



Usk

Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Proposals



monmouthshire
sir fynydd

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FORUM
Heritage
Services

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View to the town and Usk Castle from the tower of the parish church

Part A: Purpose & Scope of the Appraisal

1 Introduction

1.1 Conservation areas comprise the accumulation of an area's positive architectural or historic attributes, rather than the quality of its individual buildings, which makes it worthy of conservation area status. The attributes might include: the landscape setting of the area; the grouping of traditional buildings and the resultant spaces and sense of enclosure; the scale, design, type and materials of the buildings; historic boundaries; public realm; landmarks, views and vistas; and the present and former pattern of activities or land uses.

1.2 Usk is one of 31 designated Conservation Areas in the county of Monmouthshire. It was designated as a conservation area on 12th January 1976.

1.3 The *Usk Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals* is seen as the first steps in a dynamic process. The overarching aim is to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the Usk Conservation Area and to provide a basis for making sustainable decisions about its future management.

1.4 Key study aims:

- Identify those elements of Usk which contribute to its character
- Identify elements which detract from the character
- Propose measures to maintain or improve the positive character, local distinctiveness and sense of place of Usk

1.5 The framework for the study follows guidance set out in *Circular 60/96: Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology* and *Circular 61/96: Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas* and the latest draft guidance from Cadw; *Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales*, adopted March 2011.

2 Consultation

2.1 A consultation event was held in Usk on 28th June 2010.

2.2 The purpose of this event was to obtain initial views from the local community on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the conservation area.

2.3 Participants were broadly asked to consider the following:

- Positive characteristics (i.e. strengths) of the conservation area that makes it special
- Negative aspects (i.e. weaknesses) of the conservation area that threaten its special character
- Areas or features within the conservation area that need to be improved or enhanced (i.e. opportunities within the conservation area)
- Areas or features within the conservation area under threat or at risk
- Whether the boundary of the conservation area is correctly drawn
- The use of additional powers available to the Council's Planning Department to control alterations to original features on housing in the conservation area, such as windows and doors (where this is not already controlled)

2.4 Feedback from this initial consultation has been used by the study team in preparing the draft Conservation Area Appraisal.

3 Planning Policy Context

3.1 Section 69 1(a) and 2 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act') defines conservation areas as:

"Areas of special architectural and historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"

3.2 In addition, the Act puts particular emphasis on specific duties:

"It shall be the duty of the local authority from time to time to review the past exercise of functions under this section and to determine whether any parts or any further parts of their area should be designated as conservation areas..."

3.3 This is reinforced by the guidance set out in *Circular 60/96: Planning and the Historic Environment: Archaeology* and *Circular 61/96: Planning and the Historic Environment: Historic Buildings and Conservation Areas*. In particular, the local authority should from time to time, formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these conservation areas (management proposals).

3.4 In order to undertake works of enhancement, the character of the conservation area needs to be clearly defined and understood (character appraisal).

3.5 National planning policy is set out in Planning Policy Wales (PPW). PPW provides the overarching national strategic guidance with regard to land use planning matters in Wales. Conservation of the historic environment is set out in Chapter 6 of PPW. Policies relating to Listed Buildings, Scheduled Ancient Monuments, Archaeological Remains and Historic Parks and Gardens are contained in PPW unless locally distinct elements require further Local Development Plan policies. PPW also sets out clear statements for development management in Conservation Areas.

3.6 This Conservation Area Appraisal should be read in the context of the Monmouthshire County Council Local

Development Plan (LDP) which was adopted on 27 February 2014, covering the period 2011-2021. Strategic Policy S17 helps to meet LDP objectives to protect and enhance the historic and built environment by ensuring good design that enhances the character and identity of Monmouthshire's settlements and respects the County's distinctiveness. Conservation Area Appraisals can play a significant part in helping to meet such aspirations. The historic environment chapter is contained in pages 167-172 of the LDP. Policies HE1, HE2 and HE3 directly relate to conservation areas.

3.7 The detailed criteria for assessing development proposals in Conservation Areas is set out in Policy HE1 and where appropriate aims to ensure the findings of the Conservation Area Appraisals are fully taken into account when considering development proposals. The Council will seek to preserve or enhance the special character or appearance of Conservation Areas in the assessment of Planning Applications. Policy HE2 relates specifically to the alterations of unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas to ensure that the conversion, alteration and extension of such buildings make a positive contribution to Conservation Areas. A number of detailed criteria relating specifically to the design of shop fronts in Conservation Areas are provided in Policy HE3. Policy HE3 seeks to maintain high standards of shop front design in Conservation Areas.

