

12 Hereford 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.

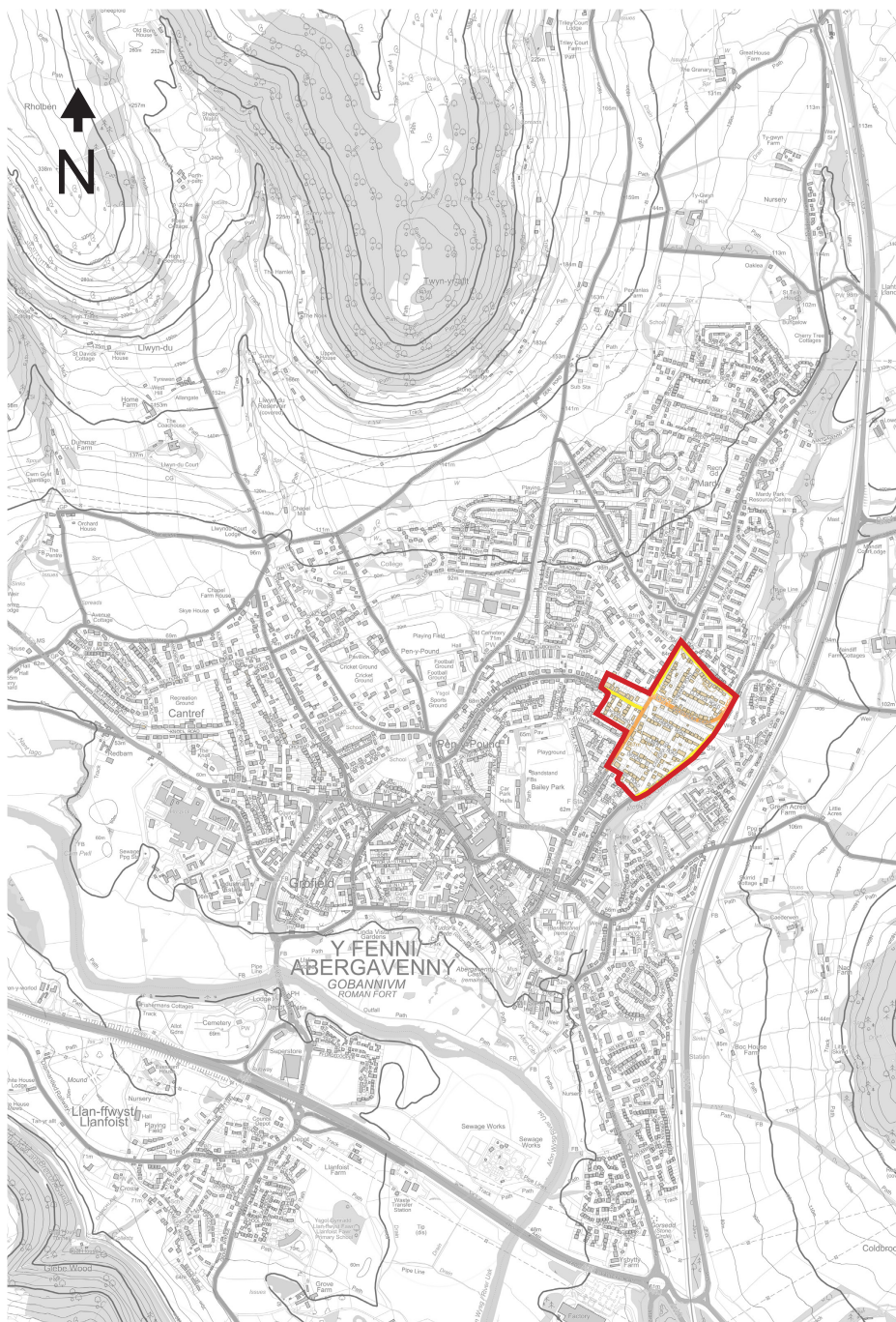
Acknowledgements and copyright information

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



HEREFORD ROAD

THIS RESIDENTIAL AREA lies to the north-east of the town centre astride Hereford Road and extending north of the former railway line to Croesonen Road, the borough boundary. Ross Road is its eastern limit. The principal side streets are Priory Road, Oxford Street, Richmond Road, Grosvenor Road and Wyndham Road, and part of Park Crescent west of Hereford Road.





Figure 2: Oxford Street

This substantial residential area has a strong, distinctive and visually appealing character, possibly worthy of Conservation Area designation, at least in part. The piecemeal variety of pre-1920 housing is mostly quite subtle and interesting, with occasional modest highlights, and conveying something of the social and, possibly, tenure mixture of the first three decades of the area's development. More recent infilling development has not always blended well, but it has not undermined the general character. The small area of detached and semi-detached housing on Croesonon Road, perfectly pleasant itself, does depart from the prevailing character.

