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18 Major's Barn
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.

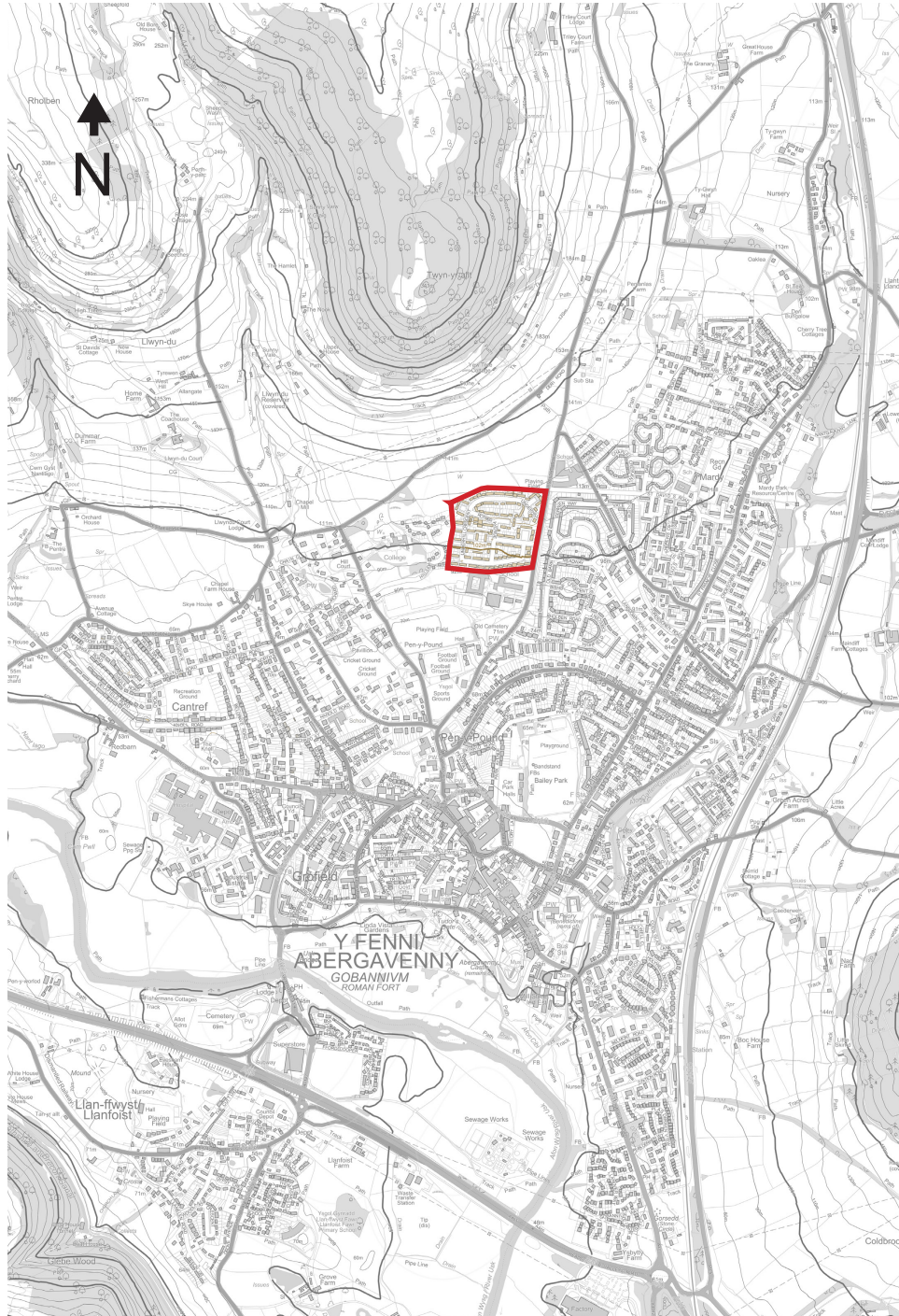
Acknowledgements and copyright information

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>



MAJOR'S BARN

THIS AREA LIES WEST of the Old Hereford Road and north of King Henry VIII School. It was developed as council housing soon after the Llwynu area on the opposite side of Old Hereford Road.

