



22 Old Mardy

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<sup>1</sup>.

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](mailto: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.

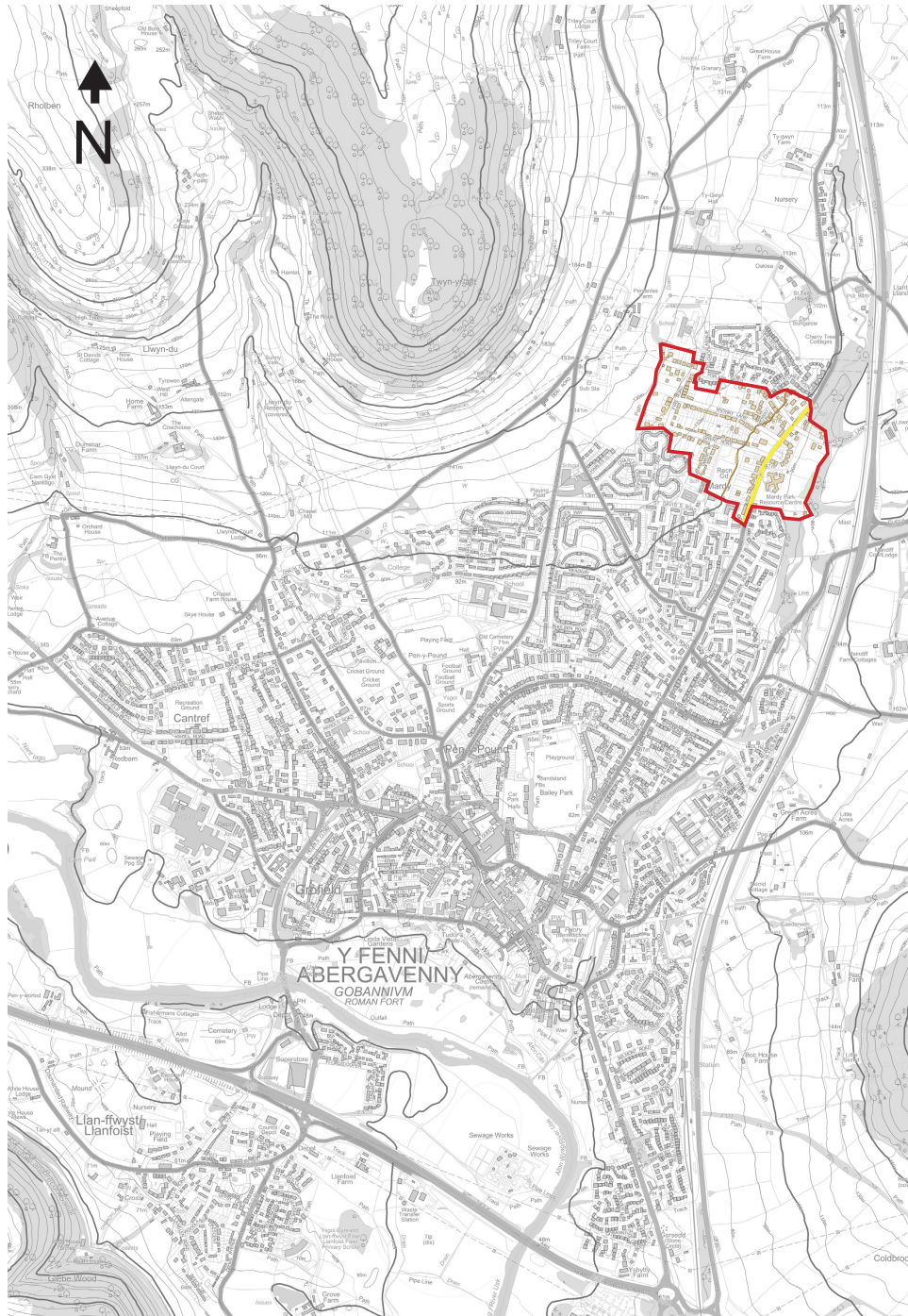
We also thank Anna Leron and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

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**Cover:** Hereford Road, looking north

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

Figure 1: location plan and aerial



## OLD MARDY

Mardy lies immediately to the north of Abergavenny town, astride the Hereford Road, and is part of the old parish of Llantilio Pertholey with its church beside the Gavenny river a little to the north. 'Maerdy' is Welsh for 'house of the mayor' or reeve, possibly of medieval origin and referring to the lord's local official. An alternative meaning could indicate the site of an ancient slave market.

