



Exploring Abergavenny

1 Avenue

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?*

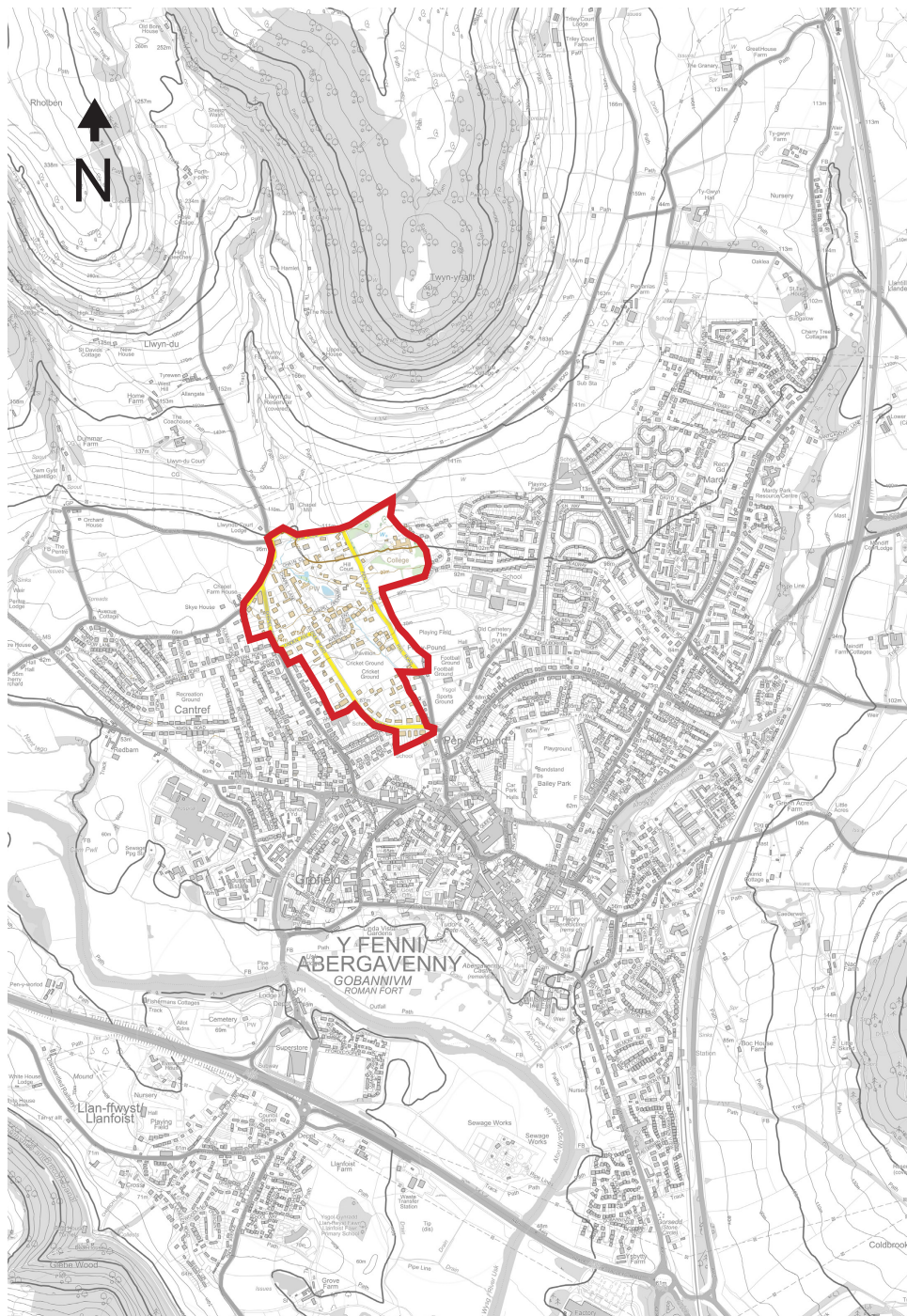
All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to abercivsoc@gmail.com or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

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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AVENUE

THIS LARGE AREA in the north of the town includes the upper parts of Chapel Road, Avenue Road and Pen y Pound. Upmarket houses of diverse age in sizeable plots with generous quantities of trees and shrubbery typify this suburb, which started with a few large Georgian or Victorian country houses overlooking the town. The Avenue Road part of the area has sometimes been known as Stanhope Park.

