



30 Ross Road

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.

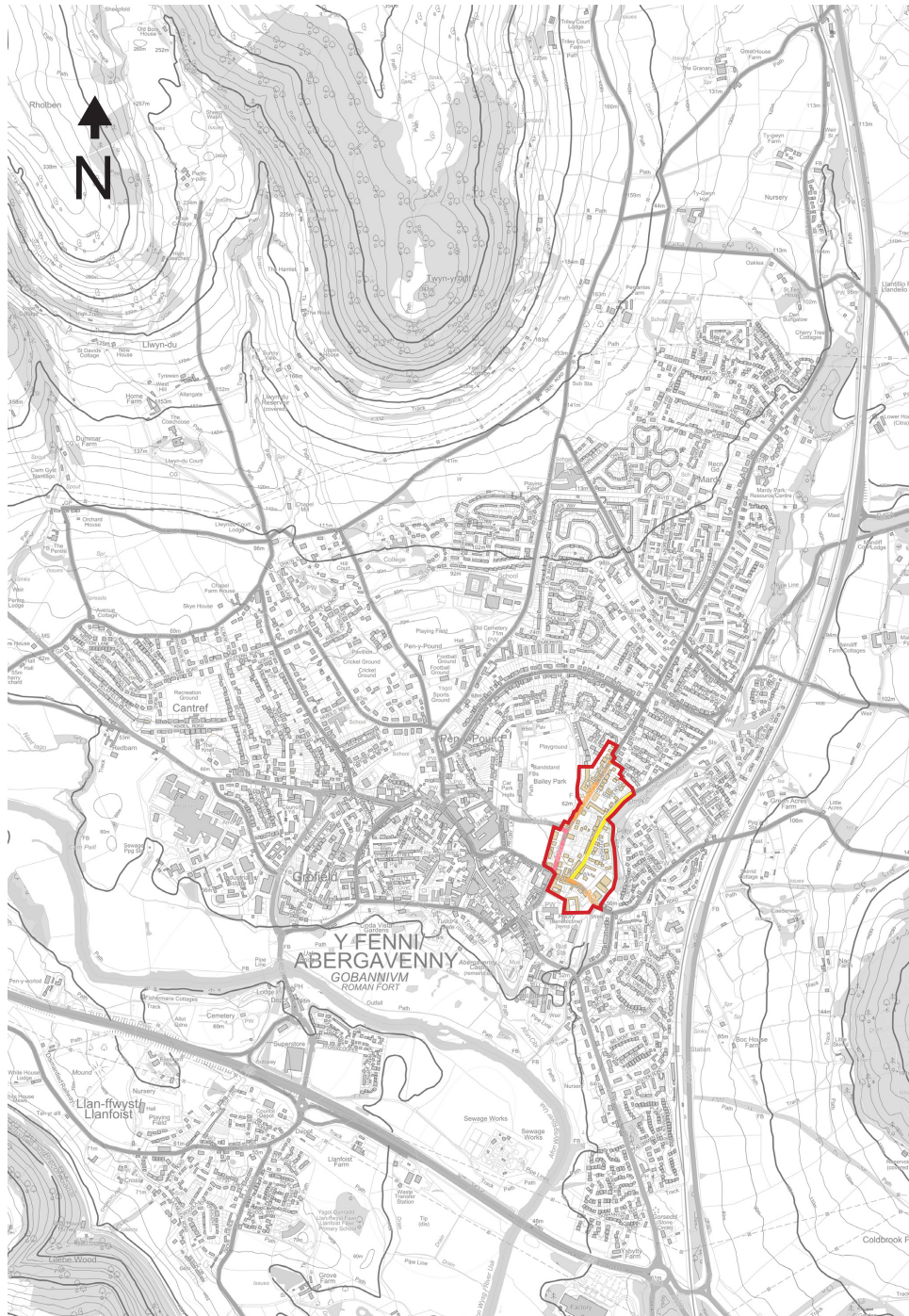
We also thank Anna Leron and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

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Cover: Ross Road from the north

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

Figure 1: location plan and aerial



ROSS ROAD

THE AREA IS NORTH-EAST of the town centre. As well as the lower section of Ross Road it includes the southern end of Hereford Road and Lower Monk Street. The northern boundary is somewhat arbitrary as the character starts to blend with that of the Hereford Road character area.

