Exploring Abergavenny

2 Belgravia

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 centre[1].

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.

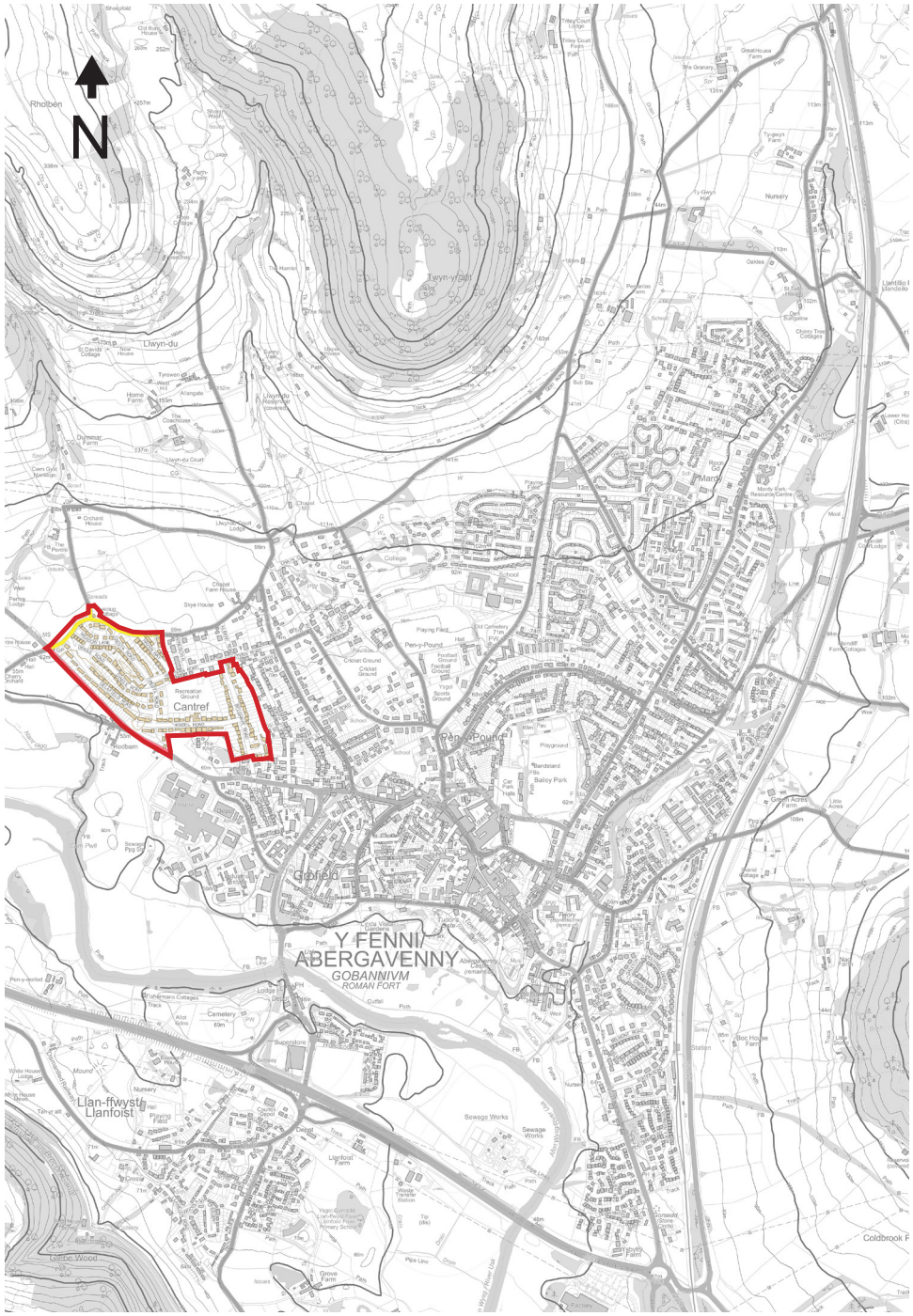
We also thank Anna Lermon and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

This publication © 2017 Abergavenny and District Civic Society. Mapping based on Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database 2017 Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence via the Open University). For educational use only. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Aerial image (figure 1) © Google 2016.

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

Cover: The Blorenge from Dingle Road

Figure 1: Belgravia location plan and aerial



BELGRAVIA

WE HAVE RATHER PLAYFULLY named this extensive suburban area in response to the names of its easternmost road and the playing field that serves the west of the town. Although almost entirely post-war housing, there are significant differences between parts of the area, notably contrasts between Belgrave Road and speculative housing to the west.