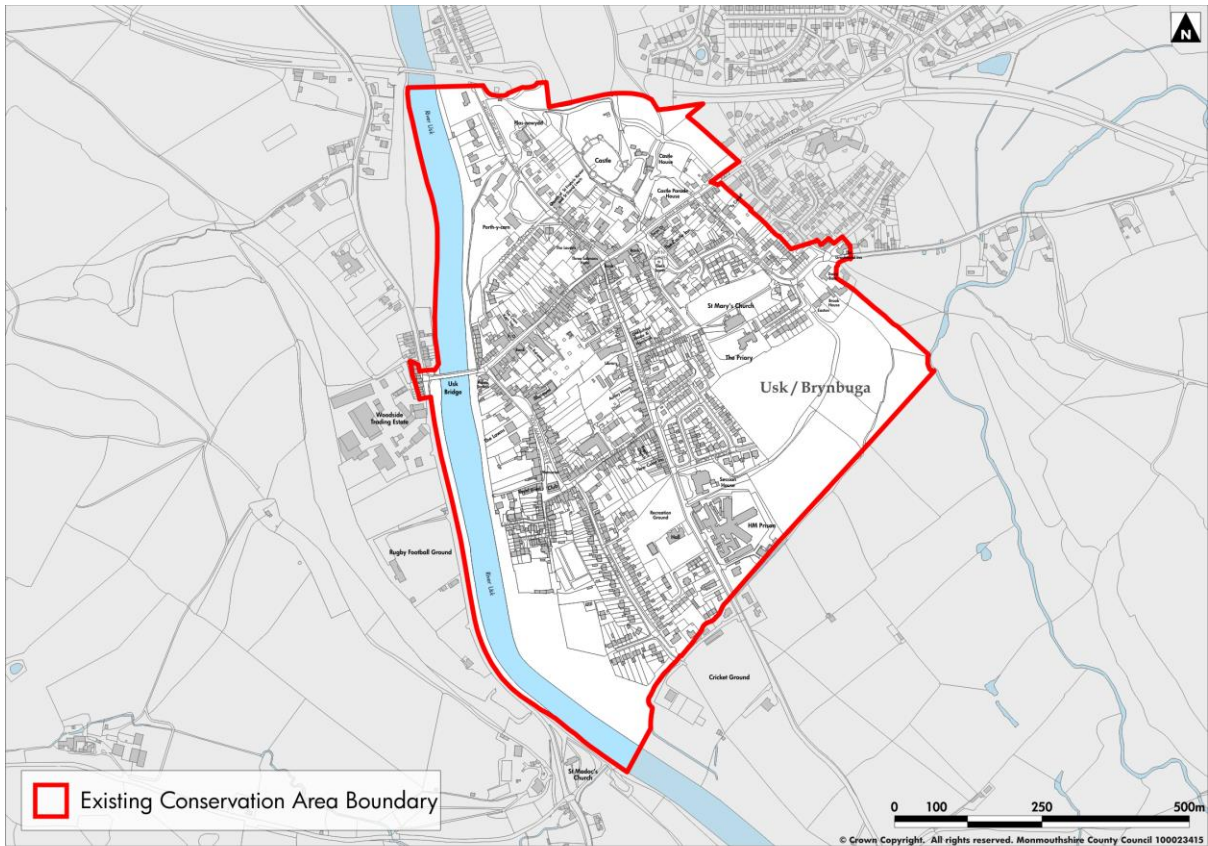
3.8 A number of additional studies carried out to support the LDP should be read in conjunction with the Conservation Area Appraisal. These include Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity Studies of the surroundings of Monmouthshire's towns and villages, including those with conservation areas. Similarly, published studies on Accessible Natural Greenspace and Habitat Connectivity may also include information that needs to be taken into account in preparing development proposals in conservation areas. Relevant information is also contained in the Monmouthshire LANDMAP landscape character assessment.

3.9 Draft Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) has also been produced. This provides practical design and planning checklists along with good practice case studies. This SPG should be read in conjunction with the Conservation Area Appraisal.

For Additional Information:

Monmouthshire Local Development Plan
<http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/planning>

4 The Study Area



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Fig.1 Study Area

Part B: Conservation Area Appraisal

5 Location & Setting

5.1 Usk is centrally located in the county approximately 7 miles east of Pontypool and 14 miles north-west of Chepstow. The A449 dual carriageway passes east of the town. Usk lies on a level site bounded on the west by the River Usk and the Olway Brook to the east. It stands at the junction of the main cross country roads (the A472 linking the A449 to the A4042 and the B4598 which runs north to Abergavenny). The town sits in a rural location, the broad river plain being surrounded by gently rising hills and woodland. The castle stands on an eminence to the north of the town from which it commands the settlement and the river

crossing. Park Wood rises on a hill to the north with Ty'n-y-Caeau Hill to the south-west.

5.2 The streets form an irregular grid opening into two squares, Twyn Square on the east below the castle and New Market Street on the western edge of town. This latter street has a narrow entrance from Bridge Street and gradually widens out to its southern end where the Town Hall stands on its island site. (**Fig.1** & **Fig.2**)