The area is a transition zone where town centre commercial uses have competed with residential and garden/orchard uses for at least two centuries. The

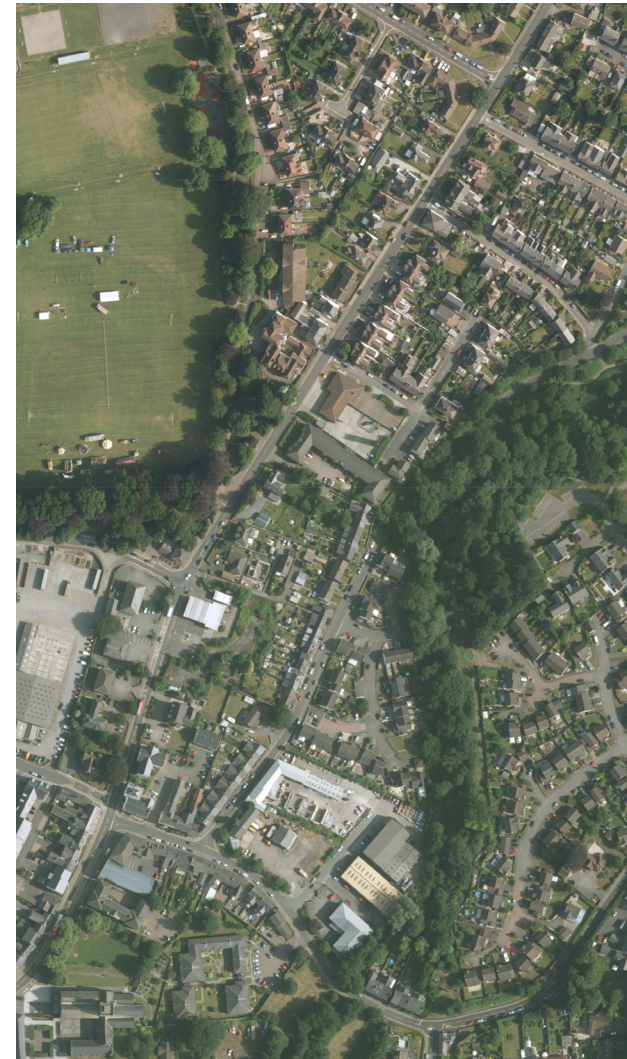




Figure 2: Osbourne Row

history of development, slow between 1880 and 1970, is interesting. While the best qualities of the old have generally been recognised and well cared for, several 20th-century developments have failed to add to or respect the character of the old, particularly in the area cleared in about 1970, a wasted opportunity. Inevitably traffic and parking also detract from the character.

The area has an eclectic mix of styles of domestic architecture. Large buildings on large plots characterise the southern part of the Hereford Road side of the area, with a large amount of accommodation for the elderly, but the northern end has middle class detached or semi-detached housing with some more modest housing on St Mary's Road. The ancient streets of Ross Road and Lower Monk Street are generally terraced cottages of two storeys, sometimes with dormers. These were constructed before the proliferation of the car and therefore have little space for parking, the majority of which is on street. The modern development of Waterside has somewhat traditionally styled domestic properties with open front gardens and parking courtyards.

