

A photograph of a residential street in Abergavenny. The foreground shows a row of terraced houses with red-tiled roofs and white or light-colored walls. A wooden utility pole stands on the left. In the background, a large, green, hilly area rises, with a distinct circular crop mark or hill fort visible on its side. The sky is clear and blue.

26 Park West

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?*

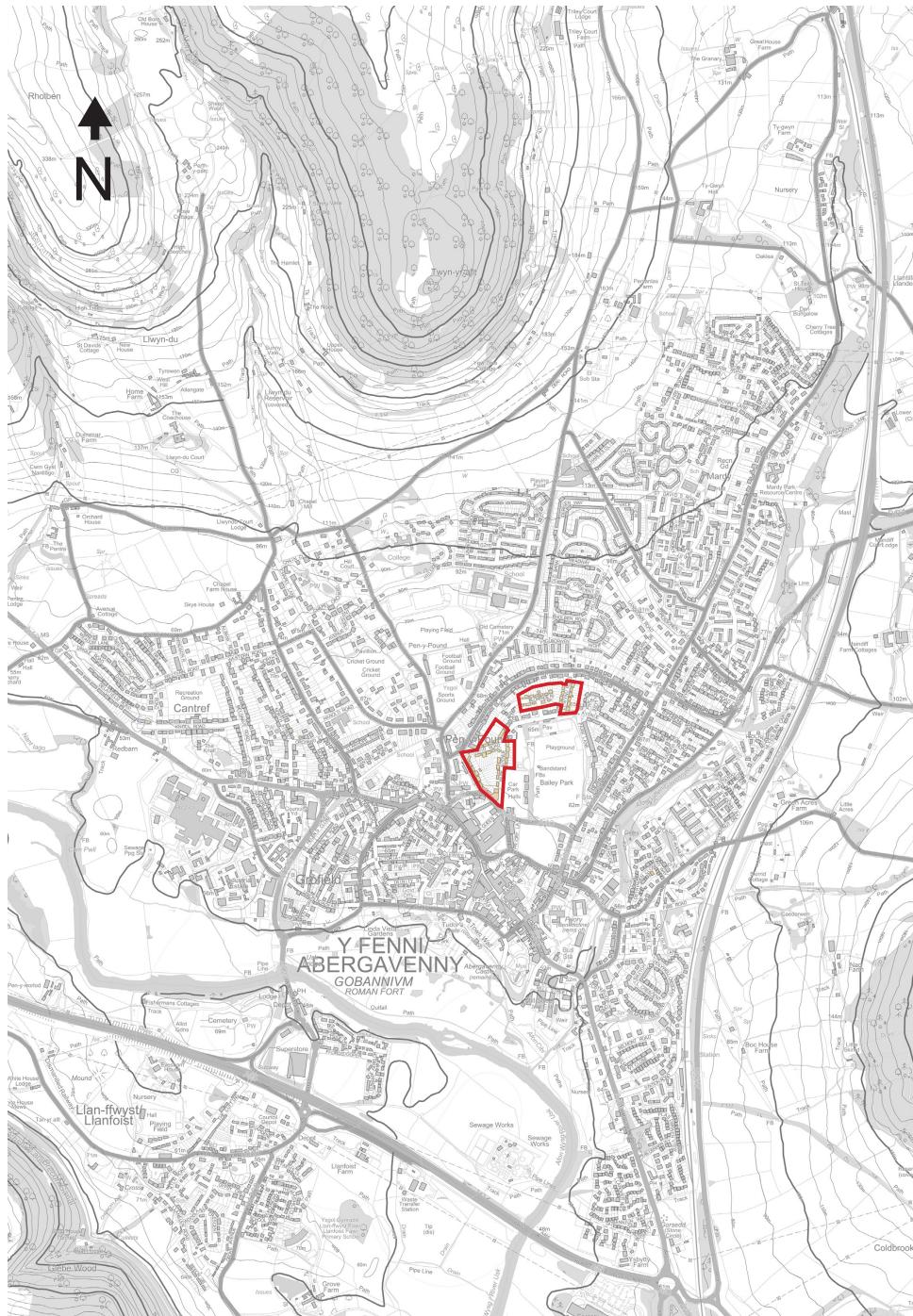
All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

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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PARK WEST

THIS RESIDENTIAL AREA LIES to the west and north of Bailey Park. It is in two parts: Pen y Fal Road, Skirrid Road and Park Avenue; and Blorenge Road and Llwynu Road.