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 1 Conservation Area Plan

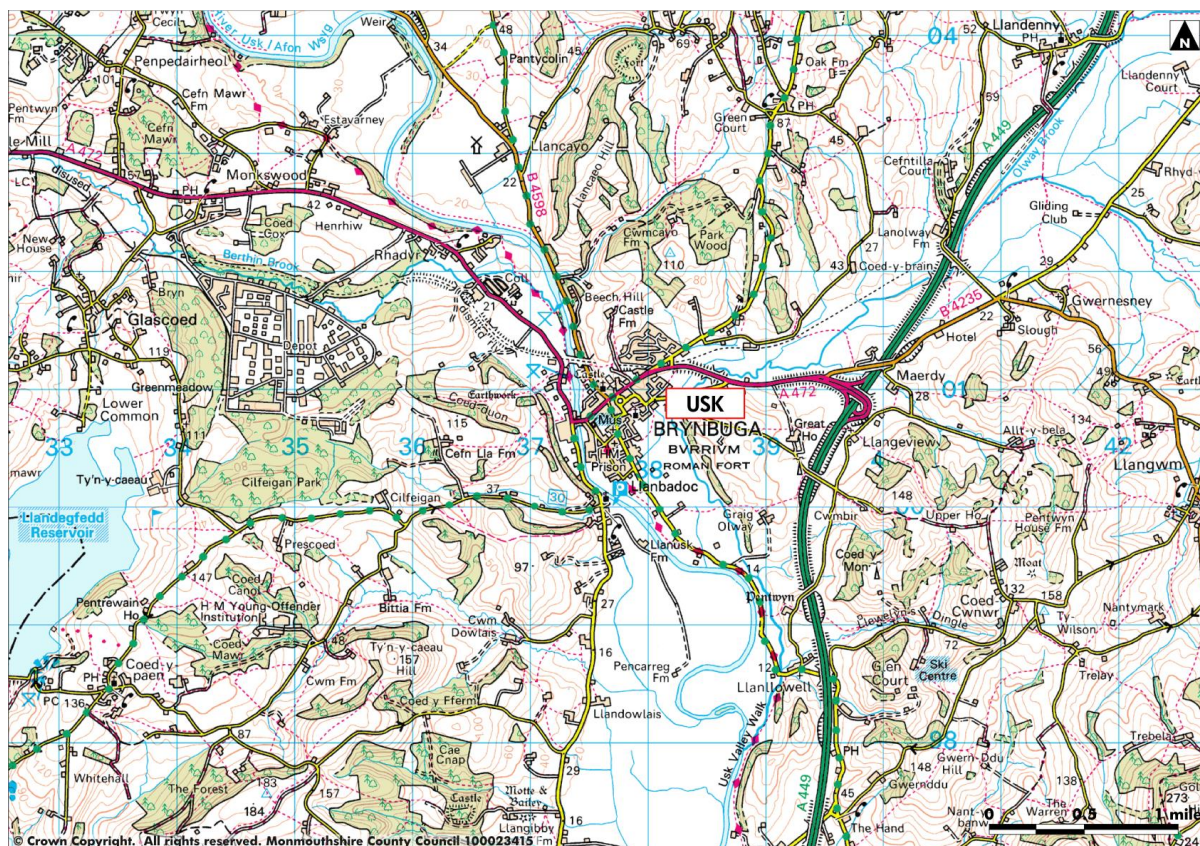


Fig.2 Usk Location Plan

6 Historical Development & Archaeology

6.1 Historic Background

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 2 Historical Plan

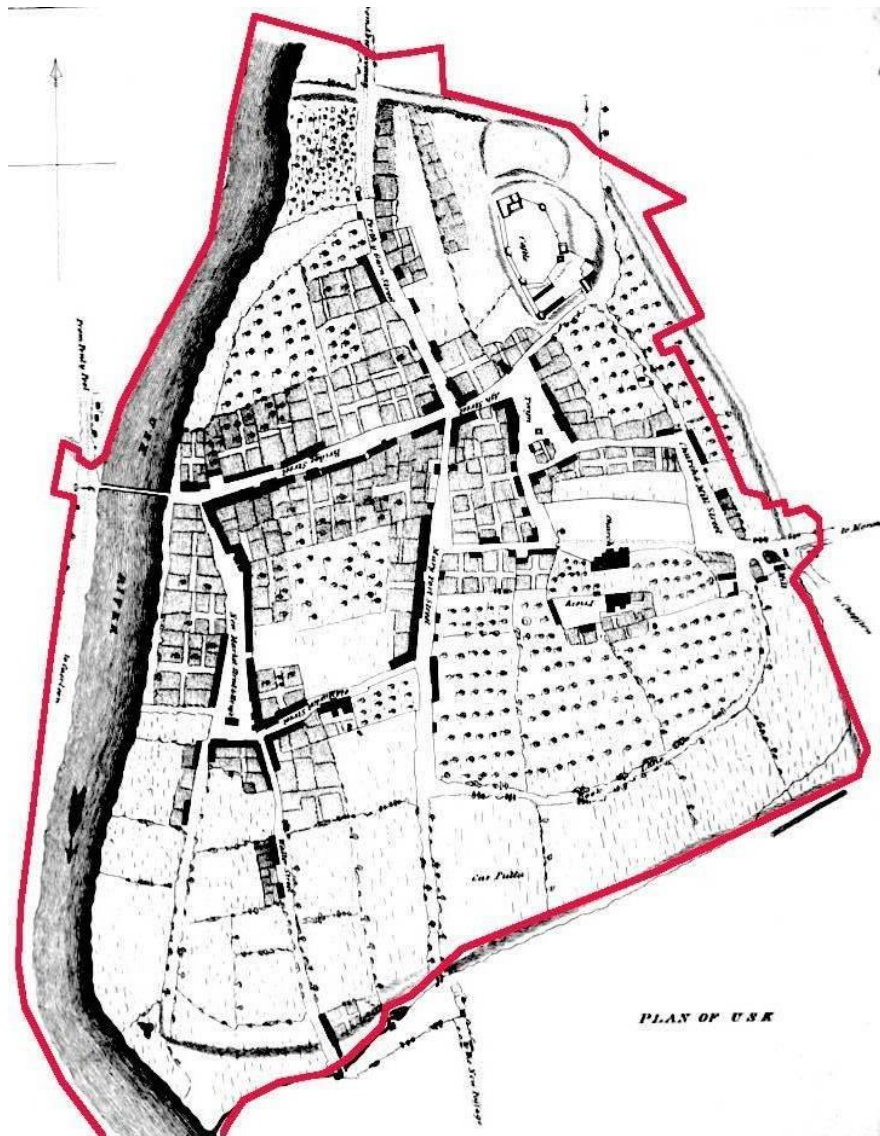


Fig.3 1801 town plan of Usk with conservation area boundary in red © Gwent Record Office

6.1.1 There is evidence of prehistoric occupation along both sides of the Usk valley (Olding, 2008) with finds from the Mesolithic period onwards. Flint scatters and a large group of later Mesolithic flint artefacts found in the area of the town are indicative of the camps of hunter-gatherers and Neolithic bowl fragments have also been found. There have been suggestions that a pre-Roman settlement existed in Usk as part of the territory of the tribe of the Silures. In the AD150 *Geographia* of Ptolemy (II.ii) it is recorded that toward the

east were the Silures whose town was *Bullaenum*.

6.1.2 Roman occupation at Usk dates from the mid-50s AD when a legionary fortress, covering some 48 acres, was established. This fortress, identified as *Burrium*, was one of a series built in Britain in the mid-1st century. The fortress comprised a series of earth ditches with timber ramparts and contained a grid of roads with a series of timber buildings. Typically, the fort was accessed via a gatehouse in each of the four sides and was crossed by two principal roads, the north-

south route entering the fort approximately where Maryport Street is joined by Church Street. Two large groups of granaries (**Fig.4**) were positioned near the east gate (with enough capacity to store grain for 4,450 men for a year). It is not known if the Romans bridged the river. The conquest of Wales was delayed by the Boudiccan revolt and other military campaigns until the mid-70s AD. As the campaign against the Welsh advanced legions were moved and the legion based at Usk, Legio XX Valeria Victrix, was transferred to Wroxeter in the 60s AD. The fortress at Usk was not completely abandoned (probably being occupied by an auxiliary cavalry unit which created a smaller fort within the

fortress). The establishment of a new fort only 8 miles away at Caerleon and the re-building of forts at Cardiff and Abergavenny led to the fort at Usk being demolished with some material salvaged for use at Caerleon. The end of the fortress at Usk did not mean the complete desertion of the site; tiles dating from the 2nd century and inhumation burials from the 3rd to the 4th centuries have been found indicating continued occupation. Usk was probably governed from Caerleon and used as a works depot, principally for the production of iron and a number of furnaces have been found that date up to the late 4th century (Manning, 2008).