The layout of the estate is typical of its slightly later date than Llwynu, with housing arranged both in rectilinear groups, often around a green space, and to a





Figure 2: upper Underhill Crescent

building line along a straight or curving road. In places this has resulted in an interesting streetscape with planned enclosed spaces. However, the amount of grey rendering, the limited architectural variety and lack of substantial vegetation give parts of the estate a rather bleak appearance. It is clearly an area where there is deprivation, but many residents are looking after their homes and gardens with care and probably enjoying their wide views of the surrounding hills.

Historical Background

The housing estate was farmland before development, with the homestead at Major's Barn, an early 20th century group of buildings on Old Hereford Road that has recently been replaced by six houses. Old Hereford Road had been superseded as the main route to that city in the 1820s, and a cemetery was established on its western side in the 1850s.

The King Henry VIII School was opened in 1963, probably a little later than the construction period of the Major's Barn housing estate.

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



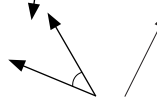
Terminated street view



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

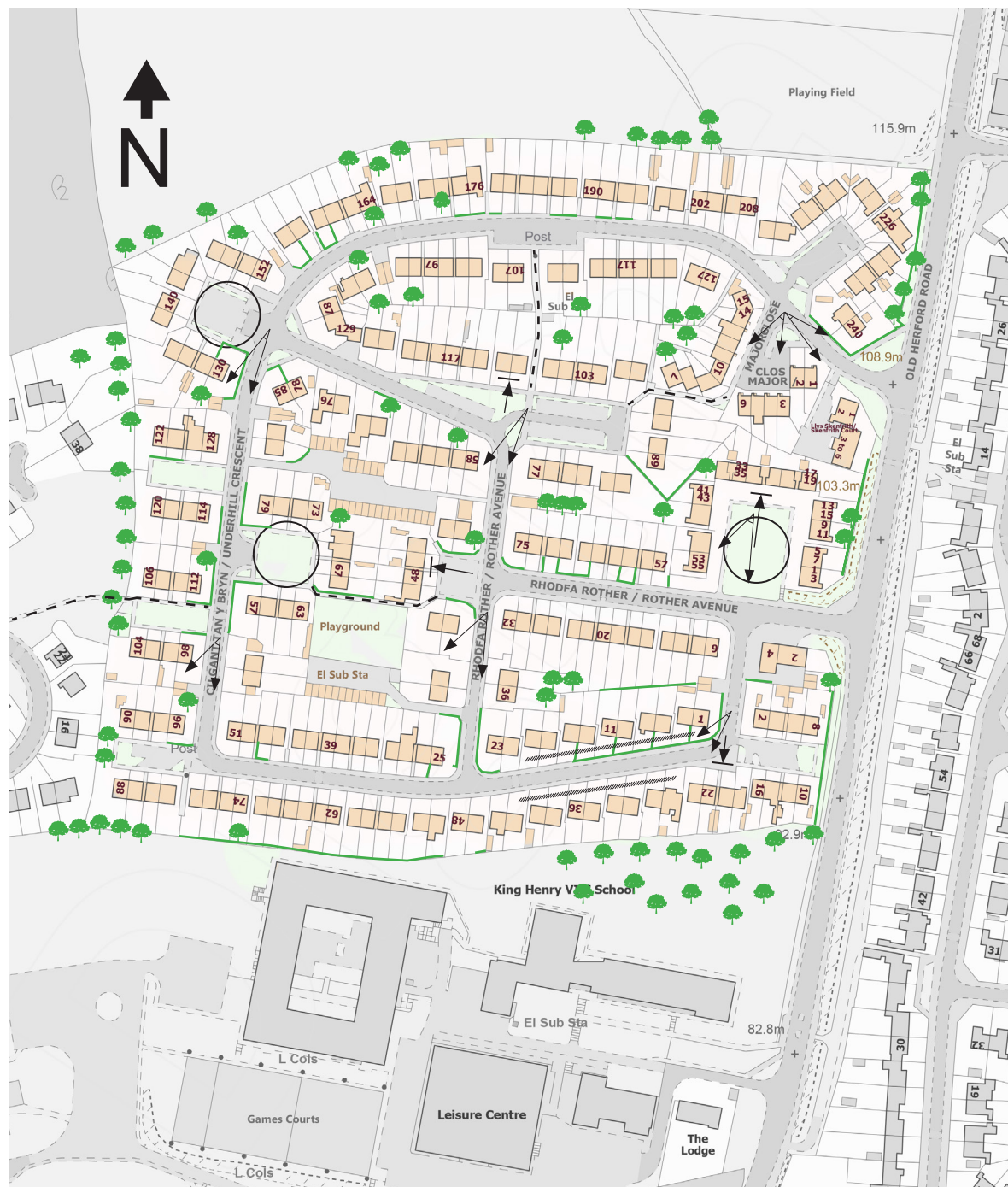




Figure 4: Rother Avenue

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The Major's Barn (sometimes known as Rother Avenue) estate lies between 90m and 120m above sea level, on a slope averaging about 1 in 8, appreciably steeper than land to the east. Most of the housing is arranged along the contours and there is no evidence of the several field boundaries that once crossed the site.

The estate layout is distinctly different from that of Llwynu. It is a little more like the later 'Saints' development of South Mardy, more rectilinear though still with conventional semi-detached or terraced housing. Most houses are on a building line of about 6m from the highway. There was no street planting and any greenery on the open spaces has not survived. Front gardens have, or had, low brick boundary walls, now often topped by a variety of timber fences, railings and even some wire netting. Some walls with railings have recently been rebuilt by the housing association. Low clipped hedges often provide welcome greenery but garden trees are very rare. Some gardens are virtually derelict, with broken down walls, but others are well cared for. A few private owners have made parking space in their front gardens.



