

17 Maes y Llarwydd

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.

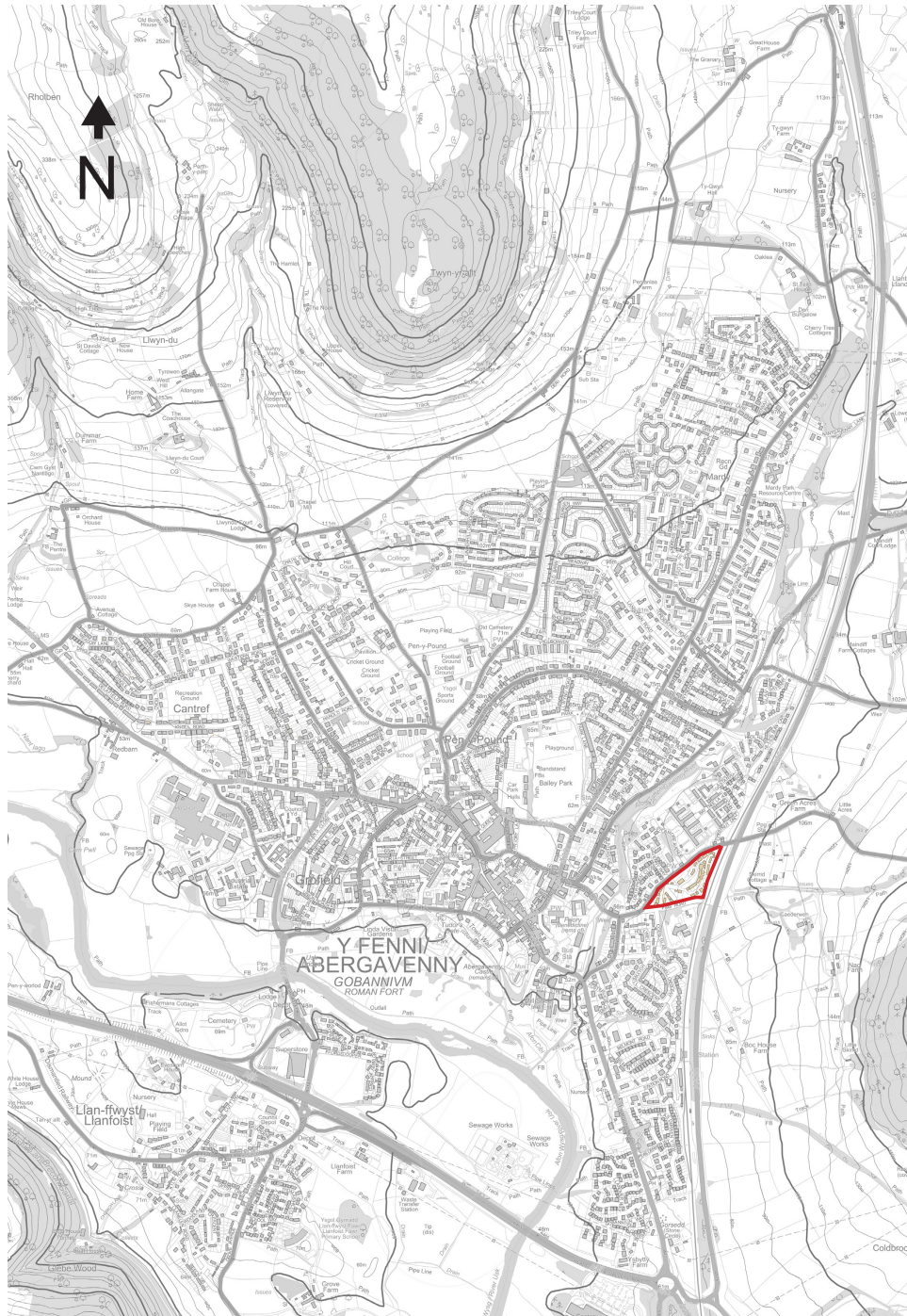
We also thank Anna Lermont and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

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Cover: The Square at the top of the development

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

Figure 1: location plan and aerial



MAES Y LLARWYDD

THIS UNUSUAL MODERN housing estate lies east of the B4233 road to Monmouth via Llanvapley, between the Pen y Fal character area and Firs Road and Coed Glas.