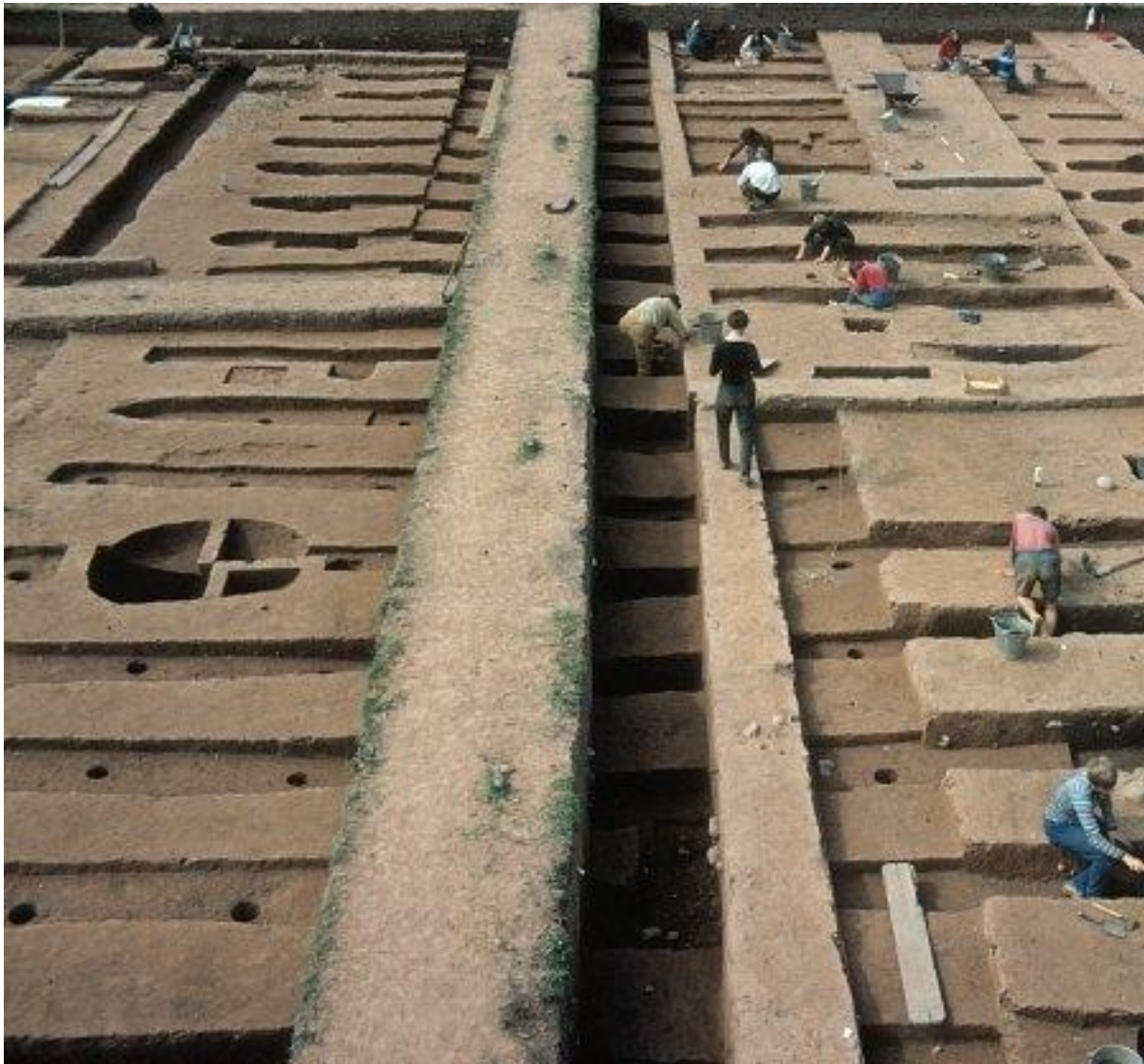


Fig.4 Excavation of the granaries at Usk (east of the Prison). The horizontal lines running across the image are the foundations for the timber granaries, with the holes for vertical posts visible in the base. (NMW)

6.1.3 Today's town is a Norman foundation, its name being taken from the river. At the time of the Norman Conquest Usk formed part of the Lordship of Striguil with its base at Chepstow. The De Clares were granted the Lordship of Netherwent (English name given from the Norman period onwards to the area of *Gwent-is-coed* - Gwent beneath the wood or Wentwood) in circa.1119. Its base remained at Chepstow but the De Clares established a secondary centre at Usk. A motte and bailey castle was built at Usk, but in 1138 it was overrun by the Welsh who took control of the castle from 1138 to 1174 (Newman, 2002). At this time the town (separate from the castle) was embryonic and it is suggested that it was only officially founded sometime between 1154 and 1170 by Richard 'Strongbow' De Clare (Mein, 2008). De Clare recovered Usk from the Welsh. He possibly built the stone keep at the castle (**Fig.5**) and he founded a Benedictine nunnery (the only one in Wales), probably shortly before his death in 1176 (**Fig.6** & **Fig.7** next page) (Newman, 2002). Usk was momentarily retaken by the Welsh who held it in 1183. It was back in English hands in 1185 and in 1189 the lordship became the property of the great military tactician William Marshal (Knight, 2008). From 1212-19 Marshal

consolidated the castle, building the stone enclosure wall of the inner ward and erecting circular towers. The keep was remodelled as a residence by one of Marshal's sons before 1245 (Newman, 2002).



Fig.5 Engraving of Usk Castle, S & N Buck 1732



Fig.6 Usk church with the Priory gatehouse, 1801



Fig.7 19th century depiction of Usk church and the Priory

6.1.4 The town had developed by this time, its layout planned so that all main roads east were routed through its market place, now Twyn Square. The road network comprised PorthyCarne Road running north to Abergavenny and Middle Street (now Maryport Street) running south to Caerleon crossed by Bridge Street which ran from the river in the west, east to Twyn Square. From Twyn Square a track led north-east towards the castle. From the south-east corner of Twyn Square Chepyng Street (now part of Four Ash Street) ran east before looping back south then east again leaving the town defences and linking to Elewith Street (now Black Barn Lane) north-east to Raglan and Chepstow Road east to Chepstow. Twyn Square linked to Middle Street via what is now Priory Street and Church Street and a lost street continuing the line of Chepyng Street westwards. Pook Lane curved around the priory lands to the south linking Middle Street to Chepyng Street near its junction with Elewith Street. A second market place developed on what is now the junction of Maryport Street and Old Market Street (both markets later moving to a site on New Market Street).