The area is quite densely settled and well-maintained, though with few local amenities apart from the shop on Hereford Road. The need to park on-street must be a difficulty for many residents.

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



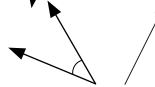
Terminated street view



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: Oxford Street charm

Historical Background

There may have been a Roman precursor, but today's Hereford Road south of the railway was constructed in the 1820s. An 1829 Ordnance Survey map shows a lane from Ross Road (approximately where Priory Road now connects) to Mardy intersecting with the new road at the 1811 tramroad crossing, which became a bridge over the railway in 1862. The course of the northern end of this lane, which by 1844 was no more than a path on field boundaries, is retained by the rear boundaries of Hereford Road properties north of Albert Road. The old property, probably once a farmhouse, that is now nos 61-65 Hereford Road is named The Hafod on an 1877 sketch map whereas a larger house near the road intersection is named Hafod on the 1881 OS map, with grounds extending to the cottages.

The area was farmland until the 1870s except for Hafod, nos 61-65, the house or inn that is now the Black Lion Guest House, Junction Cottages, and a tollhouse on the corner of Grosvenor Road (probably unnamed at the time and



Figure 5: Priory Road

earlier a shared space with the tramroad). All but Hafod survive today.

At the time that the 1881 map was surveyed no new development in the area was recorded. Soon after this the convenient access to the town via Hereford Road was exploited by setting out roads for housing development. By then, building in the St Helen's Road area west of the town centre was well under way and the Hereford Road area became the next place where homes for a similar upper working/lower middle class demand could be met. A grid of roads was set out throughout the area east of Hereford Road and by 1900 a substantial number of homes had been built south of the railway. Development west of Hereford Road was less advanced; Park Crescent was named Oakland Road until extended west after the First World War. North of the railway only plots had been set out.

Further development took place south and north of the railway so that by 1920 the overall character was established except on Croesonon Road, leaving only infilling plots elsewhere. By the end of the 20th century development on Croesonon Road and infilling, mainly by individual houses or bungalows, had



Figure 6: Hereford Road Edwardian

left little scope for further development.

The railway land, disused by 1980, was subsequently used by an access road to the Heol Hamlin estate and for eight housing association homes on Grosvenor Road in 2013.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area rises from about 65m above sea level in the south to nearly 90m in the north, an average gradient of 1 in 20. On the eastern side the ground dips into the well-treed Gavenny valley, especially noticeable where Croesonen, Clifton, Grosvenor and Priory Roads drop sharply to Ross Road. Stone retaining walls feature here.

Hereford Road is the spine of the area, generally with about 20m between facing buildings. Older buildings such as the Black Lion break the building line. The gradient increases to cross the former railway, the bridge of which remains though filled with spoil material. In the late 1990s it was suggested that



Figure 7: Once Oakland Road, now Park Crescent

the bridge be reopened to provide a walking and cycling route under Hereford Road, but local opinion has rejected this on public safety grounds. There are fine views of the Bloreng from the bridge

The grid of short streets on both sides of Hereford Road, together with the pre-1914 houses they were built to serve, sets the character of the area. The space between the houses is about 10m with consistent building lines to which more recent building has usually conformed. Where there are almost continuous terraces of houses facing each other the street space can feel narrow and confined. The opportunity to place buildings to create enclosed linear spaces was generally missed; only views in one direction along Woodland, Summerfield, Clifton and (recently) Wyndham Roads are effectively terminated in this way. However, trees in the Gavenny valley invariably close eastward views along the streets.

Alexandra Road is a north-south link between the other streets of this part of the area. It had little development in the early years but some infilling plots have since been taken up. There are good views to the south from this road. North of the railway, Wyndham Road also runs north-south but is faced by housing on



Figure 8: Wyndham Road

the western side; it has similar views.

There are relatively few garden trees having an impact on the street scene, making those that do more precious. Examples include copper beeches in Alexandra Road and trees at the junction of Wyndham and Clifton Roads.

Front garden sizes reflect the mixture of house types in the area. Those of earlier houses are typically forecourts of little more than a metre deep, with low stone or brick walls and various iron railings. A surprising number have finial-headed railings on a single course plinth more characteristic of mid 19th century houses in Grofield. Elsewhere larger front gardens have a variety of boundary treatments, not always enhancing the area but including many clipped hedges that contribute greenery.

Rear gardens are usually about 20m long throughout the area except where a rear access lane was provided between Hereford Road and Wyndham Road. The main exception is the northern side of Park Crescent where most owners have extended their gardens by purchasing former railway land. Garden width varies according to the house type, but only about half a dozen houses in the



Figure 9: Grosvenor Road

area have significantly larger plots.