The area was built as early council housing close to the town centre, and is generally in good condition. Much of the original 'cottage estate' character can still be appreciated. The main exception is the variety of treatments to front gar-





Figure 2: Pen y Fal Road

dens, which has reduced the unity of the street scenes. A 1929 aerial photograph suggests that the houses then had stained wooden fences.

Away from the A40 the streets are generally quiet with no great parking problem thanks to yellow paint and the amount of off-street provision that has been contrived. There are few trees but there is little opportunity to add more.

Historical Background

Development of the area, previously fields, was begun in the 1920s, with Pen y Fal Road, Skirrid Road and Park Avenue housing completed by 1929 and Blorenge Road and Llwynu Road a few years later. This is the earliest substantial area of social housing built by the Borough Council. Most of the 102 houses appear to have been transferred to private ownership since the 1980s.

The Constitutional Club at the junction of Park Avenue with Park Road is dated 1929. An oral history record suggests that a 'pop' factory preceded this. Park Road was then a back road to the livestock market and Bailey Park, but

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



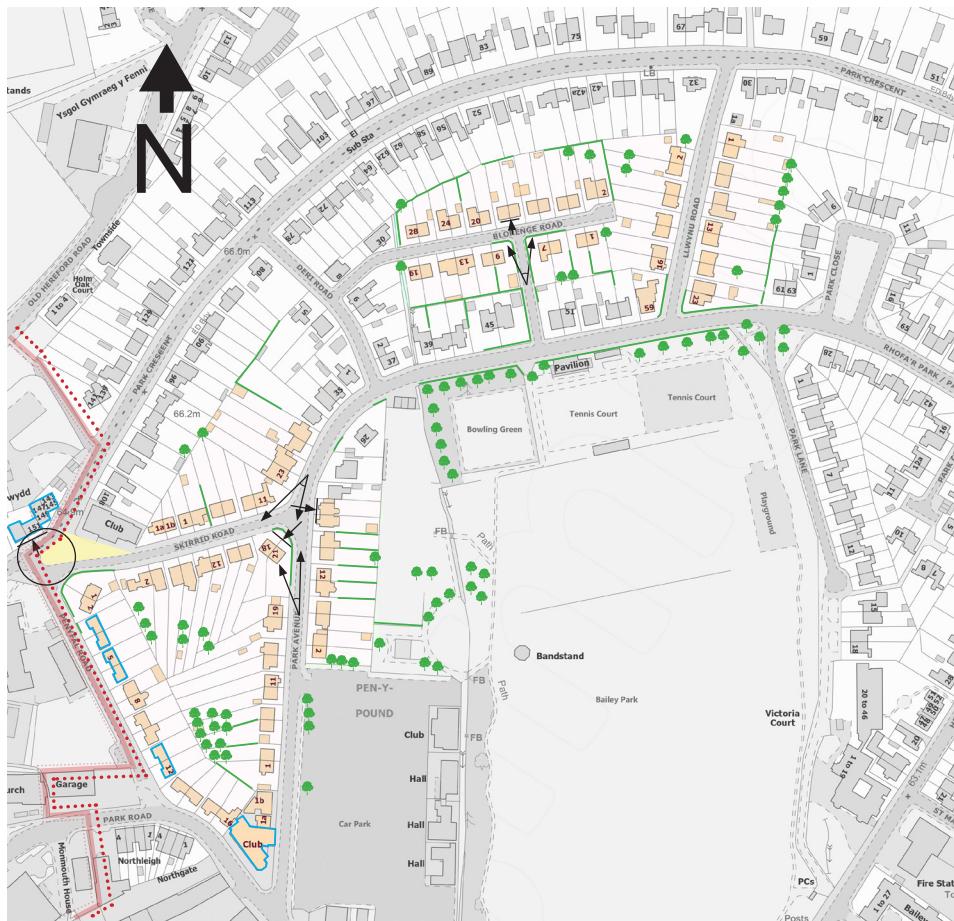
Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis



became the A40 trunk road in the 1970s when it was extended to join Hereford Road.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area rises gently from 60m above sea level at the southern end to about 70m at Llwynu Road, part of a near plateau between the town centre and the old railway line beyond Park Crescent. Views of the Bloreng and the Deri are often available.

The repetitive or rhythmic layout of the council housing in the 1920s was markedly different from that of earlier housing in the town. Influenced by the garden city movement and government standards, pairs of houses were set well back from the highway with front gardens about 3m deep and about 18m between facing houses. Car ownership by tenants in the 1920s would have been very low, but luckily a surprising number of houses, especially on Park Avenue, had sufficient space at the side later used for a car or garage access. In one case in Llwynu Road the space between houses has recently been used for a shared access to garages at the rear of the plots.

Front gardens are often now also used for parking cars, especially where there are parking restrictions near the town centre. A few have only wire netting fences, but others have a wide variety of low walls, fences and hedges. Neat corner plot hedges are notable in Bloreng Road and at the junction of Pen-y-fal and Skirrid Roads.

The layout of roads and houses has resulted in many houses having long back gardens, some nearly 50m long in the triangle formed by Park Avenue, Skirrid Road and Pen-y-Fal Road.

There are a few shrubs in front gardens but these roads have almost no trees apart from those planted along the margin of the Fairfield car park at the southern end of Park Avenue – an area that the Civic Society has started improving.

The area has no public open space but the proximity of Bailey Park is a considerable compensation and would have been particularly valued when it had an open-air swimming pool.

The area at the junction of Pen y Fal and Skirrid Roads with Park Crescent is the meeting point of three character areas, but it has some sense of place that might be enhanced by attention to the parking area in its middle.

The roads are quite lightly trafficked except that part of Park Avenue giving access to the large Fairfield public car park – a space sometimes giving rise to



Figure 4: Park Road

anti-social youth behaviour. All the streets nearer the town centre have parking restrictions.

Building Character

The council houses were built of deep red brick with hipped slate roofs and red ridge tiles. The brick has almost always been covered with layers of pale paint, but some exceptions remain near the Park Avenue/Skirrid Road junction. Two pairs (one at the junction of Pen y Fal and Skirrid Roads, the other in Pen y Fal Road) have front gables and were brick with rendered first floors, and the remainder of Pen y Fal Road and Park Road houses have interesting front gable roofs extending below the main eaves line, a slightly Arts and Crafts influence. Except in Blorenge Road, where there are original porches, the houses had simple flat front door canopies. More recent personalisation has introduced a variety of porches and modest extensions but the overall appearance of the houses has otherwise survived.



Figure 5: Constitutional Club

The red brick Constitutional Club is something of a landmark, particularly if travelling west on Park Road where the rounded elevation and railings neatly mark the corner into Park Avenue. The entrance on Park Road has restrained classical details and there is a dormered hall and an attached house on Park Avenue.

Between the club and the 1920s housing on Park Avenue there is a discordant asymmetrical front gabled 'ironing centre' with dark tile hanging typical of 1960s/70s domestic architecture.

Heritage Assets

The early council housing is mostly typical of the period, though short of the tree planting and open space found in the best examples, but the house types on Pen y Fal Road, perhaps the first to be built, may be unusual. The original appearance of most has been altered by porch additions, etc.