6.1.5 The town comprised a series of burgage plots, narrowest in the square and progressively wider further away, a market hall fronting the main street and mills by the Olway Brook. Usk's earthen defences defined its politico-economic boundaries, however, Olway Street lay outside the defended area (Griffiths, 2008).

6.1.6 At the end of the Marshal family line Usk became a separate lordship under Richard De Clare. The De Clares continued to alter and renew the castle, mainly as a domestic residence. The town continued to grow and an account of 1263 suggests a figure of 130 full burgages. This had risen to 280 by 1289 (Mein, 2008). However, in the 1280s there were skirmishes between Edward I and Llywelyn ap Gruffydd. It was recorded that in 1295 180 houses in Usk were 'void and burnt in the war' and another 104 'void and ruinous' due to the poverty of their owners, clearly the town had been attacked and was experiencing economic decline (Knight, 2008).

6.1.7 The castle continued to be improved piecemeal by Elizabeth de Burgh in the 14th century. In 1405 it was attacked by the forces of Owain Glyndwr. The population of the town declined after this date, but the castle was kept in repair (Knight, 2008). By the 1460s housing had developed along Pook Lane (now a footpath south of the church) and houses soon followed on the north-western side of New Market Street. In 1548 Usk Castle was granted to Sir William Herbert who in 1551 allowed the castle to be robbed of stone for the construction of a new residence (Great House, now Nos.17-27) in Old Market Street. The castle gatehouse remained habitable and became a farmhouse.

6.1.8 Post-medieval Usk spread towards the river with the piecemeal development of Old Market Street in the late 16th century/early 17th century followed by properties in Maryport Street. The place of the market unusually moved position. The present western portion of Four Ash Street was once known as Old Chepyng Street meaning 'Old Market Street' (not to be confused with the current Old Market Street). An early market hall was placed on Twyn Square on the site of Mulberry House (**Fig.8** next page). This market hall was not kept in repair and was replaced by a market hall on 'a piece of unbuilt upon land in the street of the New Market' (New Market Street) in the 1590s (which was later the site of two visits by King Charles I) (Gray & Morgan, 2009). Mill Street had developed by 1630 containing 27 burgage plots.



Fig.8 Mulberry House, Twyn Square with the castle ruins behind, 1801

6.1.9 In the 16th and 17th centuries burgage plots extended along Baron Street (on the site of today's garden centre) towards a ford across the River Usk to Llanbadoc church, located in the small settlement of Llanbadoc to the south (Mein, 2008). The planned layout of the town survived the centuries but gradual encroachment onto the highway was an early feature in the town and ultimately four streets were lost including a lane leading west out of Twyn Square and an extension of Castle Street (Mein, 2008). In addition there has been infilling or covering of back lane access between individual burgages although some remain in Bridge Street and Priory Street. Usk had little part to play in the Civil War for the castle had long been ruinous.

6.1.10 In the 18th century the Welsh gentry prospered in the town. Several gentry families lived in the town including the Prothero, Rumsey and Sheppard families (Barrow, 2008). Usk lacked the fine Georgian buildings of Monmouth and to a lesser extent Chepstow but many Georgian buildings were erected or older buildings re-fronted in New Market Street, Priory Street and Maryport Street. The 1590s market hall had fallen into disrepair by

the 1770s when the current market hall was built as a replacement (and subsequently raised in height in 1859).

6.1.11 Usk did not develop as an industrial town and retained its importance as a market centre with other crafts and trades such as tanning, shoemaking, and tailoring. The only industry was limited to the small-scale Japanning trade brought over from Pontypool (Nichols, 1981). The Usk was fished for salmon in shallow flat-bottomed boats known as coracles. In 1801 Coxe wrote that, '*Usk has 166 houses, about 700 inhabitants, a manufactory of japan, and no commerce.*'

6.1.12 By 1750 the wooden bridge crossing to Llanbadoc was ruinous and was subsequently replaced by today's stone bridge (enlarged 1836). The Turnpike Act of 1755 was passed to bring a direct road cutting through the east of the town, past the castle, towards Chepstow and Monmouth. This appears not to have been implemented until after 1801. The Three Salmons was built as a coaching inn and prospered with stagecoaches travelling to Abergavenny, Brecon, and Chepstow.

6.1.13 Coxe's map of Usk in 1801 (see **Fig.3**) clearly depicts the town with its two squares, Bridge Street, Maryport Street, Church and Mill Street (now part of Four Ash Street, the current Church and Mill Streets are in the west) and Porthycarne Street with numerous garden plots and orchards with a series of small to medium sized fields to the east. Pook Lane survived as a curving track south of the priory linking Maryport Street with Church and Mill Street.

6.1.14 By 1846 (**Fig.9**) there had been a series of developments including Porthycarne house to the north, the construction of houses on the west side of New Market Street, the appearance of the turnpike road to Monmouth and the construction of Usk prison beyond the line of the defences of the town, then the New Bridewell.