This part of Mardy could be divided into two character areas – the village on





Figure 2: Hereford Road looking south

the main road and the roads to the west – but we have regarded the community as one with a shared history and popular identity, though described as two sub-areas.

The village along the main road retains the pleasant variety and character of a linear rural settlement with some interesting buildings and majestic trees. It is quite unlike any other part of the town. Like many village streets it suffers from through traffic and has the consequent measures to control parking and enable pedestrians to cross the road.

Behind the village to the west is an extensive planned layout for house building that has taken well over a century to develop, mostly since 1945 and perhaps not completed yet. In parts it is very rural with individual homes of various ages and styles set along roads without footways that have a pleasant rustic informality. Elsewhere the council acquired land for housing and there is a more urban appearance, but the overall effect is still village-like. It would seem unfortunate if further creation of footways eroded this character, notwithstanding the possible conflict with the needs of the bus route.

## 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



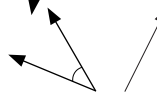
Terminated street view



Deflected street view



Vista, long view



Visual pinch point



Building rhythm



Important walling



Important trees or shrubs



Important hedges



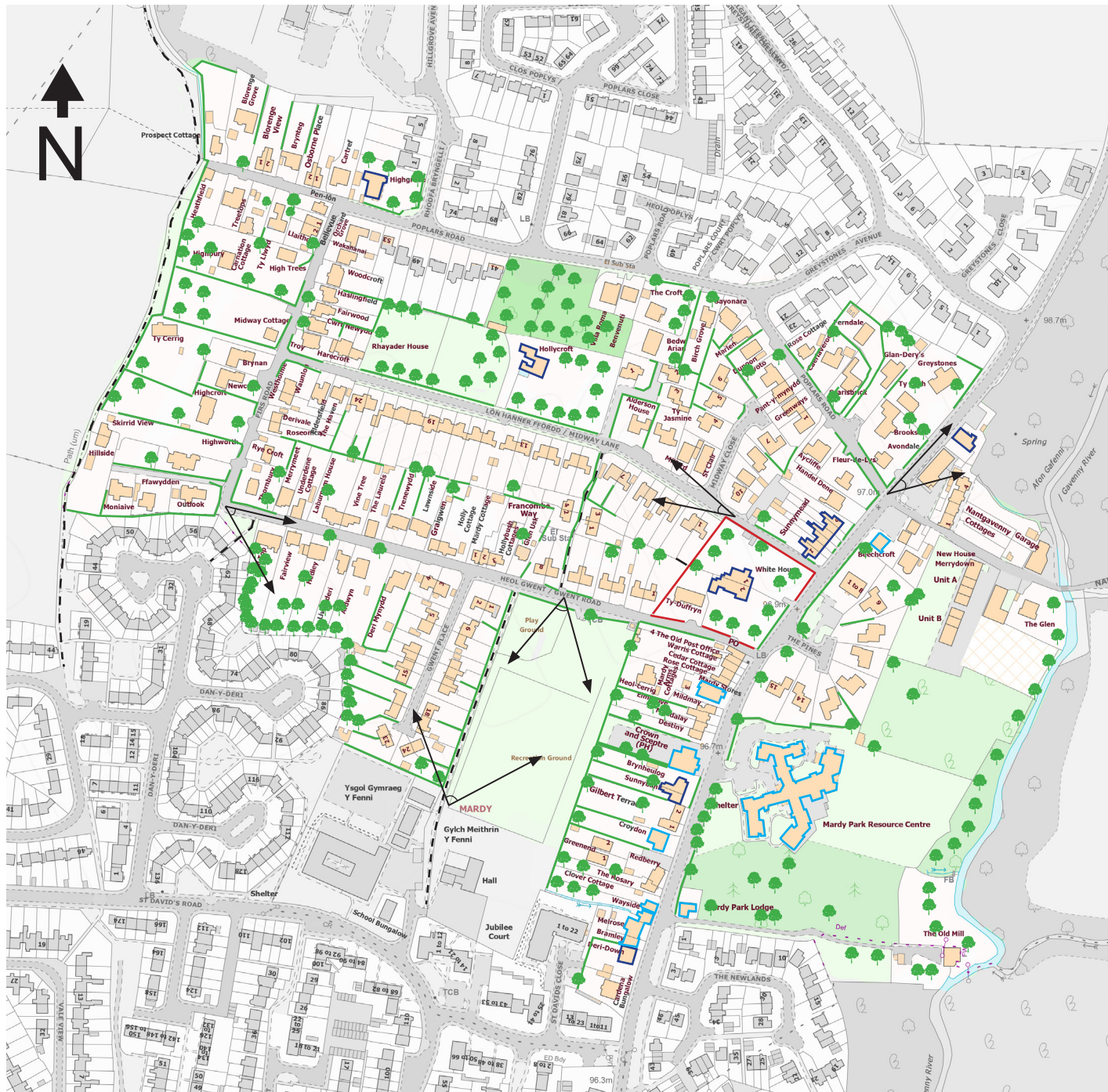
Footpath



Improvement opportunity



Figure 3: character analysis



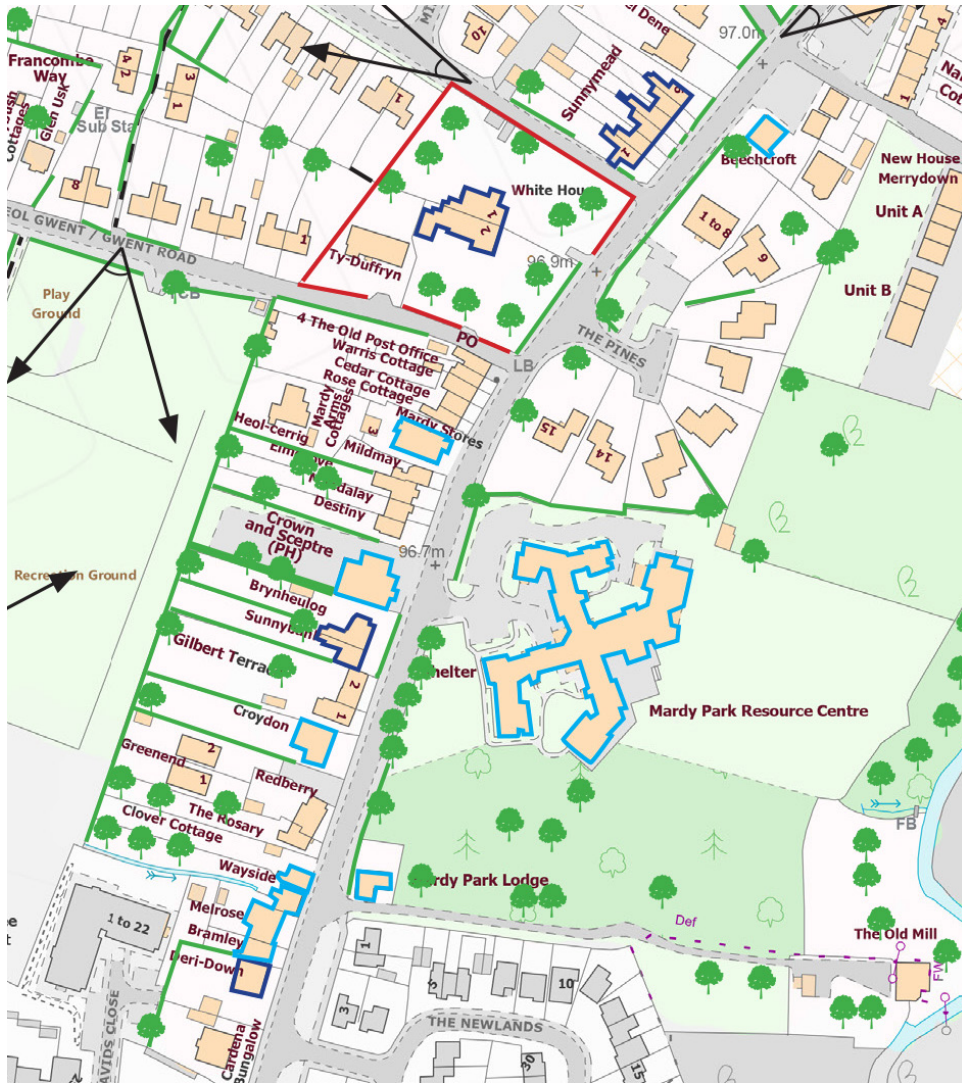


Figure 3b: detail



Figure 4: Sunnymead Terrace

The central location of an undeveloped area in the backland, and its mature vegetation, suggests that, should it become available for development, care must be taken to provide a suitably sensitive scheme, perhaps based on a footpath link between Midway Lane and Poplars Road.