Maes y Llarwydd is a visually successful response to an awkwardly shaped steeply sloping site using a wide range of traditional and often locally authen-



tic building types, details and materials arranged in a quite dense but informal urban village-like way. The succession of differing urban spaces is particularly noteworthy, inviting a visitor to explore further. Some pantiled brick elements are not locally characteristic and the meandering roadscape (and undersized garages) contribute to a street parking issue, but the overall townscape has a strong character and sense of place.

This design approach was greatly influenced by the Prince of Wales' Poundbury development at Dorchester. It is not to the taste of those who prefer good modern architecture, but it is perhaps unfortunate that this quality of design has since only been replicated by a major house builder locally at Croesonen Gardens.

Historical Background

Firs Road, between the estate and Coed Glas was the main Monmouth road until superseded by the gentler gradient of the present route of B4233, probably in the 18th century. It is still a 'restricted byway' beneath and beyond the railway and by-pass,

The area was fields until the Newport to Hereford railway line was opened in 1854, soon to be come part of the Great Western Railway. The 1844 tithe map shows a single building, probably agricultural, that appears to be today's Larchfield Barn, a residential conversion in about 2008.

Larchfield, a large house probably built in about 1870 for the superintendent of the Asylum opposite, and its 0.6ha grounds were carved out of the triangle of fields west of the railway. In the early 21st century the house and fields were allocated for residential development and 52 homes by the Charles Church company were the outcome, named after the house in Welsh. Larchfield itself awaits conversion to apartments.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

The area is quite steeply sloping, from about 62m above sea level at the lowest point to about 84m at the railway, meaning that the cul-de-sac climbs at a gradient of about 1 in 14.

Several mature trees have been retained within the estate and there are belts of old trees beside the railway and along Firs Road and within Coed Glas. Green space is restricted to a grassed steep embankment and the small fenced play area