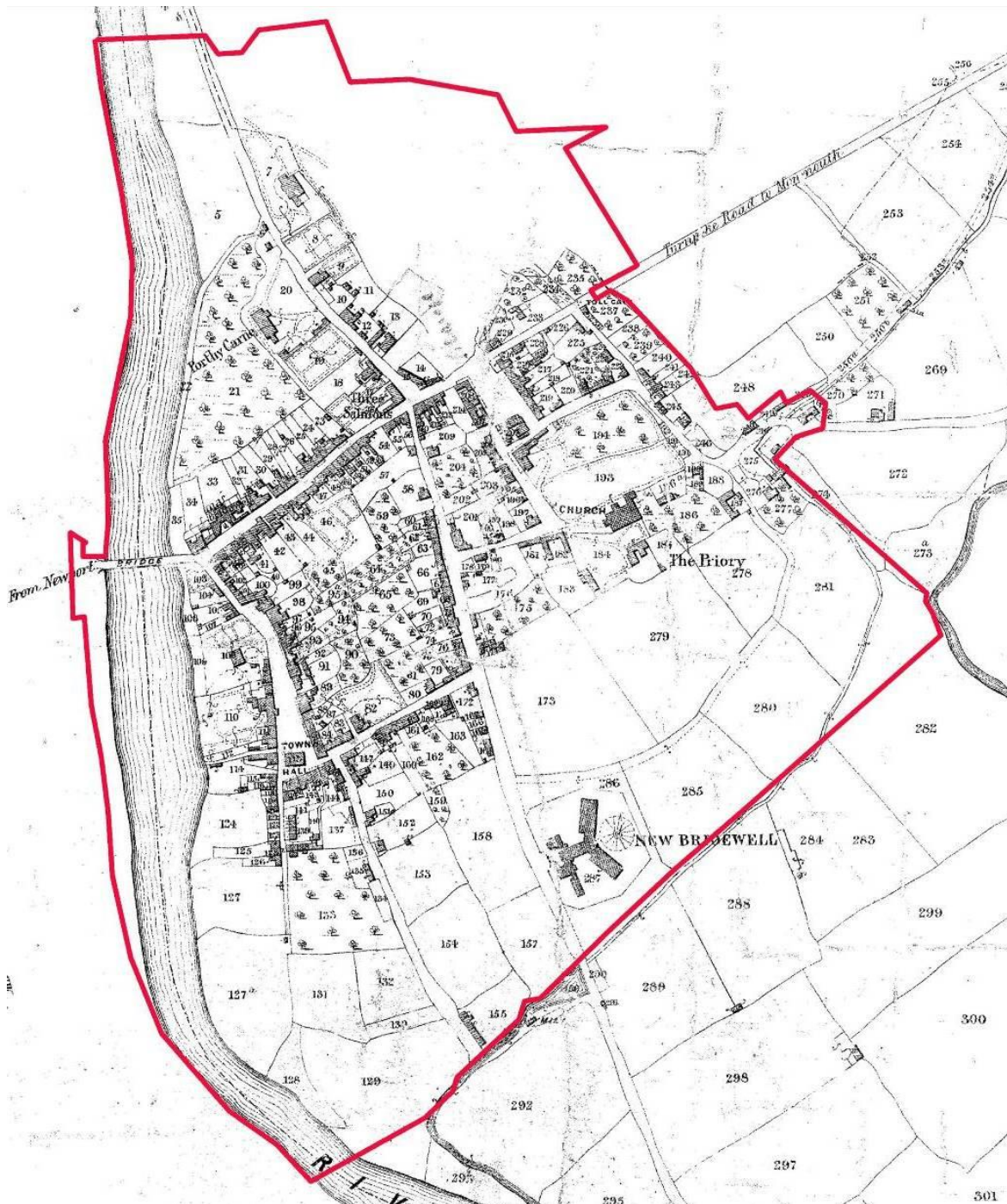


Fig.9 1846 Usk tithe map with conservation area boundary in red © Gwent Record Office

6.1.15 Usk prison was constructed in 1841/2 to a panopticon plan model by T H Wyatt. This new 'House of Correction' replaced an earlier prison in Bridge Street, which was renamed, the Old Bridewell. The new prison was enlarged in 1868 when it became Monmouthshire County Gaol. The prison involved the realignment of Maryport Street, curving east, and the construction of houses for prison officers in Mill Street, Baron Street and Maryport Street.

6.1.16 During the 19th century homes were built within gaps to the frontages of historic streets. This gradual infill continued throughout the Victorian period but the town's population increase lagged behind Monmouthshire's overall growth rate (Barrow, 2008). The only new road from the 17th century town layout was introduced in the 1840s as a turnpike road (Castle Parade, Monmouth Road). The railway line to Usk was built in 1856, extending from Usk to Monmouth (Troy) in 1857. The station was positioned just west of the tunnel on the north side of Usk Castle (only its platform now remains covered by soil and grass) with its goods yard placed a quarter of a mile away on the west side of the River Usk.

6.1.17 The 20th century brought a new lease of life to the Usk Castle ruins. The gatehouse, which had become a farmhouse, was purchased by the Humphreys family who later acquired the castle ruins. Rudge Humphreys began creating the castle's famous gardens in the 1930s.

6.1.18 Small groups of houses were constructed in the inter-war and post-war years in Mill Street, Conigar Crescent, Abergavenny Road, Priory Gardens (an addition to the road system), and Porthycarne Gate. Usk was destined for major expansion from the 1950s onwards due to the close proximity of the town to nearby factories at Mamhilad, Glascoed and Pontypool, but the designation of Cwmbran as a new town in 1949 took the pressure off (Barrow, 2008). Usk railway station closed to passengers in 1955. The flood plains and lack of drainage capacity hindered the development of the town up until the 1970s and the instigation of an improvement programme. There were severe floods in 1979 resulting in the flood protection banks but floods reoccurred on a large scale in 2002 (2010 has seen further improvements to the defences).



Fig.10 An open Twyn Square with the castle ruins behind, early 20th century

6.2 Settlement Plan

6.2.1 Usk is a planned town built by an English lord, creating a centre for defence and administration. The town shares some characteristics of other planned towns in Monmouthshire such as Chepstow and Monmouth; a castle, a priory and a market place forming the focus for settlement and economic activity. Usk also has an irregular grid of streets which is particularly fine-grained in the area of the early market place. This historic space is approached by routes from the south and east as well as fronting onto Castle Parade the main east-west road. The grid plan of the town means that the typical pattern of long, narrow, burgage plots typically seen on single street planned towns was not possible with properties running back from streets at right angles to each other. Only on the north side of Bridge Street and along New Market Street is there a regularity in plots typically associated with burgage plots. An unusual feature of the town plan is the presence of a second market area along New Market Street.

6.2.2 Late 19th and early 20th century development either infilled the many areas of open street frontages within the core of the plan or effectively created extensions of the existing patterns as in the south-west corner of the town along Mill Street.

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 2 Historical Plan

6.3 Key Historic Influences & Characteristics

6.3.1 The key historic influences and characteristics of Usk are:

- Roman occupation from the mid-50s AD with a large legionary fortress, covering 48 acres.
- Norman development of the town, the De Clares establish a market centre at Usk.
- Officially founded some time between 1154 and 1170 by Richard 'Strongbow' De

Clare who developed the castle and established the nunnery.

- Burgage development of the town with all main roads east routed through its market place.
- Early 15th century decline in population followed by modest expansion of the town in the late 1400s.
- 16th and 17th century town spreads towards the river with Old Market Street, New Market Street and Maryport Street. The development of a new second market place is an unusual feature.
- 19th century brought turnpike roads, the railway and the prison.
- Mid-20th century infill and later 20th century development including Priory Gardens.