'Belgravia' is a pleasant well-maintained suburb built by the private sector in the conventional way with houses strung along lengthy straight or gently curving roads. It was begun just before the war and almost completed by 1970, by which time public sector housing in Mardy was using more complex layouts that were to influence the private sector later in the century. The architecture is varied, undistinguished but sometimes interesting.

Housing in Belgrave and Knoll Roads, the earliest to be built, tends to be rather more up-market and bespoke than the housing to the west, though this too has considerable variety. The older part also has more trees and greenery in

larger gardens, while the housing on Delafield, Dingle, and part of Cresta Road is ranged along the contours of quite steep slopes, often a challenge for gardeners.

Historical Background

In 1880 there were three fields between North Street and The Knoll; by 1900 they had been combined into one, and a track named Belgrave Road joined Brecon and Western Roads with just two pairs of houses almost facing each other at the Brecon Road end. Nothing had changed by 1920 and by 1940 only a few houses had been built on the eastern side of Belgrave Road at its northern end.

The development of Belgrave Road and Knoll Road south of a new recreation area was almost completed during the first twenty years of the post-war period. Cresta Road had recently joined Knoll Road to Western Avenue and a

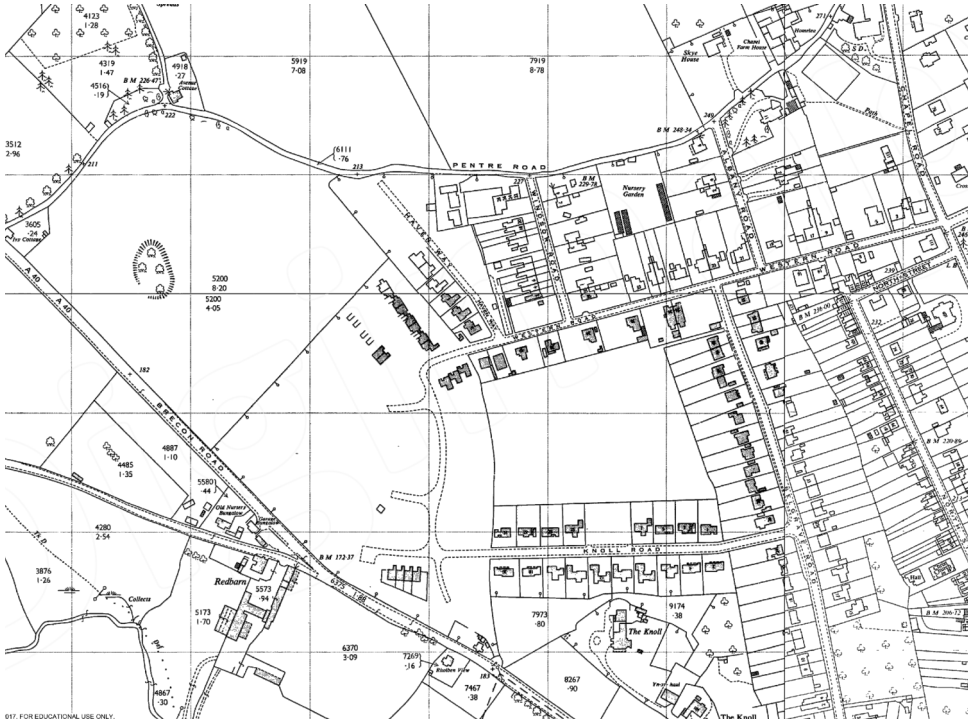


Figure 2: development by 1965

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

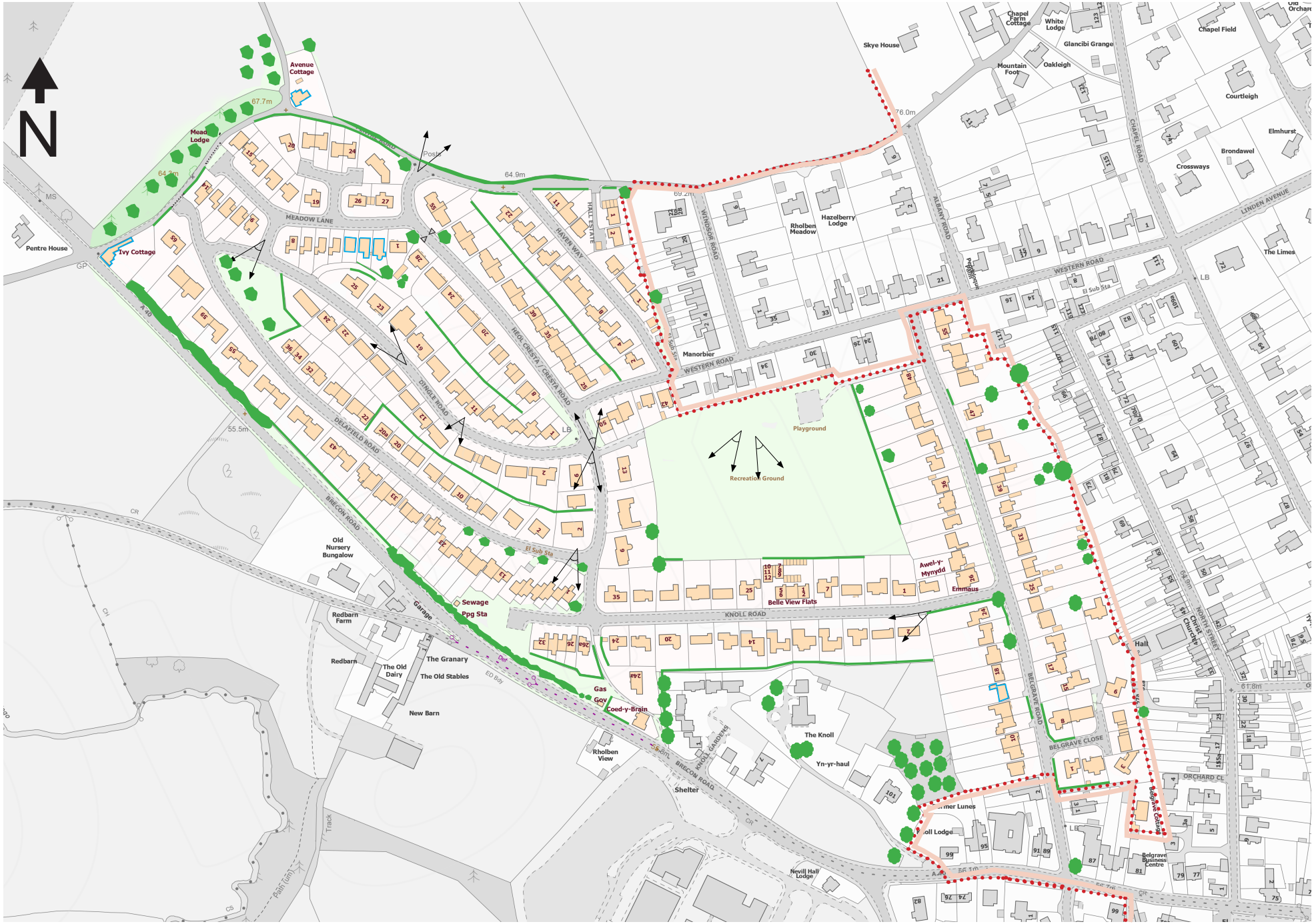
Important trees or shrubs

Important hedges

Footpath

Improvement opportunity

Figure 3: character analysis


N
Avenue Cottage
Mead Lodge
Pentre House
Ivy Cottage
MEADOW LANE
HAVEN WAY
HALL ESTATE
HEOL CRESTA / CRESTA ROAD
DINGLE ROAD
DELAFIELD ROAD
BRECON ROAD
WINDSOR ROAD
WESTERN ROAD
ALBANY ROAD
CHAPEL ROAD
LINDEN AVENUE
KNOLL ROAD
BELGRAVE ROAD
BELGRAVE CLOSE
ORCHARD CL
NORTH STREET
Skye House
Chapel Farm Cottage
White Lodge
Glancibi Grange
Mountain Foot
Oakleigh
Chapel Field
Courtleigh
Elmhurst
Brondawel
Crossways
The Limes
Rholben Meadow
Hazelberry Lodge
Manorbier
Playground
Recreation Ground
Old Nursery Bungalow
Sewage Ppg Sta
Redbarn Farm
Redbarn
The Old Dairy
The Granary
The Old Stables
New Barn
Garage
Gas Gov
Coed-y-Brain
Rholben View
Shelter
Belle View Flats
Awel-y-Mynydd
Emmaus
The Knoll
Yn-yr-haul
Nevill Hall Lodge
Belgrave Business Centre
Hall
Christ Church
Track
Path (um)
67.7m
64.9m
76.0m
55.5m
61.8m

few houses had been built on Cresta, Delafield and Dingle Roads. Haven Way had been completed off Western Road.

