



21 North Mardy

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>



NORTH MARDY

THIS IS THE MOST northern area of the Abergavenny built-up area, partly based on Poplars Road, one of the roads laid out in the 19th century, and partly a late-20th-century extension. The area is characterised by a variety of post-war housing developments, and land for further housing has been allocated to the north.

It is an area of quite small post-war housing estates with no overall character though each portion has its own character. The council housing on Poplars Close must have been considered a model example when built and conversion to mainly private ownership has meant that some of the unified character with open forecourts and consistent architectural details has been lost. Nevertheless the Close is still pleasant, retains much of its quality and is well cared for, apart from the garage courts. The simple dark purple-brown private housing on





Figure 2: bungalows at Poplars Close

Poplars Road still has its solid attractive qualities and Poplars Court has recently added an appealing group to the area.

The Greystones area is a 'rounding off' of the urban area, constrained by overhead power lines, and its road layout suffers from this, departing from the Mardy grid. Greystones Crescent is an open-ended long cul-de-sac, though the Close has a pleasant sense of private enclosure. A more coherent development at the northern end of Mardy might have been possible if the development of Deri Farm land to the north had been anticipated and planned for, with the removal of the intrusive power line pylons, some years ago. Incremental releases of land can result in uncoordinated development.

Historical Background

As described under the Old Mardy character area, Poplars Road was set out sometime before 1880, by which time only one or two houses had been built. Apart from Poplars Close, very few houses were added before the 1970s when

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



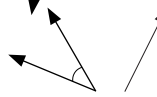
Terminated street view



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: Poplars Road

parts of Poplars Road, together with new adjoining roads, started to be developed as small private sector housing estates with a much less rural character.

Poplars Close was built as council housing, probably in the late 1950s or 1960s, on the site of a Second World War prisoner-of-war camp. The field must have been requisitioned for the camp and accessed from Poplars Road, and the subsequent estate is shown in isolation on maps until the 1970s. The northern half of the field is shown as a recreation area at that time.

Private housing estate development began on Poplars Road and Close and Hillgrove Avenue in the late 1970s. The Greystones estate became possible when a new link was created to the main road from Poplars Road in the 1980s. It was completed around the end of the 20th century. Poplars Court is the most recent development in the area.

A new Llantilio Pertholey primary school was built beyond Poplars Close in the 1980s or early 1990s.



Figure 5: Greystones Crescent

Setting, Streets and Spaces

This area is topographically a northern extension of the backland area of Mardy described in Old Mardy, sloping gently up between the 100 and 120m contours towards the foot of the Deri. The gentle slopes continue extensively to the north, but the Tŷ Gwyn lane, two fields away, marks the boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park, an effective barrier to further development.

Views of the Deri from Poplars Road are as described in Old Mardy; the bend in the road at Greystones Avenue gives a good view of Ysgyryd Fawr to the north east.

Mature trees are generally on the former field boundaries marking the northern limit of older Mardy and in the school grounds. No more than garden shrubs mark the development boundaries where further fields have only been partly released for housing – i.e. the northern edge of Poplars Close, and Greystones Crescent and Close. A high-voltage overhead power line, the pylons of which intrude considerably into the estates, defines this northern edge of Greystones. This line has resulted in the straight alignment of the inappropriate-



Figure 6: Greystones Avenue

ly named Crescent. A lower voltage line passes through the estates just north of the edge of old Mardy.

Front gardens are, or were, predominantly open-fronted. In Poplars Close, following private purchase of houses, many apart from the bungalows for the elderly are now enclosed with low picket fences or hedges, or tarmaced for cars; some have low stone retaining walls. Greystones Crescent, Avenue and Close have almost entirely retained their open frontages (12 Greystones Close is a notable exception) though extra tarmac for parking is quite common. Earlier private housing on Poplars Road and Close and Hillgrove Avenue has low brick forecourt walls often supplemented with hedges and shrubs. Recent Poplars Court has some steel bow-topped railings.

Rear gardens are generally quite or very short, especially in most of Poplars Close. There are no separate footpaths connecting the various estates.



Figure 7: Poplars Court

Building Character

About eight different styles of housing can be identified in the area, reflecting the periods of development and different building companies. The main phases are summarised here.

The 51 terraced homes of Poplars Close, built as council housing, are arranged around the edge of the site with 23 bungalows for the elderly in the centre. Flat-roofed partly sandstone (Pennant?) entrance porches and cloakrooms add character to most of the houses' roughcast front elevations, though private owners have added pitched and tiled roofs to many. Personalisation is extensive, now including photovoltaic panels on the concrete tiles, but much of the original character remains. The bungalows, still social housing, show more reddish brick and have recessed doorways or neat slightly arched canopies. Two further homes are proposed to replace the garage court in the south east corner.

The dark purple-brown brick detached or linked houses of Poplars Road and Close and Hillgrove Avenue, about 40 in total, are quite plain in design and have been little altered (apart from uPVC). The houses lack chimneys, an in-

creasingly common characteristic from then on. The absence of a consistent building line on the south side of Poplars Road adds interest to the street.

Greystones Avenue and Close have larger detached homes on slightly larger plots, with smaller but similar houses on the first section of Greystones Crescent. There is a considerable variety of styles and finishes and gables tend to face the road. Development at the more recently built end of the Crescent, including a short cul-de-sac, includes some semi-detached homes; a paler brick is used and several garages have been converted to rooms.

In recent years the Victorian Poplar Villa was cleared and replaced by Poplars Court, five detached houses in buff brick with cream-washed render above, steeply pitched roofs of slate-like grey tiles, chimneys, uPVC windows from new, bow-topped iron railings to the frontage, small back gardens, welcome high brick walling to the rear of the front properties, and brick paved surfacing. They illustrate the current fashion for a more traditional, if not authentically vernacular, look, and higher densities.

Heritage Assets

The Poplars Close estate is a good example of council housing from its period. A notable feature is the way that roads have been orientated to focus the eye on the Deri or Ysgyryd Fawr. It would be interesting to learn who designed the scheme and whether its quality received any recognition at the time.