The area of backland between Hereford Road and Ross Road, adjoining the

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



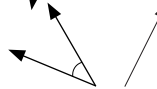
Terminated street view



Deflected street view



Vista, long view



Visual pinch point



Building rhythm



Important walling



Important trees or shrubs



Important hedges



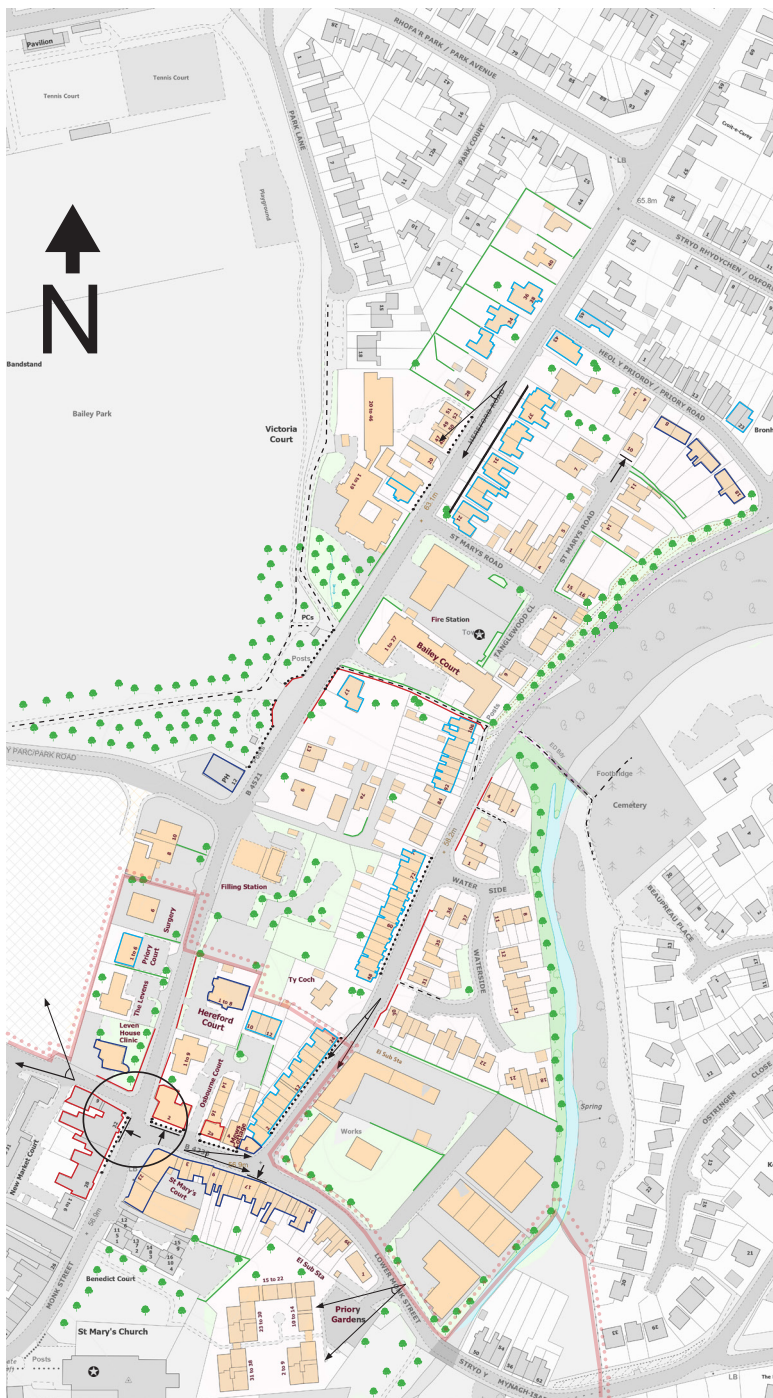
Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis



filling station, is a development opportunity that requires careful planning if it is to contribute to the character of the area.

Historical Background

Maps of the town in 1760 and 1801 show Monk Street, both sides of Lower Monk Street and the adjoining part of Ross Road (then Ireland Street, probably reflecting the origin of its residents) already developed, much probably during the previous century. The 1834 map shows a sizeable formal garden laid out behind the cottages on the north side of Lower Monk Street, later shown as divided into individual gardens. Monk Street and Lower Monk Street was then the main route out of the town towards Monmouth.

Monk Street was extended north as Hereford Road in the 1820s, replacing the ancient route via Frogmore Street and Pen y Pound. Apart from the public house now called The Bailey and the Boys' National School of 1848, now redeveloped, this part of the new Hereford road did not attract development until the latter half of the 19th century, and even then only a few large houses were built before the 1890s when the area north of Priory Road was opened up for development. Instead more terraced housing was built on the upper side of Ross Road and there was some redevelopment on the south side of Lower Monk Street.

