

# 29 Plas Derwen

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 centre<sup>1</sup>.

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](mailto: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 Lermont 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.

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

## PLAS DERWEN

PLAS DERWEN IS A housing estate of over 80 detached homes east of Monmouth Road and south of Station Road.

In contrast to the nearby Ysbytty Fields, Plas Derwen has a considerably more open feel. This is due to the estate having a seemingly more spacious layout with wide roads and quite long runs of houses beside them in the traditional manner, separated by single story integral garages. Together with a prevalence of

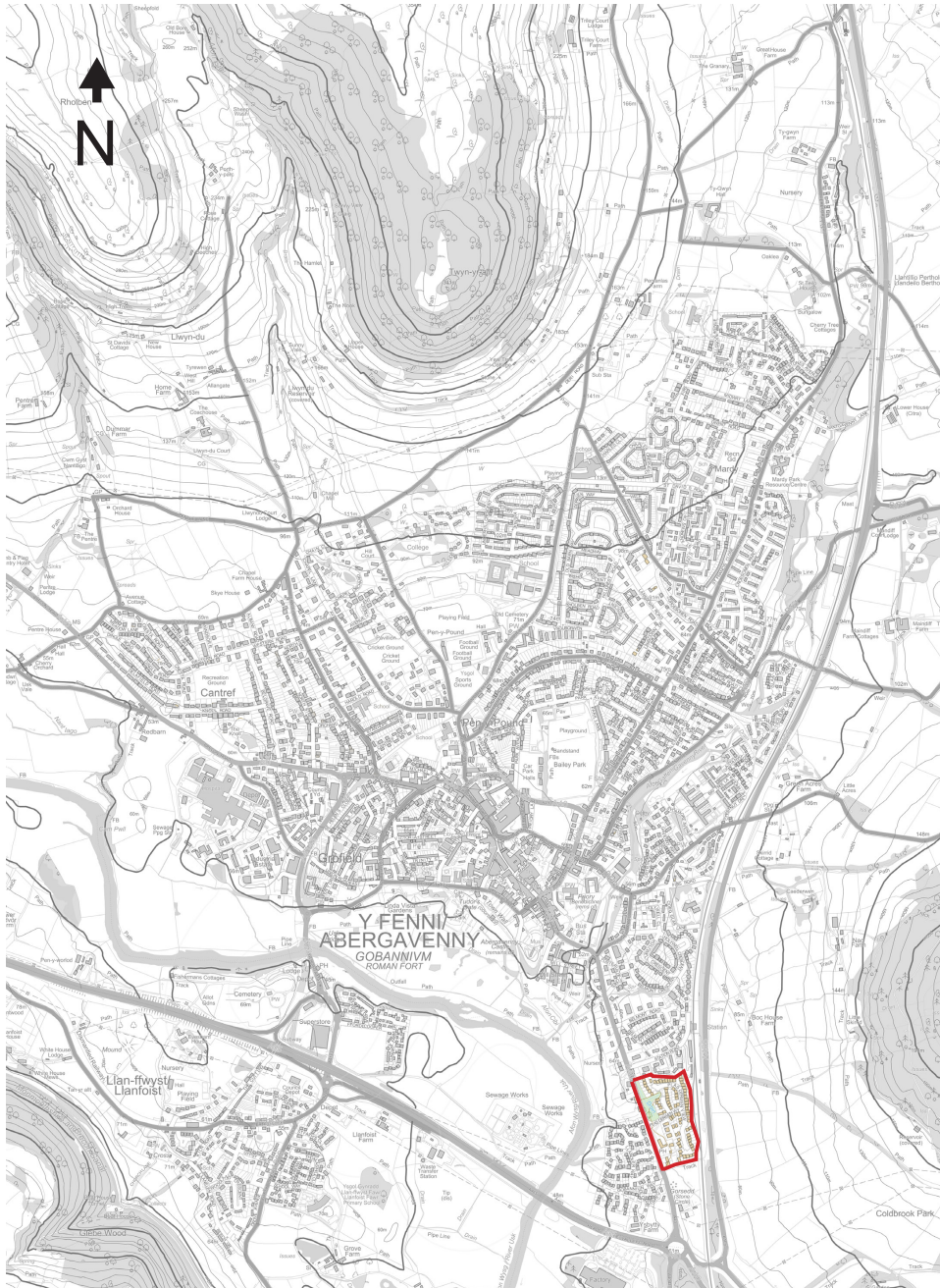






Figure 2: Plas Derwen Close

white rendering, this gives the area a pleasant character. The elevated position affords fine views.

However, attractive as the area is, as usual for its period, it makes few design references to Abergavenny building traditions.