There are variations in density – the pairs of Edwardian houses at the beginning of Avenue Road and those on Avenue Crescent are more closely spaced – but for over a hundred years this has been Abergavenny's main opportunity for custom-built residential privacy. Much of the architecture is undistinguished



and since 1920 has rarely echoed local character or materials, but the overall impression is one of quality and ongoing adaptation and renewal.

The area is now entirely residential and car-dependent with no bus service, and no shops or other facilities apart from the nearby schools and leisure centre.

Historical Background

Chapel Road has ancient origins as the upper part of a lane that extended from Tudor Street via Pant Lane and today’s Commercial Street towards Llwyn-du and the medieval deer park at the head of the Cibi valley between the Deri and Rholben. Confusingly the property named The Chapel (once Capel Hên Gwrt) is to the east; alternatively Chapel Road may take its name from Chapel Farm on Pentre Road; the 1813 and 1829 maps (but not the 1844 Tithe Map) suggest that Chapel Road then veered west towards the farm, on a route that survives as a public footpath.

Pen y Pound is similarly old and the 1813 map shows that it also gave access to two large houses, Great Hill and Little Hill, built in the previous century, and overlooking the town half a mile below. Little Hill is now Hill Court and Great Hill, much altered, is The Hill, which once had a park extending much further south and east.

By 1880 Chain House (now The Chain) at the junction of Pentre Road and Chain Road had been added to the large residences in the area, with Glan Cybi on Chapel Road rather less grand. The 1881 Ordnance Survey map shows avenues of trees parallel with, and east of, Chapel Road, perhaps once planted as a parkland feature in the grounds of The Chapel.

Twenty years later Avenue Road had been set out between Chapel Road and the Cibi brook, and large fields had been subdivided into smaller fields, potentially building sites. Only eight houses had yet been built in the area: three at the town end of Avenue Road, two at today’s Avenue Road Nursing Home, a nearby house on Harold Road, Lyndhurst on Avenue Road, and Rocklands on Linden Avenue. The Rowans, at the junction of Chapel Road and Pentre Road, and The Beeches on Pen y Pound, had added to the number of larger houses.

By 1900 the upper part of Pen y Pound was known as Hill Road, but the property numbering today continues that of Pen y Pound. To avoid confusion we have made few references to Hill Road.

At the time of the First World War a dozen more houses had been built at the town end of Avenue Road, but otherwise only Warwick House on Avenue