The terrace named Eastgate Place replaced the oldest housing on Ross Road in 1892, but cottages on the northern side of Lower Monk Street were not cleared until 1973. Those on the southern side have survived, as have the more grand buildings, mostly Listed, nearer Monk Street.

The Cottage Hospital, now part of a home for the elderly, was opened in 1902 on Hereford Road beside Bailey Park (1883) and a row of Edwardian houses followed on the opposite side of the road. Apart from a few houses in St Mary's Road little changed until after the Second World War when a petrol filling station appeared on Hereford Road and a few houses replaced gardens.

The late 20th century brought greater change. This included the replacement of the Victorian boys' school by a fire station, flats for the elderly and some council housing; the Lower Monk Street clearance area was succeeded by commercial buildings; the Waterside housing area replaced a wartime depot; homes were developed at the rear of no 2 Monk Street; Priory Gardens provided flats for the elderly and more accommodation for this group was provided in Melin Homes' Victoria Court complex, previously the Cottage Hospital.



Figure 4: Waterside

In the later 1970s Park Road was extended to join Hereford Road, allowing this to become the A40 trunk road and relieving Upper Cross Street, High Street, Frogmore Street and Lion Street of through traffic and traffic light controls. Hereford Road north of The Bailey had ceased to be a trunk road in 1975, when the A465 by-pass was opened.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area rises in terraces from the Gavenny river at less than 60m at Lower Monk Street to nearly 70m above sea level at the northern end. The river is in a quite dramatic incised wooded cutting.

Much of the backland between the Hereford and Ross Roads is still surprisingly little developed for a situation so close to the centre of the town, though there have been plans to change this. Apart from those in this backland and in front of some properties on Hereford Road, the area has few trees and no public open space other than a small play area at Waterside. However, Bailey Park and



Figure 5: St Mary's closes the view

paths in the well-treed Gavenny valley are nearby.

The south-western corner of the area adjoins the handsome and distinctive wide space of Monk Street, to some extent visually enclosed from the south by no 2 Lower Monk Street, Leven House and a fine copper beech. Hereford Road is straight and quite wide, with most buildings set back 10m or more, whereas the older Ross Road and Lower Monk Street are less so, with doors on the latter opening on to narrow footways.

Hereford Road and Monk Street are busy with trunk road and local traffic; Lower Monk Street is also quite busy (a 'rat run' via Holywell avoiding delays at the Monk Street/Cross Street crossroads), but Ross Road is less so as traffic is now encouraged to use Hereford Road and Grosvenor Road. Parking is restricted to residents on one side of Lower Monk Street and at the bottom of Ross Road, and entirely on Hereford Road, which also has large direction signs and traffic lights. The forecourt of the Hereford Road filling station is a discordant space in its surroundings.

Stone walls tend to give some unity to the area. A walled footpath between



Figure 6: Lower Monk Street

Ross Road and Hereford Road at Bailey Court is an important feature; it continues east of Ross Road across the Gavenny into the Pen y Fal estate. Sometimes walls have been lowered, swept back for entrances, and predate the buildings behind. The retention of walls on the Ross Road frontage of Waterside helps to integrate modern housing into the street. Large front gardens on Hereford Road have become tarmac parking areas when homes were converted to commercial use, but substantial trees relieve these forecourts. At the northern end of the area the early 20th-century houses on Hereford Road are set back about 15m and have brick walls, though these have often been cleared for access to parking space.

A notable view is that to the south on Ross Road, closed by interesting old cottages on Lower Monk Street (one a former public house – see below) with St Mary's tower and the flanks of the Blorengie beyond. Ysgyryd Fach can also be seen to the east. The higher parts of Hereford Road have views of the Blorengie to the south.

The commercial area on Lower Monk Street is rather shapeless with a con-



Figure 7: Polychromatic brick

spicuous large poorly surfaced area used for commercial vehicle parking.