## Historical Background

We believe that this suburban estate was built between about 1985 and 1990. The estate is still shown as fields on a 1986 Ordnance Survey map, surveyed a few years earlier. The Plas Derwen public house is south of the junction of Plas Derwen road with Monmouth Road. It is a much older building ('The Cottage' in 1829) built, or rebuilt, as a residential property in the mid-19th century and may have been linked to a large adjacent orchard over which part of the housing estate has been developed. This was once Coldbrook House land. In the 19th century the property was named *Ysbytty* on Ordnance Survey maps (see the Ysbytty Fields area report). 'Ysbyty' is the Welsh word for 'hospital' suggesting

## 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



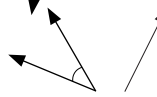
Terminated street view



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: note the topiary

that some medieval equivalent was here.

### Setting, Streets and Spaces

Monmouth Road is close to the 60m contour at this point, and Plas Derwen estate was built on ground that slopes upwards to about 70m where the estate backs on to the railway. It lies well above the River Usk flood plain, providing elevated views across the valley towards the Bloreng. After the leaves have fallen there are glimpses of all the surrounding hills. Buildings and mature trees on the western side of Monmouth Road obscure the lower valley and river.

The housing is well screened from Monmouth Road except where the wide single access road provides a view into the estate. The belt of mature trees north of the entry road is a particular feature of the area, and these continue to a lesser depth between the public house car park and the houses. A belt of trees on the southern edge separates the housing from the fields, while more mean that the railway to the east is barely visible, at least in summer.





Figure 5: The Courtyard

The arrangement of houses along the roads in the northern part of the estate has produced an interesting rhythm best seen with the consistently white houses on the eastern and northern side of Plas Derwen View. Houses visually enclose the end of each cul-de-sac, as likewise is the initial view up the entry road, and two houses provide a visual stop at the southern end of the main phase, before The Courtyard.

Important characteristics throughout Plas Derwen are the open front gardens, 6-20m in length with low level brick boundary walls (somewhat higher in The Courtyard), rarely changed by residents, and the considerable personalisation of the well-kept front gardens with hedges and shrubs, with some fine examples of topiary. Back gardens vary in length as much as those at the front, within a similar range. The houses are mostly on plots of between 7m and 10m width.

The main access road is linked via a cul-de-sac to the lower northern end of the estate by a wide footpath that leads into a well-kept open area of grassland and mature trees. A small stream, which may be in a culvert from the railway,

emerges just below this area. Another small green area is found in the southern end of the estate where the private entrance to a pair of houses (Plas Derwen Gardens) has been grassed and has with attractive trees. However, a house is planned on part of this space.

The clutter-free road and footway widths are more than adequate and traffic is entirely generated by the housing except for public house visitors at the entrance. However, there are three situations where houses are accessed by shared driveways: The Orchard, Plas Derwen Gardens and at the end of Plas Derwen Close. There is little on-street parking.

## Building Character

Apart from The Courtyard at the southern end, most of the estate homes, which are all detached with red/grey concrete roof tiles and chimneys, fall into four types. A majority are roughcast rendered, originally and still usually white, over a buff- or red-brick base below the window sills, with a hipped roof and matching tiling over windows, doors and garages. The second type is similar but gable roofed with a projecting two-storey bay and a porch, both gabled. The third is a red-brick house with a gabled porch, and finally there are red-brick or rendered bungalows, gabled to the road. An unusual detail is some brick dentils below windows and most houses still have dark brown-framed original faux- leaded diamond window panes.

The Courtyard at the lower southern end is a separate phase of the development, beyond a field boundary on the 1986 map. Here there is a slightly different range of house types, mostly in a red brick. Plas Derwen Gardens, reached by a private driveway off The Courtyard's turning head, has two substantial traditional houses from the late 20th century. Adjacent Plas Derwen Lodge, a late Victorian house extended north in the 1970s or '80s, with white rendered and red brick detailing, is accessed from Monmouth Road.

There has been little change to the housing stock. One house has been enlarged by the addition of a two-storey extension over what was the garage and several have converted the integral garage into living space. Conservatories have often been added at the back.

The Plas Derwen public house and restaurant, behind a stone wall with an angled top, is a complex Victorian building, probably with older elements, to which a conservatory and other changes have been made since it ceased to be a house.

Mention may be made here of Raglan Terrace, beyond a field south of the character area. This row of four stone houses with ground floor angled bays, dated 1892, may have been built for Coldbrook estate workers. A bungalow from the 1960s and a workshop now accompany the terrace.

### **Heritage Assets**

None, though the Plas Derwen public house retains some interest if only for its survival through a change of use.

The wooded area between Plas Derwen and Raglan Terrace contained the 1913 National Eisteddfod Gorsedd circle until the stones were moved to Swan Meadow in 2000.