## Historical Background

The early one-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1813 names Maerdy but shows no buildings except possibly a mill on the Gavenny. At that time the main Abergavenny - Hereford road was still the Old Hereford Road higher up the valley side; Maerdy was on a network of lanes just above the valley floor.

Local histories indicate that the new Hereford Road, continuing the line of Monk Street in the town to join the already existing road towards Mardy at the tramway crossing, was opened as a turnpike in the 1820s. The 1829 one-inch map shows this main route and three buildings roughly at the southern end of the present village on the western side of the road, and it names 'Parsons Cot-



Figure 5: Gwent Road and the Deri

tage'; Maerdy is a house or farm off the main road to the north, on lanes that no longer exist; Maerdy Park house is not shown. The more detailed 1839 tithe map confirms the existence of Croesonen Cottages (in the South Mardy character area) and the group of buildings at the location of Parsons Cottage, plus another group of buildings including the New Inn further north where the tramway from the south met the Hereford road. Nantgavenny Lane is not shown.

The new road probably triggered the development of the Victorian settlement that is mainly along the western side of the road, perhaps centred on public houses and a smithy, and (sometime between 1840 and 1880) Maerdy Park house to the east. This was replaced by Mardy Park care home/resource centre in the late 20th century. It seems likely that the village housed farm and nursery garden workers, mill workers, Maerdy Park staff and early commuters to Abergavenny, but this needs further research. A corn mill on the Gavenny near Mardy Park, not shown in 1839, was disused by 1880.

Research is also necessary to establish the origin of the apparently speculative layout of roadways west of the main road, which were starting to attract hous-

ing development by the time of the detailed 1881 OS map. The 1839 tithe map shows only the first few yards of a track that became Gwent Road. The 1881 map shows Beaufort Buildings here (later called Francombe Cottages, redeveloped after 1945) and it is recorded in 1839 that the Duke of Beaufort owned the land later made available for development. Apart from Beaufort Buildings perhaps the first house built in the area was Highgrove, formerly Hillgrove, on Poplars Road, which may date from about 1860. Infilling of this part of old Mardy continues to this day.

### Setting, Streets and Spaces

The axis of the area is the main road which approximately follows the 95m contour of the valley formed by the river Gavenny flowing southwards between the Sugarloaf and associated Black Mountains to the west and the offset but equally impressive Ysgyryd Fawr mountain to the east. The railway and the modern A465 trunk road to Hereford are on the opposite side of the valley.

Old Mardy occupies a relatively spacious gently sloping 500m wide shelf between the foot of the wooded Deri and where the land slopes much more steeply down to the river Gavenny. The Old Hereford Road and boundary of the Brecon Beacons National Park is 300m further up the steepening Deri slope. The grandeur of the natural setting contrasts with the relatively small-scale dwellings which typify 'the Mardy' as the community is often locally known.

The Deri seems very close to this part of Mardy, especially seen uphill and closing the view on the three side roads. The dramatic free-standing Ysgyryd Fawr two kilometres to the north east is best appreciated from the recreation ground but frequently glimpsed elsewhere. Looking south from the recreation ground there are views of the Ysgyryd Fach and, in the distance, the Bloreng. Views to the east of rising countryside on the eastern side of the Gavenny are less impressive.

We have divided the older part of Mardy into two character sub-areas – Mardy Village on the main road, and Backland Mardy, the area of roadways and plots set out in the Victorian period.

Mardy Village is a mainly Victorian linear settlement along the Hereford Road. Mardy Park retains many of the mature trees and remnant orchard of the grounds of the demolished house, most strikingly the copper beeches on the main road frontage. The grounds of White House are dominated by mature trees, and much of The Pines housing close is well-screened by trees. Otherwise



Figure 6: Airey Homes

the street has only a few front garden specimens. Front gardens are generally short with a variety of low walls, fencing and vegetation. One house at the Ab-ergavenny end has fine arrow-headed iron railings. Rear gardens are about 60m long, extending to the recreation ground, a few with backland development. Double yellow lines, parking zones and a pedestrian crossing aim to manage traf- fic on this quite busy road.