Building Character

Lower Monk Street: The character area has only two listed buildings, part of the group around the junction of Monk Street, Lion Street, Hereford Road and Lower Monk Street. South-facing no 2 Lower Monk Street is late 18th-century, rendered and painted, and notable for its deep Tuscan portico, iron railings and the prominent bay and circular windows on the Hereford Road elevation. The similar adjacent early 19th-century no 2a also has a fine portico. Both buildings have been part of the headquarters of the Monmouthshire Constabulary and no 2 has also been a gentlemen's club and a National Park office. Both were restored to residential use in the early 21st century and sympathetic apartments and cottages added at the rear (Osborne Court). Also on the northern side, no 4 is a substantial 19th-century house with an unusual stone bay with a rope motif in the cornice above the windows.



Figure 8: Hereford Road looking north

Leven House, on the corner of Lion Street, is a complex mid-Victorian building in red brick with gothic arches and other details in polychromatic brickwork. It once had a substantial glazed entranceway and has been a clinic for many years until recently.

The cottages on Lower Monk Street front the footway and vary considerably in size and details. Note, for examples, roof pitches and the splayed foot of wall of no 17 (once the Omar Pasha inn and dated in origin to about 1600) a feature nicely repeated in a modern Osborne Court cottage. There are short stepped terraces between individual dwellings, probably not all built at the same time – later 19th century in brick to the east. A modern manager's house for Priory Gardens completes this side of the road.

Priory Gardens is a pleasant modern group of two-storey housing for the elderly (38 units) in sympathetic dark plum brick, well arranged in relation to St Mary's Church.

The buildings in the commercial area between Lower Monk Street, Ross Road and Waterside replaced 18/19th-century cottages, a pub and workshops



Figure 9: Hereford Road looking south

cleared over forty years ago. The Ross Road frontage shows some attempt to retain the original street form, though the modern building is incongruous with high level horizontal windows and a balcony; it includes a dwelling and a dis-used showroom. The former building line to Lower Monk Street is marked only by tree and shrub planting. Behind this an interesting corrugated iron workshop with obliquely sloping, or buttressed, sides has survived. The owner bought the building, of wartime origin, in 1955 and brought it to this site. The large commercial buildings nearer the river, with ground floor brick and profiled coloured metal sheeting above, have no relationship with nearby buildings or each other. That in a brown brick east of the entrance, with colour-coated corrugated roofs, partly screened by trees and a hedge, has slightly more character.

Ross Road: nos 2-24 Ross Road (Eastgate Place) are dated 1892 (replacing earlier cottages), neat and relatively unaltered in sandstone with yellow Ebbw Vale brick dressings, arched recessed doorways and hipped slate-roofed angled ground floor bays. The 2-3m front gardens have walls with rounded and



Figure 10: A local landmark

spearhead railings. An incongruous recent red brick detached house with wide horizontal windows follows, set well back from the road.

Nos 48-76 (Osborne Row) are shown on the 1844 Tithe Map and are of varying width, now mostly rendered white or cream. The enclosed porches are unusual, varying greatly and possibly added or reconstructed, though all with tiled gables. A variety of dormers have been added to some. All are accessed via a railed walkway 1m above the road. Two pairs of elevated 1960s semis follow, with rear access.

Early mid-Victorian Nos 92-106 (Skirrid Terrace), each accessed by steps, may have originally all been stone with red brick dressings. Some are now rendered or have rendered dressings, some have added porches, one is almost covered by creeper.

The Waterside development of the 1990s is a mixture of short terraces, detached and semi-detached homes (37 in total) in a pleasant irregular layout, some in reconstituted stone with brick courses, some rendered. While the effect is cottage-like, apart from door canopies and some porches there is little evi-

dence of following truly local detail traditions and there are no chimneys. The projecting rendered window surrounds are attractive but not quite vernacular because of the window shapes.