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 2: character analysis

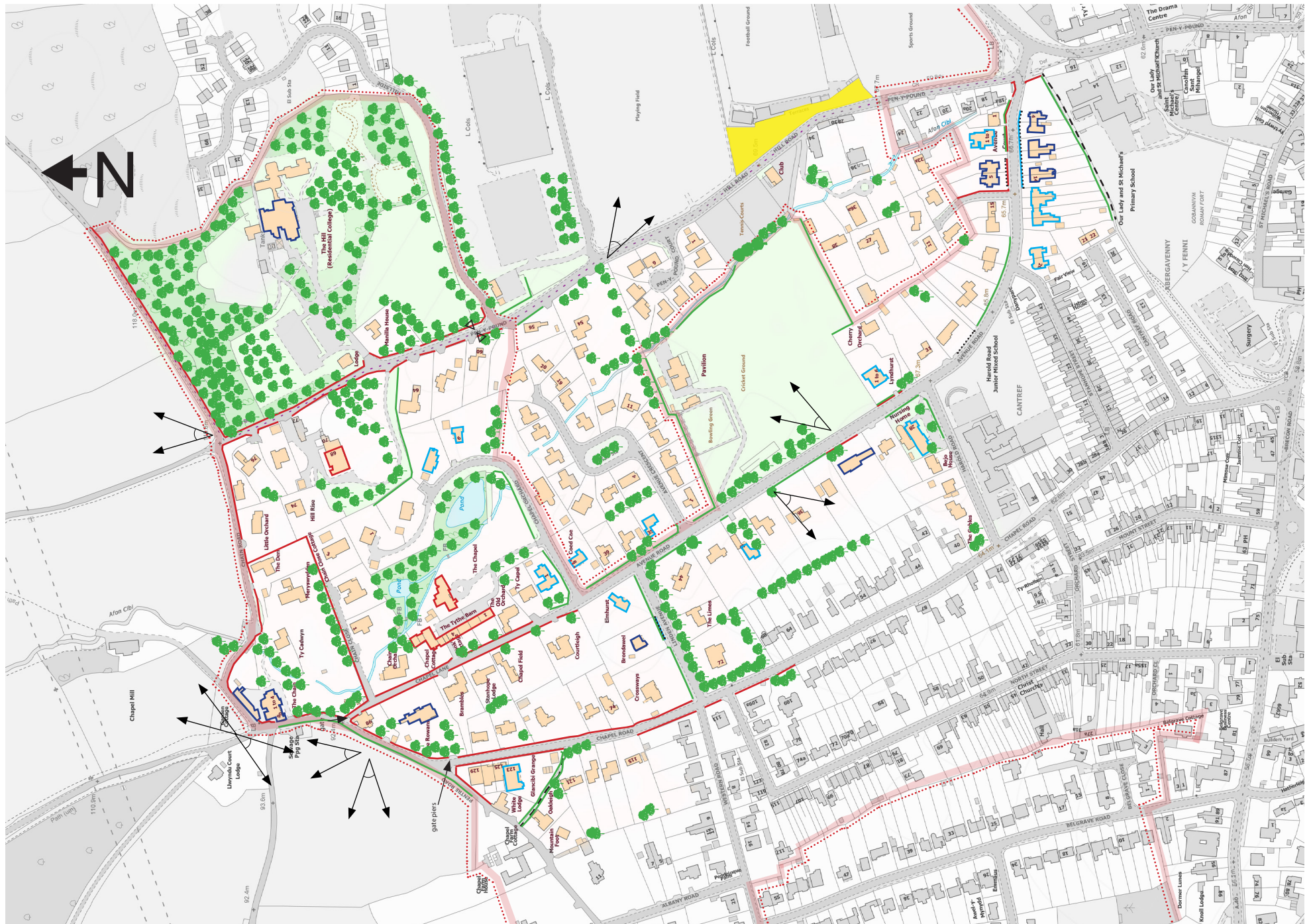




Figure 3: Chapel Lane from Pentre Road

Road and The Gables on Harold Road had been added.

Since 1920 about 100 houses have been added to the area. Most have been custom-built on sizeable plots, but most of 22 houses in Avenue Crescent (*ca* 1960) were a speculative estate, as were nine in Pen y Pound Court (*ca* 1985). Avenue Road below Linden Avenue was substantially complete by 1939, with the cricket ground provided in the early years of the century. There are still plots where infilling might be allowed.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The Cibi brook runs unobtrusively through the middle of the area, entering near The Chain before feeding ponds in the grounds of The Chapel, passing through Avenue Crescent, and marking the eastern boundary of the cricket ground before passing under the junction of Avenue Road, Pen y Pound and Old Hereford Road. It descends at an average gradient of about 1 in 30, but more like 1 in 13 at the top.



Figure 4: The Rowans, Chapel Road

The area has a distinctly sylvan character, especially where trees have endured in the grounds, or former grounds, of the large old houses and newer garden trees and shrubs have matured. Those in the grounds of The Hill are particularly important, as is that property's walled kitchen garden.

These trees, at least in summer, and at street level, often restrict views of the surrounding hills. The best place to enjoy views is at the intersection of lanes beside The Chain, the top of Chapel Road, or from the cricket ground or leisure centre grounds, but the Blorenge, Deri and Ysgyryd Fawr, and the Town Hall, can also be glimpsed elsewhere.