A 1971 aerial photograph shows development moving further west along Cresta,Delafield and Dingle Roads; a photograph ten years later shows the development of the area, including Meadow Lane, to be complete apart from a section of Delafield Road.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The eastern half of the area rises gradually from about 60m above sea level to nearly 70m, a gradient of 1 in 40 on Belgrave Road. West of the playing field the ground rises to a high point on Meadow Lane, with Dingle and Delafield Roads at descending levels on a quite steep slope to the south, Cresta Road on the north-eastern slope, and Pentre Lane a little lower to the west.

The most distinctive landscape feature of the area is the grassy slope where Dingle and Delafield Roads meet, probably too steep for building. A grove of five mature trees adds to the appeal of this open space, which enjoys good views of the Blorenge and Gilwern Hill. A depression in the area may mark an old quarry.

The playing field, rather grandly known as Belgrave Park, has a football pitch and there is play equipment in the north-east corner. It benefits from wide views of the hills but otherwise has no particular landscape quality. There is also a small grassed area parallel to the A40 behind the last block of housing in Knoll Road. It has no obvious function and there are limited views from it. The only surviving section of a footpath that once extended to Pentre Road connects the end of Knoll Road to Brecon Road, perhaps little known as it does not appear to have led to hospital-related parking in Knoll Road.

Belgrave Road is almost straight with plots about 60m long and 10-20m wide, with the houses on an irregular building line usually about 12m back from the footway. Forecourt walls are mostly brick on the eastern side, concrete block on the west, outside of which a part of the road has a narrow grass verge with trees, a rare Abergavenny feature, possibly replacements of the row of trees there before building took place. Front gardens have generous tree and shrub planting and rear gardens have mature trees where they abut the old boundary with North Street properties.

Behind properties on the west side of Belgrave Road south of Knoll Road there is the small but striking wooded knoll that explains the names of the large

Figure 4: Delafield Road

house beyond and the road to the north.

Belgrave Close has small plots with more open front gardens behind low forecourt walls (one on the corner raised by open blockwork) and short back gardens.

Knoll Road is a wide straight carriageway with ample tarmac footways and low brick property boundary walls with gate piers (one since embellished with finials). Front gardens have shrubs and small trees rather than hedges. The building line is irregular but always at least 6m back from the road, often broken by tall hedges that separate plots. Plots are about 30m long and 18m wide.

The street scene on the speculative estates further west is quite different, varying according to the lie of the land and whether the properties are bungalows or houses. On Cresta Road rising ground to the west allows garages to be beneath houses and bungalows, while to the east the houses are below road level.

Gently curving roads and footways are of more than adequate width and traffic is locally generated. Such on-street parking as exists tends to be where driveways cannot accommodate two cars. Even here the local custom of parking

Figure 5: Cresta Road and Rholben slopes

with two wheels in the footway is followed, and the road pattern may lead to some speeding.

Plots vary considerably in size in this part of the area, but building lines are fairly consistently at 6-8m behind the footway.

The estates generally have low forecourt walls of brick or concrete blocks, sometimes with a hedge added, but a few in Cresta Road have an open forecourt, now usually with a low hedge or timber rails. There are initially only hedges on the south side of Delafield Road, though with trees in the gardens, but the north side has low retaining walls. Dingle Road properties also initially have no forecourt walls, but they reappear further west, often with a retaining function on the upper side. Higher block walls or fences give privacy at the rear when necessary, as in the Meadow Lane area.

Some back gardens are significant works of construction with high retaining walls and steep fights of steps. Gardens have many shrubs but few trees except where they back on to the A40 where the overgrown hedgerow survives.

Otherwise, apart from those on the steep open space referred to earlier and those in Delafield Road, the only substantial trees in the western estate section are garden trees grouped on both sides of the road at the far end of Cresta Road. A mature tree belt on the western side of Pentre Road strongly marks the boundary between town and country.

Pentre Road retains much of the character of a narrow country lane with hedges and only occasional reminders of the nearby housing. Within the estate there is a curious private access lane to No 28 Cresta Road from Dingle Road, seemingly little used.

Being in an elevated position, the area has fine views north from many positions, particularly from the junction of Western Road with Cresta Road. Clear views of the Blorenge and the ridge towards Pontypool are available from the recreation ground and the junction of Meadow Lane with Dingle Road.