Figure 5: New build, Major's Barn

Rear gardens are about 10m long, rather shorter than in Llwynu, and there are a few rectangular public open spaces, including a designated playground. The permeability of the estate for pedestrians is assisted by a number of foot-paths, one of which connects to the parkland-like open space of the neighbouring 1990s Hillside development to the west.

The estate has a particularly low provision of private parking space, partly because of the higher building density. However, more off-road public spaces and garaging, mainly in courts behind houses, were made available where space and the gradient allowed. The condition of many of the original garages is now poor, though seemingly condoned graffiti has added some interest.

The entire estate is a 20mph zone with speed-reducing humps throughout. It is served by a bus route, though the passage of buses cannot be easy because of street parking, which is particularly dense on the northern section of Underhill Crescent.

Like Llwynu, the area has wide views of the Bloreng to the south, and it is overlooked by the Deri to the north.

Building Character

The estate has nearly 300 homes, in pairs or terraces of up to six, usually closely spaced. One group of two-storey buildings is made up of flats. Many of the homes must now be owner-occupied but it is not easy to identify these except in the few cases where extensions or new porches have been added.

Most of the housing is rendered, usually in the original grey above a brick plinth, but a few are now colour washed. Plain tiled roofs are both hipped and gable ended, and there are chimneys throughout. Some south-facing roofs have photovoltaic panels. A few groups of houses in brick or with a brick ground floor relieve the repetition, and details such as brick infill panels between upper floor windows or brown window opening surrounds are also occasionally used. Many original simple horizontal door canopies remain and most woodwork is still painted white. A few homeowners have invested in porches or canopies with lean-to or gabled tiled roofs that add considerably to the appearance of their properties.

Major's Close, adjoining the old farmhouse, is a group of fifteen mono-pitch-roofed houses in cream brick, built in the 1970s at about the same time as the Dan y Deri estate. Six new cottage-like houses have recently replaced the Major's Barn farmhouse next door.

At the Rother Avenue entrance to the estate there is a Lonsis general store, built about 1970, rather later than the main estate.

Heritage Assets

None.