32 Station 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 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?*
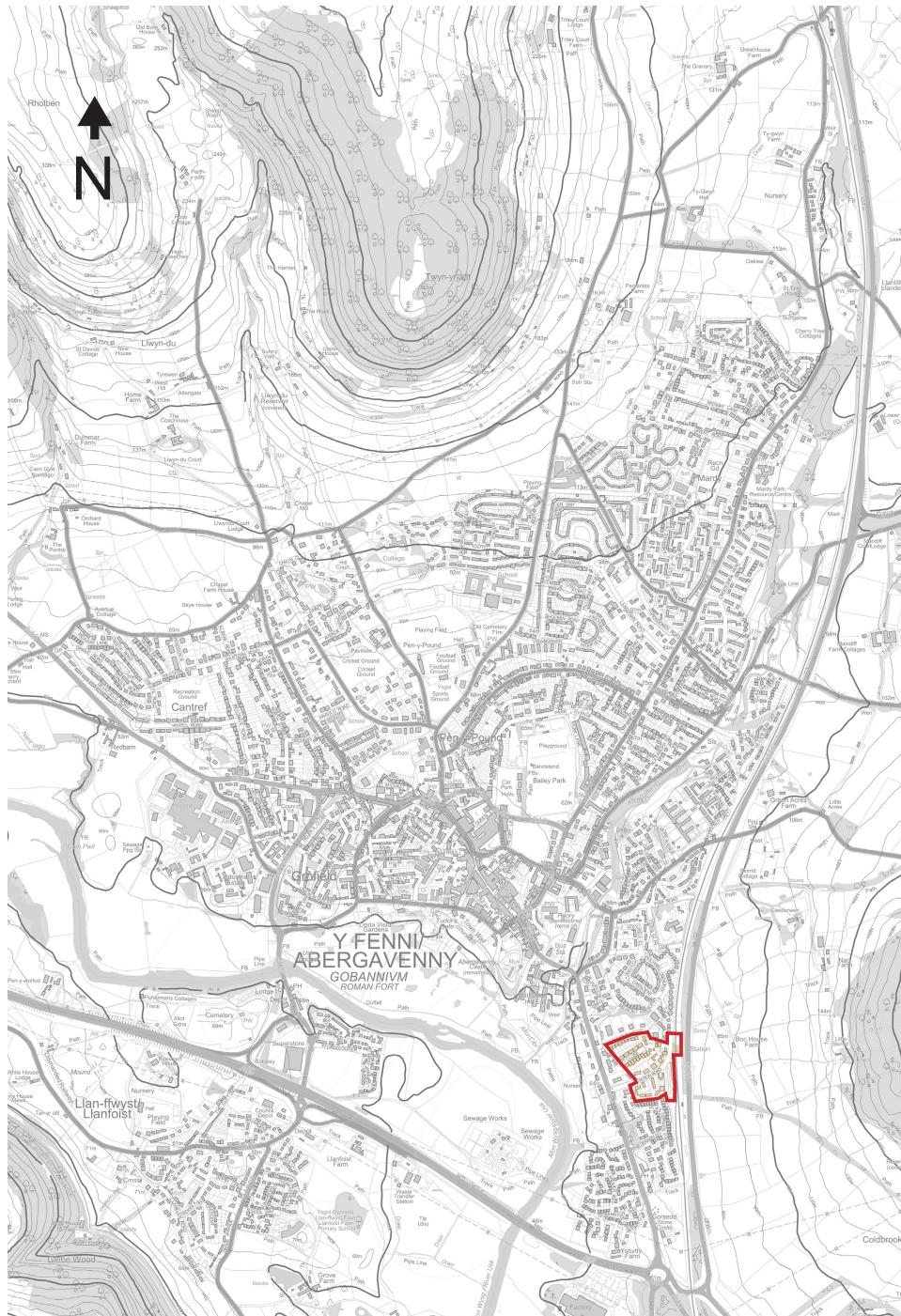- *What have we missed that should have been recorded?*

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

Cover: towards Monmouth Road and the Blorenge

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

Figure 1: location plan and aerial

STATION ROAD

THIS CHARACTER AREA, which includes Abergavenny's only surviving railway station, includes buildings dating from the mid-19th century to the late-20th century that give it a mixed character. Station Road is the first that rail travellers see of the town.

The immediate environs of the station are unlikely to impress the visitor, being somewhat marred by yellow road markings, patched surfacing and a variety of signage. The area can be congested with traffic when busy trains arrive and depart. However, despite its architectural mixture, Station Road is a pleasant

Figure 2: the railway station (1854)

route into the town, with impressive views and some greenery.

The modest 1960s housing on Belmont Road, quite typical of the period, contrasts sharply with the large Victorian properties in the Conservation Area on the other side of that road. Such juxtaposition might not be considered appropriate today.