Hereford Road: Large individual buildings of varying age punctuate Hereford Road, mainly used as commercial premises or apartments, including the early Victorian The Bailey public house (formerly the Victoria Inn) with a shallow hipped roof and a pedimented doorway, the much-altered nos 8/10 (veterinary practice and offices) and neat no 6 (a medical practice) which is hip-roofed and double-bayed in stone with cream stone dressings, both about 1870. The Levens and Priory Court are late 20th-century three-storey apartments on sites surprisingly not developed before, the former mostly red brick, the latter pseudo-classical, but neither styles to blend particularly well. On the opposite side of the road Hereford Court, once the vicarage and now flats, is a large late-Victorian twin-bayed stone dwelling (the brick coach house appears to be older on map evidence). Modern rendered cream Osborne Court flats to the south have Classical features to blend with no 2 Lower Monk Street, but present a windowless face to the north.

The petrol filling station canopy on Hereford Road, like most others, is of a discordant different scale in the street scene.

North of the filling station there is a post-war bungalow, with a recently built bungalow on the site of a workshop at the rear, and a pair of 1930s semis with red brick walling. No 17 is a substantial late Victorian stone house with Bath stone dressings, fine decorative bargeboards and front garden railings.

Two-storey red-brick Bailey Court (27 units) is on the site of the Victorian boys' school and verges on over-development of its site but has interesting bays and gables on the Hereford Road elevation. Window frames are brown, a fashionable detail of the late 20th century.

The oldest part (1902) of Victoria Court, on the opposite side of the road, was the Victoria Cottage Hospital by the locally distinguished architect, E A Johnson, in red brick with rendering above. Subsequent alterations and additions have left little of Johnson's original gabled design and the social housing complex now includes a large block facing Bailey Park and an interesting late 20th century red brick building on Hereford Road.

Apart from Victoria Court the western side of the road has three early Victorian white rendered houses (nos 16-20): a pair (one of which is little altered) and a detached house that appears to be half an uncompleted second pair. There are

also four inter-war detached homes, of which nos 32, 34 and 42 are particularly characteristic of the period, the latter two with Art Deco stained glass in top lights. White-rendered Park Guest House is between nos 34 and 40, part Italianate and on map evidence probably built about 1880 with a 1920s extension.

The Fire Station, with its extensive shallow pitched roof and red doors and its associated extensive spaces front and rear, departs from the prevailing domestic scale and character of the area. The training tower at rear is a small but locally distinct landmark.

North of the Fire Station the eastern side of Hereford Road is characterised by five pairs of Edwardian houses (nos 21-39) with steeply tiled roofs, stepped brick chimneys, white rendered first floors, ground floors in stone, brick or render, bays and mock timber and tiling details, porthole windows, some original timber main window frames (others sensitive uPVC) and porches. After an early post-war bungalow the Black Lion Guest House comes within the Hereford Road character area.

St Mary's Road is at the northern limit of the area. It was begun in the early 20th century with a pleasant terrace of four homes with a tunnel access midway, a continuous slate roof to square-sided ground floor bays (some windows replaced), red brick low forecourt walls and ground floors with grey roughcast rendering above; no 4 has a sympathetic single storey rear annexe (No 5). At the rear of the fire station (Tanglewood Close) are four white-rendered and two red brick homes (probably 1990s social housing), the colour change reflecting adjoining buildings. The remainder of St Mary's Road consists of three pairs of white-painted inter-war council housing (each different in details – one pair has unusual squared bays), two recent back garden infills (one brick, one stone) and, closing the view, a detached hip-roofed house that seems to be part of the inter-war Priory Road development. Several prominent garages detract a little from the street scene in this area.

Heritage Assets

Apart from the listed nos 2/2a Lower Monk Street, there is architectural merit in Leven House, Hereford Court, The Bailey public house, nos 17 and 22 Hereford Road, no 4 Lower Monk Street and the early 20th century Nos 21-39 Hereford Road. nos 32, 34 and 42 Hereford Road are among the town's best houses from the 1930s. The older cottages on Lower Monk Street have group value, while the terraces on Ross Road also have some interest. The relocated

wartime workshop on Lower Monk Street is unusual and should be researched if threatened by redevelopment. Stone walls on Ross Road and mature trees on Hereford Road are also important assets.

Only the southern end of the area falls within the town's main conservation area and there is a need to give detailed consideration to whether other parts of the area may merit designation.