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



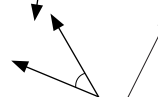
Terminated street view



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

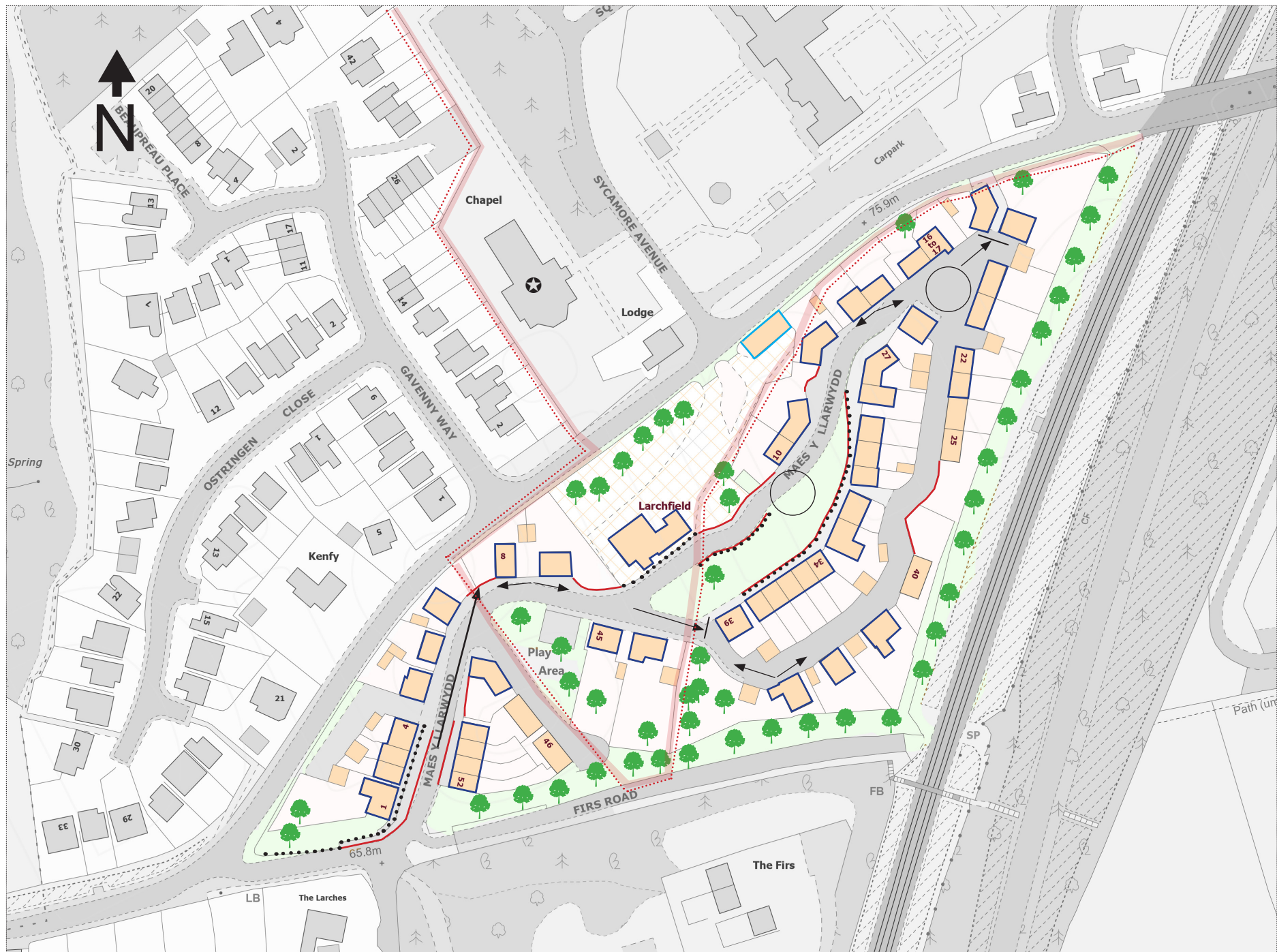




Figure 3: Entering the area

set among trees. Views out of the housing area are limited at street level, but many houses enjoy good views over the town centre to the Bloreng.

The housing is arranged to create an illusion of an unplanned townscape, perhaps as developed in the mid 19th century. It thus presents a succession of contrasting spaces, starting with a straight street that focuses on the small spire of the hospital chapel and ending with an interesting triangular 'square' at the top of the development. The middle section is characterised by the steep grass embankment rising to terraces of houses.

The houses are generally close together, giving a dense feeling to parts of the estate. The several three-storey detached houses tend to loom over their smaller neighbours - an unusual feature in a modern development though not so unusual in the older towns this scheme aims to emulate. Front doors open directly onto the street, sometimes without even a footway, or on to an elevated footpath, with no front gardens. The lack of front gardens must impinge on privacy and at several points one is aware of looking directly into living rooms.



Figure 4: Turning the bend

The tarmac roadway that loops around the housing sometimes has a varying width and a single wide footway, or sometimes none. Parking tends to be in the roadway, sometimes on the footway, despite the provision of parking courts, spaces and garages (known to be under-sized). Simple tall lamp standards are in a traditional style.

Rear gardens vary in size but are generally small and enclosed by white rendered walls or tall wooden fences. A low field-like hedge on the B4233 frontage is an ineffective screen for any untidiness, especially in winter.

Building Character

Maes y Llarwydd has an interesting range of traditional, often locally vernacular, styles. Within a small area there is a considerable variety of building forms including broken terraces, semi-detached houses, detached homes (some elbowed in shape) and four large three-storey detached units. Having all been built at the same time (*ca* 2008) they have the historical integrity intended by the designer,



Figure 5: Tuscan detail

but the varying scale and style enables some degree of social mixture.

The majority of properties are finished in a white or off-white smooth render with white uPVC windows, which adds visual unity to the development, but this is punctuated by the use of red sandstone in three of the three-storey houses and, in random rubble, a few smaller houses. All have slate roofs often with brick chimneys and dormers. A remarkable selection of details has been used to create the unplanned illusion. Some of the properties have protruding flat Victorian canopies, many have moulded arch doorways, and others have lean-to or gabled porches as seen elsewhere in the town. Many have ground floor bays. Occasional features such as oriel windows, classical columns at doorways, Gothic arches and steps up to doorways add considerable interest.

A stylistic incongruity is the studio apartments above garages, built in red brick and roofed with orange pantiles, with Juliet balconies. These do not relate at all to the other buildings on the estate or echo anything else in the town.

Larchfield is a large multi-gabled stone mid 19th century house with grounds that once coincided with a Conservation Area boundary that is now somewhat

superseded by the modern estate. It is accessed from B4233 via decorative gates but remains derelict, though with permission for conversion to apartments. The stone outbuilding backing on to the main road has been converted to residential use – Larchfield Barn.

Heritage Assets

Larchfield has some merit as a large Victorian house, and arguably the character of the rest of the area should be conserved as a high quality example of this approach to housing. The Conservation Area should probably be amended to include all the estate and possibly Article 4 Directions introduced to prevent the erosion of its integrity.