Stone walls along the roads contribute greatly to the character. Much of Chapel Road and the northern ends of Avenue Road and, particularly, Pen y Pound have high walls. At Pen y Pound, beyond the entrance to The Hill, the walls are both high and only 4-5m apart, with overhanging boughs and no footways, giving a very atmospheric effect. Most, but by no means all, walls have a 'cock and hen' coping.

Other characteristic features are associated with the walls: a number of fine



Figure 5: Warwick House, Avenue Road

decorative cast and wrought iron gates, and small wooden gateways with gothic arches.

Where walls are low or absent there are plenty of trimmed hedges that front and separate the gardens of the area. The west side of Avenue Road is a good example, and Chapel Orchard has a remarkable tall example on the boundary of The Chapel. The more closely spaced early 20th century houses on the south side of lower Avenue Road have low stone and/or brick walls and piers, some with ornate railings. Warwick House has a catenary brick wall and Avenue Crescent has low forecourt walls.

Plot sizes, and therefore gardens, vary considerably across the area, smallest at the lower end of Avenue Road and in Pen y Pound Court and Avenue Crescent, but often a quarter hectare or greater. Plots have become noticeably smaller since 1950. Except on lower Avenue Road and Avenue Crescent, building lines are rarely apparent. Few houses need to use the road for parking, though this can be a problem on Pen y Pound where the sports fields attract parking.

Except for the curve of Avenue Road below Harold Road, the three principal



Figure 6: More than a hint of Georgian on Chapel Orchard

roads in the area are straight, or nearly so, and about 600m long. There are connecting roads between Chapel Road and Avenue Road but none between Avenue Road and Pen y Pound, not even a footpath. The northern end of Avenue Road is named Chapel Lane and appears to be a private road, with no footways and a locked gate at the Pentre Road end, with a kissing gate for pedestrian access. Avenue Road and Linden Avenue are up to 7m wide with generous footways while Chapel Road and Pen y Pound/Hill Road are narrower, the latter with an intermittent footway and none at all at the northern end. Avenue Road and one-way Harold Road have traffic calming measures because of the school.

Building Character

The buildings of greatest interest are summarised taking each of the three main roads in turn, starting from the east.

Pen y Pound

The oldest house on this part of Pen y Pound is Hill Court, listed and de-

scribed by Cadw as mid/late 18th century, said to have been built in 1768 and then altered and extended in 1860 and little altered since then. The front of the house cannot be seen from the road, but the handsome Georgian hipped roof three-storey main south-facing section is rendered and there is a single storey wing to the left and a two-storey wing to the right. There is a tented verandah. The property is now two residences with another in a stone outbuilding at the rear and a modern house (No 74) in the grounds.

On the opposite side of the road The Hill, also south-facing and three-storey, is by origin at least as old but substantially rebuilt at the beginning of the 19th century. Ashlar Bath stone facing, projecting bays and the porch were added by E.A. Johnson early in the 20th century. The terrace balustrade and the single storey pedimented lodge at the entrance also date from about this time. The Hill is not listed. The house was an adult educational centre between 1967 and 2009 and residential accommodation was added in the 1970s. There are currently proposals to convert the main house into apartments, clear the modern extension, and build houses in parts of the grounds.

Lower down the road, The Beeches is a large late 19th century sandstone property of 2½ storeys. It has Bath stone detailing and English Revival gables with 'Tudor' woodwork and red tiling.

Seven further houses have been added to the upper part of Pen y Pound since the 1950s, plus another accessed from Chain Road, all in the grounds of Hill Court or The Chapel. Each is sited on its plot to have a southerly view. No 74b (*ca* 2000) in buff brick, with a course of darker brick used vertically above windows and as sills, is perhaps the most interesting, with a complex series of gables.

Between the tennis club and The Beeches, Pen y Pound Court is a short cul-de-sac of nine houses built in the early 1980s. With red brick ground floors with rendered first floors, they have distinctively low-hipped roofs (no chimneys) and wide eaves to both the houses and to the projecting double garages (one now a living room).