Summary of Building Character

Belgrave Road Nos 1/3 and 2/4 date from about 1900 and fall within the Brecon Road character area. The remainder of the road was built in a variety of styles mostly in the 1950s and 1960s, though several at the Western Road end on the eastern side with mock Tudor timbering, slate or tile hipped roofs or rounded bay windows probably date from the late 1930s (two have added balconies). Most other houses on the eastern side, detached or pairs and built after the war, have features similar to pre-war houses such as hipped roofs. nos 15 and 17 are modest bungalows (no 15 with an unconventional monopitched and flat roof and grey reconstituted stone, demolished since our survey), and nos 19 and 21 are dormer bungalows (the former using a similar reconstituted stone).

Belgrave Close, built in the 1970s, has closely spaced substantial brown brick houses with white rendered panels and flat-roofed garages.

Belgrave Road's western side south of Knoll Road has individual detached houses (one a dormer bungalow) usually rendered or in a buff brick, all in a similar style typical of about 1960; nos 16-20 may have been identical when built but nos 18 and 20 have been considerably altered. No 6 at the southern end is the most recent. North of Knoll Road there are various colour-washed rendered dormer bungalows, substantial detached houses and two pairs of semi-detached, one pair notable for the complete difference between the halves.

Knoll Road This road was also almost completely built-up by 1965 and is mostly an extension of the earlier Belgrave Road development of substantial detached

houses. These are typical of the '50s and '60s using mainly a pale red/brown brick and brown ribbed tiles, pronounced eaves, large casement or fixed windows and flat-roofed garages, but with a variety of tile hanging colours, rendering and reconstituted stone features; nos 6 and 16 have Juliet balconies. In striking contrast nos 8-14 are bungalows with very low-pitched felt roofs, Belle View Flats (12 homes) add white boarding, grey bricks and flat and split gable roofs to the details, and two rendered dormer bungalows flank the flats. The flats, last to be built in the road, are reminiscent of New Town developments at the time, as are a terrace of four felt (or similar) roofed houses at the end of the road (preceded by no 26a, a darker brown brick house with brown window frames and no chimney).

Delafield Road A similar mixture is found on Delafield Road, but most houses are semi-detached or linked and in groups of similar design, using a narrower range of finishes. On the south side nos 1-11 is an en echelon terrace of felt-roofed houses, and beyond no 41 the houses are simply brick with gables to the road. On the north side Nos 2-4 are shallow roofed bungalows with garages and entrances underneath and balconies over these; nos 6-20a are similar to no 26a Knoll Road and probably the last to be built on the estate, probably in the 1980s.

Dingle Road The south side of Dingle Road is entirely detached houses with accesses and garages at first floor level and further accommodation cut into the slope below. The north side begins with houses with gables to the road, some characteristic of the period with an elevation split vertically between brick and rendering plus windows. These are followed by a variety of balconied bungalows with garages underneath and much reconstituted grey stone.

Cresta Road The lower end of Cresta Road has three bungalows backing on to Belgrave Park, facing three with garaging underneath. Further up the hill the houses on the lower side are red brick with tile hanging or buff brick with reconstituted stone porches, while those on the elevated upper side are similar red brick and tile hanging or bungalows with decorative grey brick balconies, all with garages under.

Haven Way This, together with two mono-pitch roofed houses at the end of Western Road and the small group known as Hall Estate, was one of the earliest 1960s developments. Except for two dormer properties, Haven Way and Hall Estate are rendered bungalows; most of their shallow pitched roofs have been renewed.

Meadow Lane Three houses on Meadow Lane are notable for quasi-alpine eaves and balconies; others are front-facing gabled and quite bland in a dull brick or are bungalows.

Most houses in the western part of the area appear, at the front, to have been little altered since they were built, apart from window or door replacement usually in uPVC. Some extensions over garages are discernible only by a slight change in the tiling. Rear extensions and conservatories are common.

Ivy Cottage, at the junction of Pentre Road with the A40, is a late-Victorian sandstone house with a red tiled roof and sturdy finials to the gables. An unusual feature is a tiled canopy to a first floor window, supported by iron brackets, and an 'A' moulding indicates that this was part of the Marquess of Abergavenny's estate. Avenue Cottage, at the junction of lanes on Pentre Road, is a charming side-entrance early/mid Victorian house (shown on the 1844 map, but perhaps later altered) in stone with red brick details and half dormers. The slate roof has red ridge tiles and the dormers are topped with prominent finials. A low stone forecourt wall has rounded red brick coping.

Heritage Assets

The area has no listed buildings, and none that have listing potential under present guidelines. However, a walk around the area will demonstrate the variety of domestic architecture during the quarter century following the Second World War. Although the design of the housing paid no respect to the traditional appearance and materials of the town, it has its own period style.