6.4 Archaeological Potential

6.4.1 The origins and development of the Roman fort has been subject to extensive excavation to the south of the medieval town. Undeveloped areas that remain unexcavated are protected as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, one Scheduled area also including part of the area of the medieval priory which lay within the area of the Roman fort. The area of the medieval castle and sections of the medieval town defences to the south of the town are also regarded as nationally important and are Scheduled Ancient Monuments. As such there is a presumption against development that would cause physical damage to a monument or negatively impact on its setting.

6.4.2 Due to the importance of the Roman and medieval development of settlement at Usk, a large Area of Special Archaeological Sensitivity (ASAS) a non-statutory designation supported by national planning policy guidance, has been identified. This area includes the area of the Roman cemetery that existed to the north of the Roman fort, an area to the north of the castle which may have formed part of the castle but lies outside the Scheduled area and allows for the potential for settlement outside of the Roman fort to the south and east. The ASAS also extends across the river to include the location of the bridge over the Usk and the

small area of historic settlement that developed on the west side of the river which lies within the conservation area. Any proposed development within the AAP will need to include appropriate measures to assess and, if necessary, protect or record the archaeological interest of the site or building. Advice from the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust, the council's archaeological advisors, should be sought at an early stage.

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 3 Area of Special Archaeological Sensitivity

7 Spatial Analysis

7.1 Background

7.1.1 Conservation areas are designated for their special character, but within the area there will be zones which are varied but contribute to the whole. It is important to define these 'character areas' and provide a clear understanding of the defining elements making up the character of a particular part of the conservation area. This leads to a more useful and comprehensive document in development control terms.

7.1.2 Whilst individual character areas have been defined with a line (see **Plan 6**), adjacent areas will, in almost all cases, have a direct effect on the character of any defined sub-area. Character areas do not sit in isolation and when considering the impact of proposals on the character and/or appearance of a conservation area the character area and adjacent character areas and their wider setting (which may in some cases extend beyond the conservation area boundary) should be very carefully considered. There are often cases where character areas will overlap giving these spaces added complexity and importance in terms of proposed changes.

7.1.3 It should be noted that whilst nine character areas have been identified, it is also important to appreciate the cohesion to the whole conservation area, which should always be considered when addressing the character of the Usk Conservation Area.

7.1.4 For general guidance on the criteria used for assessing buildings making a particularly positive contribution to the conservation area, please refer to **Appendix 1**.

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 4 Spatial Analysis

Part D - Plan 5 Listed Buildings & Buildings Making a Particular or Special Positive Contribution

Part D - Plan 6 Character Areas

7.2 Overview

7.2.1 The town of Usk sits to the east of the River Usk with its castle high above and to the north. The castle's domination of the town has been diminished by vegetation which covers the walls and other surviving sections and the subsequent extensive tree cover which is a characteristic of parts of the town, particularly to the castle environs and Porthycarne Street.

7.2.2 The regular grid of streets narrows and widens in places to form squares and former market areas. Houses generally sit to the back of pavement and where this is not the case boundary walls of mostly stone continue the line of the street. This strong definition of the townscape is a key part of the character and appearance of the conservation area and provides comfortable enclosure almost throughout the conservation area.

7.2.3 Many areas are strongly defined by historic buildings, most of which are on the Statutory List or buildings which are considered to make a particularly positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the Usk Conservation Area. These often form groups of varying size. Areas such as New Market Street, Twyn Square and sections of Maryport Street are good examples of this grouping. Elsewhere the town has experienced some infill on a small (one or two units) and large (streets of houses) scale and this to the most part is of limited historic or architectural interest. In some cases, for example immediately south and east of the church most development is post-war and its special character is very limited.

7.2.4 There are some notable large-scale buildings, including the castle remains, the church and priory remains, the gaol and Sessions House and the Town Hall which sits to the southern end of New Market Street. These are spread across the town rather than centred in one civic area. This has given the town a somewhat disparate nature, with no true centre (although Twyn Square takes on this role) despite its grid street plan. This has

created a number of distinctive character areas (nine in all).

7.2.5 The river is an important part of the conservation area and provides the best views into the town which give some idea of the landscape context of the settlement and the importance trees play in the townscape. Trees to rear gardens are best appreciated in these long views as their role is occasionally diminished from the street view given the mostly built-up nature of the streets throughout. There are exceptions such as the trees to the west side of New Market Street, the cedar of Lebanon to Castle Parade/Twyn Square, the trees to the churchyard and those surrounding the castle giving the ruins such a picturesque setting.

7.2.6 The quality of the public realm makes a significant contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area. This includes: the survival of low and high stone boundary walls, sometimes (for example to Castle Parade) in long lengths; the survival of a good number of cast and wrought iron railings to the front gardens of houses and other buildings (for example the Sessions House); and the presence of cobbled street sections (seen to Maryport Street and New Market Street) and pavements of pennant stone flags (Priory Street). These elements combined with the high quality of built form significantly contribute to the quality of the historic townscape of the Usk Conservation Area.



Fig.11 View west across the town towards the River Usk and the wooded slopes beyond. Note the raised roof of the town hall against the tree line.

7.3 Character Areas

7.3.1 Nine distinct character areas have been identified in Usk, the boundaries of which have been identified in **Fig.12** below and Plan 6. This section will identify the key attributes of each character area.

