provision as it is one way of reaching the extensive housing area to the north and west. The few street lights are modern.

As in similar roads elsewhere in the town, Victorian rubble sandstone walls are a strong characteristic of the area, lining both sides of Lansdown Road. Here they are little more than 1m high, and it is the large mature trees, including copper beeches, and tall laurel hedges that often screen the properties behind. The



Figure 4: Saxonbury

stone walls continue on the Hereford Road frontage and on Croesonen Road where they mark the rear boundary of the first two Lansdown Road properties (beyond this there are hedges). Some walls are topped with close-boarded fences and those fronting Dan-y-Brynn have curious 'arrow-slit' details at intervals and unusual entrance pillars.

An aerial photograph shows that Lansdown Road probably exceeds the upper parts of Avenue Road and Chapel Road in the extent of mature trees in its gardens. The gardens are generally large (*ca* 60m deep), with extensive lawns and trees and the houses placed in various positions on the plots. Three have rear accesses to Croesonen Road; two post-war bungalows at the northern end front Llwynu Lane. Extensive parking areas have replaced gardens in some properties, especially Saxonbury. There are two undeveloped plots between Lansdown Road and Llwynu Lane, one overgrown and twice the size of the other from which it is separated by a belt of trees.

Lansdown Drive is quite different and typical of its period. Well-kept front gardens were probably originally open-fronted but some are now hedged. Rear

gardens are modest, most about 20m long. Dan y Brynn visually closes the eastern cul-de-sac.

The entrance to Lansdown Drive has opened up a particularly impressive view across the Usk valley to the Blorenge. Within the estate the view to the west takes in the Deri, Rholben and Mynydd Llanwenarth. The views from Lansdown Road are limited by vegetation but the Deri closes the view from the upper end.

Building Character

Dan y Brynn, fronting Hereford Road, is a substantial Italianate mid-Victorian villa in orange/red brick (locally unusual for such a house at the time) with a double-arched upper central window, limestone details, wide eaves and a shallow slate roof. A stone wall separates the main house from a matching coach house. The main house has cottage-like extensions that appear earlier but are probably not.

Saxonbury is listed and probably the work of E.A. Johnson. It is a massive complex structure from the mid 1880s, now apartments with modern extensions at the back. It is built in buff brick with decorative red brick bands and several interesting features such as the entrance porch, a belvedere, an elaborate Flemish gable and mouldings. It was originally named Havering (or Haverang) House. The recently remodelled modern smaller scale rear courtyard extensions in buff brick and cream-washed rendered harmonise quite well, though with some curious decorative features on an end wall facing the road. Adjoining is The Coach House, originally part of the same property and of the same period in a matching style, now with a flat-roofed garage extension.

Dominion Manor (which is now Grove Mansions flats) was probably also built in the 1880s and originally named Nell's Grove and then The Grove. It is a large sandstone house with limestone dressings and a clay-tiled roof. In multi-occupation, it has been extended in recent years. Hillcrest (No14) is also large and of a similar age and materials apart from slate roofing; it is south east facing and well hidden from the road by trees.

Other houses built before 1920 are: no 72 Hereford Road and nos 1-7 Lansdown Road (nos 5/7 being the only pair in the area) and no 10. Some are well hidden by trees and hedges, but nos 3-7 have a red-brick ground floor frontage, a cream-rendered first floor, dormers and matching decorative front gable barge-boards. No 10 is south-east facing, cream with red and recently added dormers.

The inter-war period brought the double-fronted 'Tudor' bungalow at no 11 and a dark red-brick house set back to the left of it. Another followed this on the right after the war, understood to form a family group originally on a single plot. A large neo-Georgian dark red-brick house with six multi-paned windows, a Classical central doorcase, its eponymous sundial, a steep tiled roof and tall chimneystacks is at no 15. Three other houses on the south side and appearing to be from the inter-war period are undistinguished.

A few more plots were developed in the 1950s and 1960s, some with bungalows and dormer bungalows. The grounds of Dan-y-Bryn were used to create Lansdown Drive, now about twenty detached houses, dormer bungalows and a bungalow characteristic of the period using a variety of shapes and materials including various bricks, rendering, reconstituted cream and grey stone, and tile hanging. Several have been further modified. More recently two large houses have been added at the northern end of Lansdown Road on each side of Dominion Manor. One, The Laurels, is red brick in a convincing neo-Edwardian style; the other, Grove House, is in a less clear retrospective style, red brick with buff brick dressing and a slate roof. Another smaller house has recently been added behind with access from Hillcrest Road.

Heritage Assets

Only Saxonbury is listed, and this is not a conservation area. Dan y Bryn is an interesting large mid-Victorian house, unusual for being in brick, with surviving outbuildings. Saxonbury's coach house (if that is what it originally was), Dominion Manor (or Grove Mansions) and Hillcrest are also good examples of late Victorian architecture, and Sundial House is an impressive inter-war residence. There are also several interesting Edwardian houses.

Stone walls, trees and hedges are vital to the character of most of the area.