Avenue Road

Starting at the town end, nos 4-14 are pairs of fine little-altered early 20th century residences (Victorian in style) with two storey bays; nos 4/6 are the most impressive, in yellow brick and Bath stone with terracotta decorative details, slate roofing with decorative white bargeboards, ridge tiles and finials, and bay gables to the front and side. Nos 8-14 are matching pairs in sandstone and yellow brick (red brick side walls). Nos 16-22 are a little less grand in red



Figure 7: A hint of Regency on Chapel Lane

brick, with ground floor bay and doorway roofing in slate; nos 20/22 are 2½ storey and have rather more Bath stone decoration and flat-roofed dormers. All these houses seem likely to be by the same architect/builder, perhaps Foster of Fosterville; several have had rather unsympathetic garages added. Nos 24/26 are different and a little later, with red brick ground floors, white rendered first floors, red tiled roofs with flat-roofed dormers, and distinguished by prominent corner bays.

The north side is much less consistent: Avenue Court and nos 3/5 are late-Victorian, the latter in cream brick with Tudor Revival second-floor details and glazed sun rooms above side entrances. Contrasting with these are four *ca* 1960 detached houses (one with particularly characteristic features of the period such as tile hanging, stone side wall chimneys and 'picture' windows) grouped on a short cul-de-sac, followed by two detached houses from the same period, linked by their garages. Thereafter most of the homes date from the 1920s, all large with tiled roofs, most subsequently extended. The pair nos 15/17 are curiously different from each other though both with *faux* timberwork (a 1929 aerial photo



Figure 8: Edwardian style, Avenue Road © Google Streetview

confirms that this was not built as a single house). No 31 in red brick, laid in an interesting herring bone pattern between lower and upper windows, is post-war. Lyndhurst (6 flats) is late Victorian in sandstone with Bath stone details with two two-storey bays linked by a doorway canopy supported by good ironwork.

The north side of *Harold Road* has the Avenue Road Nursing Home, originally a semi-detached pair from the 1880s in grey sandstone, extended west in remarkably matching style and stonework in 1985. Another house, of 1890, has a stepped-out first-floor gable, anticipating Revival styles, and The Gables, a large early 20th-century white rendered house with a complex red tiled roof, is on the corner of Chapel Road, almost hidden by conifers.

Returning to Avenue Road, early 20th-century no 32 (Warwick House) was reportedly built by the Marquess of Abergavenny for his doctor (but rejected by the doctor) and bears the 'A' moulding. The house has a redbrick ground floor and stable block, a white-rendered first floor and steep slate roofing, part hipped, plus tall chimneys; casement windows are mostly two-by-twelve panes. Post-war no 30 between the nursing home and Warwick House has quite re-

cently been extended and given a modernising facelift. Nos 36-40 are inter-war and face south for the view to the Bloreng, no 40 the largest with a two-storey bow-windowed gable; no 44, angled on the Linden Avenue junction, probably dates from the 1960s but has been remodelled with a slate roof and a large balcony. Elmhurst, on the opposite corner with 'Tudor' timberwork, probably dates from the 1920s and is little altered. Brondawel in *Linden Avenue* has a more Edwardian appearance, one of the more interesting houses in the area. Crossways is a large dormer bungalow dating from the inter-war period, extended in recent years at the expense of its symmetry; the exposed rafter ends are a fairly unusual detail.

On the eastern side of Avenue Road north of the cricket ground, *Avenue Crescent* was built around 1960, mostly comprising several types of detached house in a reddish brick with various panels of dark red tile hanging, rendering, and reconstituted 'Cotswold' stone, plus flat-roofed garages. More recent extensions and alterations have made almost every house different. No 4 is a distinctive corner house with an asymmetrical front gable and dark green tile hanging. At the end of the road there is a flat-roofed bungalow with a garage underneath, and the upper side of the development has five bungalows, three of which were once similar. On the Avenue Road frontage there are three 1960s houses with typical features such as a mixture of materials, 'picture' windows, broken eaves lines, low pitched roofs, and flat-roofed garages to the fore, followed by Coedcae, a more recent loosely Regency styled house.