Overall this mixed-use Station Road area has no distinctive character. It has developed slowly with each phase designed according to the fashion of the time, rather than with any coherent respect for what went before. Nevertheless there are interesting buildings, trees, views and history. Improvements to the station forecourt would be welcome and the listed Station Hotel could be more imposing. The pedestrian route to Holywell Crescent could be improved, with better lighting from the station all the way to Holywell Crescent. There are outline proposals to improve the station, including costly extra parking and possibly bus access, but a modest environmental enhancement and extra cycle parking would be a valuable first step.

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: Station yard buildings

Historical Background

The Great Western Railway station was opened in 1854 with Station Road (for many years Great Western Road) constructed to connect the station with the recently improved Monmouth Road and thereby the town, which was then over 500m from the station. The Great Western Hotel was built close to the station shortly after, along with a pair of houses at the junction with Monmouth Road (in Monmouth Road character area), but it was the 1870s before two more pairs were built on Station Road. The 1881 map shows a formal garden to the right of the hotel (now occupied by houses) and a bowling green and quoits ground to the rear (a tennis court by 1901 and now a storage depot). There was a timber yard north of the quoits ground and a few cottages and other buildings opposite the hotel, where cattle pens were added in the early 20th century. A 1965 map shows 'public offices' on the south side of Station Road, of which only the driving test centre remains. These could have been wartime single storey temporary buildings and perhaps the Claremont prisoner-of-war facility referred to in

Figure 5:1870s Italianate

Figure 6: modern infill

prisoner-of-war camp lists.

By 1971 housing development had been completed in the field south of Belmont Road, including Belmont Close, and St Ronans followed south of Station Road during the 1970s. Further infilling and redevelopment completed the area as it is today by the end of the century. Station Road was the southern limit of Abergavenny's built-up area for 130 years.

The lane that marks the western boundary of the character area was once part of a track that headed east towards Llandewi Skirrid. No trace of this remains south of Station Road.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area is south-east of the town centre on the lower slopes of Ysgyryd Fach. Station Road rises by about 10m from Monmouth Road to the station, which is 70m above sea level and 30m above the River Usk.

Station Road provides impressive views of the Blorenge to the west, initially framed by trees. Belmont Close has a similar view, though the houses are not arranged to enjoy it.

There is little remarkable about the domestic gardens of the area except that those of the Belmont Road/Close area are rather larger than would probably be provided for a similar development today. Front gardens in that area were probably almost open plan with only a low boundary wall, but most now have a variety of fences, hedges or shrubs or are even open for car parking.

The Italianate no11 Station Road has suitably appropriate palm trees.

The railway station has a fee-paying car park, often fully used, but many travellers prefer on-street parking, which has had to be controlled by extensive yellow lines. As a result Station Road is free of parked cars and thus appears wide with generous footways.

A path connects the station with Holywell Crescent to the north, but there is no pedestrian connection with Plas Derwen to the south. The path to Holywell Crescent requires pedestrians to walk through the station car park, garage forecourt and office car park, all of which are badly lit.

Figure 7: Lime Tree Mews

Figure 8: Belmont Road

Building Character

One hundred and thirty years of development have resulted in an interesting mixture of styles. The Victorian buildings are not grouped together: the modest listed mid-19th century Italianate railway station in ashlar sandstone and the listed stucco hotel of a similar date (with former outbuildings to the rear, now housing) are separated by modern infill housing behind fences and shrubs, and a block of dark red brick modern flats (*ca* 1990) intervenes before nos 10/12, the mid-Victorian pair of Italianate rustic sandstone houses on Station Road. A pair of early post-World War II cream-washed houses follows.

Until the 1960s the substantial Victorian houses of Belmont Road faced a field that separated them from Station Road. This field was then developed with detached and semi-detached houses and, in Belmont Close, bungalows. These homes are characterised by wide windows and a variety of tile hanging, boarding, stone cladding and other details (including interesting projecting ground floor windows on Belmont Road). Most of the semi-detached homes have sacrificed their garages for extra living space. At about the same time a garden or

paddock south of Station Road was also developed with four pairs of bungalows with flat-roofed dormers – St Ronans.

Redevelopment of the 'public offices' and other buildings on the southern side of Station Road resulted in the plain dark red brick Marsh Court flats (*ca* 1980) and the later cream colour-washed Lime Tree Court, with a grey mansard roof, and cottagey rendered Lime Tree Mews.

A neat single storey building of grey corrugated sheet above red brick, containing eleven business units, faces the station car park, formerly a station yard. Beyond this are several old GWR stone buildings, a former weighbridge and a long corrugated shed on wooden supports.

The storage depot opposite the station is unobtrusive behind a hedge and high gate. The site has featured in plans to increase the accessibility and car parking of the station, but change now seems unlikely here unless the owner seeks it. At the northern end of the station approach there are interesting black early 20th century corrugated metal workshops with arched roofs. Within the station a listed footbridge at the southern end is due to be supplemented at the

other end of the platforms by a new structure with lifts.

Heritage Assets

The station and its footbridge and the hotel are grade II listed buildings and nos 10/12 Station Road, with their fine railings, are a handsome pair from a slightly later date. Some of the surviving old buildings related to the station yards (old GWR stone buildings, former weighbridge and long corrugated shed on wooden supports) also have historical value but are not listed.