Backland Mardy is based on Gwent Road, Midway Lane and Poplars Road, linked by Firs Road at the top. Sections of all four roads lack one or both foot- ways, contributing to the rural character of this planned road layout, which re- sulted in plot depths of about 50m. The greatest concentration of mature trees is in the grounds of Hollycroft, otherwise a paddock area of approaching a hectare that has escaped development. Elsewhere most significant greenery is found in rear gardens and the Firs Road area. Mature trees form a buffer between Gwent Road properties and the Dan y Deri estate to the south. A rather featureless large recreation ground and public footpath links this character area with the modern housing estate and school on St David's Road. The footpath continues



Figure 7: Firs Road

across Gwent Road to Midway Lane and any opportunity to extend it to Poplars Road should be taken.

### Building Character

Mardy Village is a ribbon of very diverse mostly small Victorian properties, some detached, and others joined in short rows, almost entirely on the western side of the main road. The ribbon is broken at its midpoint by the modernised Crown and Sceptre public house, probably dating from about 1870. To the south of this is a white-painted brick Classical early Victorian pair of houses (Sunnybank and Brynheulog) with a hipped roof and first floor balconies, full width over angled bays. Croydon is early 20th century, in red brick and render with twin two-storey gabled bays. Clover Cottage is whitewashed random rubble, end-on to the road and probably once a barn or some other non-resi- dential use. Melrose and Bramley also have early origins, and Deri Down is a double-fronted early/mid-19th-century house, roughcast rendered with five

8+8 sash windows and a pedimented central doorcase. To the north of the Crown and Sceptre there is a large detached double-gabled sandstone building of some character which has been converted into Mardy Stores. North of this convenience store is a mid/late-19th-century terrace that extends up to the junction with Gwent Road and ending with a small post office. On the other side of this junction is the large garden belonging to, and obscuring, the White House (once Sunnyside), a substantial stuccoed Italianate Victorian property now divided into two dwellings. Beyond this is the red brick early 20th century Sunnymead Terrace of six houses with cream brick dressings. Four more modern detached properties complete the housing on this side of the road before the Greystones estate access road was built in about 1985.

On the east side of the main road the northern entry to the built-up area is marked by the rather isolated Victorian three-storey former New Inn which faces north and is now a dwelling. A single-storey food store has recently been built in the inn's car park. Otherwise this side of the main road has only a late-19th-century sandstone terrace with long gardens descending towards the river, various commercial premises including new workshop units on Nant-gavenny Lane, and The Pines, a semi-circle of eight brick executive homes (*ca* 1980s) characterized by large tiled roofs which slope down over forward-projecting double garages. Thereafter come the architecturally appealing modern Mardy Park buildings, single storey with hefty hips and gables and sky-lit tiled roofs and stone chimneys. A small sandstone lodge with yellow brick dressings is at the entry to a driveway that once served Mardy Park and now only the former water mill that provides sizeable modernized and characterful accommodation.

The mixed age and style of the buildings, together with substantial greenery, combine to give the core of Mardy a mature village-like unity and 'out of town' character.

Backland Mardy has been developed for housing over a period of at least 130 years, still with one sizeable undeveloped area. The housing has few or no defining characteristics but is predominantly modest two-storey detached or semi-detached housing of varying simple designs according to their period, with extensive personalisation of individual properties and of those on older estates. The age range of property ranges from mid 19th century to current construction, though mostly built since the Second World War, especially since 1970. The oldest cottages tend to be on Gwent Road's north side, where there is no consistent building line. This and the fact that two cottages face east rather than south, contributes markedly to the character of this road. There are two

flat-roofed extensions. Early post-war council housing, now largely in private hands, occupies other parts of Gwent Road: eight 'Airey' prefabricated semis on the site of Beaufort Buildings/Francome Cottages, one of which (no.7) appears unaltered at the time of survey, and twenty-two hip-roofed houses in Gwent Place, brick-built, now painted or rendered. Some possibly original chain link fencing survives. Much of the south side of Midway Lane is taken by semis that appear to have been council-built, some of an unusual, seemingly superior, design. Apart from the conventional arrangement of homes along roads, there are recent examples of backland infilling with large houses in former gardens.

This mix of housing over a long period of development in this part of Mardy contributes to its rural character as a semi-planned extension of the village on the main road.

## Heritage Assets

Two properties appear to be of notable architectural interest - a white mid-19th-century Italianate villa with a veranda on Poplars Road (Highgrove, formerly Hillgrove), and the difficult-to-see White House on the main road. Hollycroft (originally Albert Villa) on Midway Lane is late-19th-century rendered with decorative gable bargeboards, and on the main road other buildings of considerable interest include Brynheulog and Sunnybank, Deri Down and the former New Inn. Sunnymead Terrace is locally somewhat unusual for being in red and yellow brick.