North of Avenue Crescent, *Chapel Orchard* is a late 20th-century development of large plots. No 6 is in a well-executed redbrick steeply gabled Edwardian style; others in red brick adopt a 'Georgian' style, notably no 5 with a grand Bath stone columned and balustrade-topped porch, but flush uPVC windows.

Avenue Road now becomes *Chapel Lane* and on the western side Courtleigh is a large south-facing 1930s house with Art Deco features. Chapel Field, also south-facing, and Stanhope Lodge are probably from the 1960s and Brambles from the 1980s. To the east occupying a corner plot on the hedged boundary with Chapel Orchard is a large, remodelled and extended, bungalow of about 1970. There are then two individually styled *ca* 2000 redbrick houses behind gated walls, one with a distinctive tower feature. Behind a low stone wall, is a listed building, the medieval or 16/17th century whitewashed thinly coursed rubble sandstone Tythe Barn (1-4 Chapel Lane). On the north side of a brick pillared archway (leading to more private buildings and The Chapel) is Chapel Cottage, seemingly part of the listing and also painted white. Finally, Chain



Figure 9: Avenue Road

Orchard is a bungalow of *ca* 1960. *Chain Close* has three bungalows from about 1970, one with a garage underneath, another with an unusual pair of separated monopitch roofs.

The Chapel is listed and may have medieval origins but now presents a mainly 1840s appearance, including a hipped pavilion to the side; it is difficult to see from public roads. The Chain is a complex sandstone 2½-storey house, probably built in the 1870s, with several steep gables with white decorative bargeboards and a distinctive rather continental-style tower, or truncated spire, with brackets under the eaves. There are somewhat similar roofs on towers of the Baptist Chapel in Frogmore Street. There are two *ca* 1970 dwellings and another recently built in the grounds of The Chain, and another of modern design is under construction, all reached from Chain Road. Interestingly, until sometime in the late 19th century, Chain Road passed between The Chain and its outbuilding at the rear; a tunnel still passes under the route of the original road.

Chapel Road

On the eastern side no 72 (Rocklands) is in the first example of the large plots found at this end of Chapel Road and is a grand stone villa built in 1896 with some 'Tudor' drip mouldings and winged dragon finials on the gables, which also have some timberwork. Nos 74 - 78 are substantial 1930s houses, no 76 south-facing. No 80 is *ca* 1960, with large windows, a balcony and some reconstituted stone, and no 82 (extended north) is of the same period in red brick. Finally, The Rowans is a fine 1890s tiled house by E.A. Johnson in yellow Ebbw Vale brick with Tudor Revival details; the terracotta griffin gable finials, similar to Rocklands, and roof ridge detail are notable.

Beyond Western Road the houses on the west side are all on large plots. No 115 is a bungalow of *ca* 1960 with a distinctive vertical window in the front gable, and nos 117-121 are *ca* 1970. No 117 is dominated by a double garage door and two dormers over, no 119 earlier with tile hanging, and no 121 has some grey reconstituted stone. Finally, beyond recent garages, redbrick Glancibi Grange is late Victorian. It was a Catholic school 1945-64 and is now probably more than one dwelling. It seems unlikely that the eastern part of the main building, with a black brick stringcourse, is that shown with the same footprint on the 1881 map. Post-war school buildings at the rear have been converted into three homes.

No 86 Chapel Road, now white roughcast rendered, is probably mid Victorian with 'Tudor' drip mouldings over some windows and some decorative bargeboards (perhaps copies of the originals).

Heritage Assets

Only three buildings are listed: Hill Court, The Chapel and the Tythe Barn. It is perhaps surprising that The Hill has not qualified, and other contenders could at least include The Chain, The Rowans, Warwick House and nos 4/6 Avenue Road.

The park and gardens of The Hill are listed grade 2 in Cadw's *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest* where they are succinctly described as 'a miniature country estate'. The character of the grounds is likely to change if current development proposals are approved.

Most of the area is within the Conservation Area, but this excludes Avenue Crescent, The Beeches, and Pen y Pound Court.

The area's trees and rubble stone walls and mature trees are particularly important elements of its character, especially in the upper section.