Hereford Road is a busy town distributor road with some parking restrictions. Park Crescent is also a busy road and residential parking on the north side considerably impedes the free flow of traffic. Grosvenor Road also has parking restrictions. Elsewhere the streets are comparatively quiet, but where the houses have no garden space for cars there can be a need to park on both sides of the road with two wheels on the footway.

There are no public footpaths except the significant drop down from Albert Road to the Ross Road negotiated via a kissing gate and a steep flight of stone steps. The only open space is a rather unkempt area at the entrance to Richmond Road, once part of the grounds of Hafod.

Well-maintained tarmac roads and pavements are the norm with minimal impact from modern street furniture, though the overhead wires can seem obtrusive. On the north side of the Park Crescent junction a wide area of tarmac (with a phone box) is used for parking by Premier store customers.



Figure 10: recent building, Grosvenor Road

Building Character

The character of the area relies greatly on late 19th/early 20th century housing, usually in short terraces or pairs, often with group names that probably precede street numbering. In detail these exhibit considerable variety, as elsewhere in the town, raising questions about how the land was released, who built the homes, whether for rent or sale, and who first lived in them. Demand from railway and hospital workers probably peaked at this time, but more research is necessary. Almost all the housing from this period is two-storey and closely spaced, faces the street with very small front gardens and with slate roofing.

A shortage of map evidence makes the dating of houses difficult. The earliest houses south of the railway (some on Richmond Road are dated 1881) have coursed rubble sandstone fronts, usually with yellow Ebbw Vale brick dressings and various stringcourse styles, and red brick sides and backs, sometimes rendered. No 44 Richmond Road is red brick with unusual black and white brick detailing. South-facing houses tend to have ground floor bay windows with

slate-roofs sometimes extended to include doorways. Round arched doorways, some giving tunnel access to the rear, are common. Two of the oldest houses (nos 5/7 Richmond Road) have untypical gabled porches with decorative bargeboards and finials, while the rest of that terrace have narrower frontages. No 59 Hereford Road has a handsome leaded door canopy. Such indications of status are common; Nos 21/23 Albert Road are more typical of western Abergavenny with two-storey angled bays and good bargeboards, gable apex finials and decorative ridge tiles, and several detached houses are already present. Only one terrace appears to have been rendered throughout its life: nos 19-29 Park Crescent.

Later in the turn-of-the-century period, especially north of the railway, even more variety appeared. Bay- and doorway- roofing may be tiled; squared bays often extend to the first floor, sometimes as a gable with decorative bargeboards and half-timbering; and red brick is used on frontages and for dressings, often with a rendered and colour washed first floor. No 5 Springfield Road has an attractive catslide tiled roof.

Alterations are generally much more evident on post-1920 property; earlier houses have retained their essential character at the front despite many uPVC windows and doors. A notable exception is no 20 Springfield Road which has lost all resemblance to its terrace neighbours. Photovoltaic panels are starting to appear on south-facing roofs. The guesthouse at no 2 Oxford Street has a sympathetic (though flat-roofed) recent rendered extension, while no 29 Oxford Street has an elaborate faux pedimented porch.

An unusual group of homes at the eastern end of Priory Road dates from the 1920s but appears much older. Three attractive pairs of wide-fronted cottages built in random rubble stone with black mortar and concrete window lintels merit more research.

The design of more recent development, mostly by infilling and single plot development, covers a wide range according to the tastes of the time of building. The infilling is sometimes out of keeping with the prevailing character, but it is only on Croesonen Road that more modern development takes on its own character, of pre-war and post-war detached middle class housing, mostly of brick and/or colour-washed render usually with tiled roofs. A few bungalows, on both sides of the railway, are perhaps the most discordant elements when between earlier houses. Recently completed social housing for Melin Homes on Grosvenor Road is exemplary for echoing local characteristics.

A former corner shop at No 23 Oxford Street with a curious moulding above

the angled doorway has been converted to residential use with little external alteration. The shop on the corner of Hereford Road and Park Crescent, evident on a 1929 aerial photograph and probably always a shop, has been considerably altered and is a substantial landmark entering the town on Hereford Road.

Survivals from before 1880 are the much altered Black Lion Guest House on Hereford Road, with bay windows bridged by the deep eaves of a shallow pyramid roof, old cottages at 61-65 Hereford Road (now below the road level), the extended single storey tollhouse, and Junction Cottages, which retain some original character on the 'railway' side but are greatly altered on the Grosvenor Road side.

Heritage Assets

While almost the entire area has heritage value as an interesting and little changed phase of Abergavenny's development, few individual buildings have special merit. The most interesting pre-1880 building is the tollhouse at the corner of Hereford and Grosvenor Roads, while the appearance of the Black Lion suggests that it may also date from soon after the creation of Hereford Road in the 1820s. The origins of the unusual Nos 8-18 Priory Road would be worth study.

The County Council is to consider whether the area south of the former railway should be designated a Conservation Area.