7.3.2 Each character area makes reference to the following key considerations

- Form (cohesiveness – why is it a character area)
- Scale & Building Line
- Significant buildings or groups of buildings making a positive or special contribution
- Materials
- Views
- Local Features
- Significant Spaces & Gaps
- Trees, hedges and boundaries

- Surfaces

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 6 Character Areas

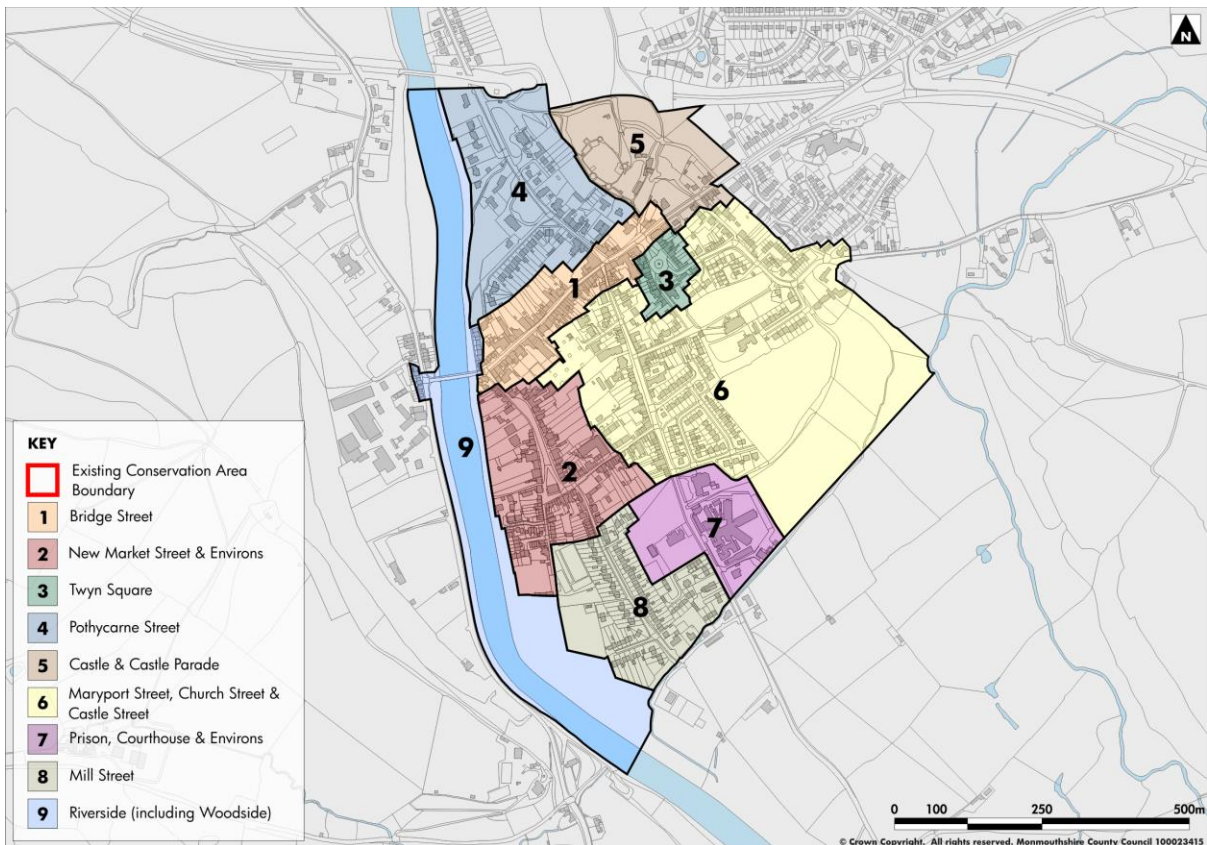
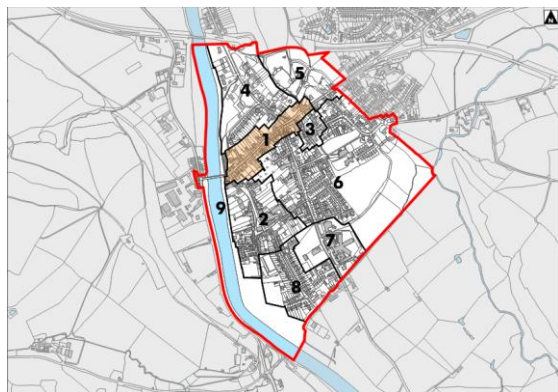


Fig.12 Usk Character Areas

CHARACTER AREA 1

Bridge Street



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6A

7.3.3 Bridge Street forms part of the principal route through Usk and could be considered as the commercial core of this small town. This section of the conservation area includes a number of varied uses from banks, to public houses, cafes and small independent shops in addition to residential accommodation. A number of ground floors have had shopfronts inserted and some are original to the building (**Fig.13**). Traffic dominates the narrow roadway with the additional issue of narrow footpaths creating a real sense of historic street pattern but with the potential for conflict between pedestrians and vehicles.



Fig.13 View looking north-east along Bridge Street – note the narrow section of the road and narrow pavement throughout

7.3.4 There is an interesting mix of two and three storey buildings fronting Bridge Street.

The roof line is varied throughout and this adds to the positive characteristics of the

historic townscape in this part of the conservation area (Fig.14). There is some variation to the façade treatment with projecting canted bays to upper floors seen to a number of buildings adding further interest to the street scene (Fig.15). The predominance of well-designed and appropriately proportioned shopfronts retains a modest human scale to the townscape to this part of the conservation area (Fig.16) despite its commercial uses and busy traffic. This is also accentuated by the narrow section of the street (Fig.17 next page). The building line is almost consistent throughout with shops, houses and public houses accessed directly from the pavement. Where buildings are set back, the line of the street is continued with boundary walls. The only exception to this is the gap created by the vehicle entrance to the Three Salmons Hotel on the north side of Bridge Street.



Fig.15 Upper floors are occasionally articulated by projecting bays with gables - No.4 Portland House, Bridge Street



Fig.16 Well designed traditional shopfronts form an important part of the character of this commercial part of the town



Fig.14 The varied roofline and eaves lines to Bridge Street are a strongly defining element of the townscape



Fig.17 The narrow section of the street accentuated by the gentle curve creates dynamic and well defined townscape



Fig.18 The fine cedar of Lebanon to Castle Parade – a local landmark of some significance forming a group with the predominantly statutory listed buildings that form both the line of Castle Parade and the northern edge of Twyn Square

7.3.5 All of the buildings to Bridge Street form a group of listed and unlisted buildings of considerable historic and architectural significance and complement each other in terms of their subtle variations in architectural treatment, materials and roof line. The buildings to Castle Parade form both an important part of the continuation to Bridge Street (a characteristic which is appreciated in funneled views along the street) and an important part of the enclosure, introduction to and northern termination of Twyn Square. This includes the cedar of Lebanon to the garden of No.11 Castle Parade which dominates the street scene and is an important landmark in the town (Fig.18).

7.3.6 The predominant material is painted render over stone or sometimes brick. There is some colour variation to paintwork on render although this is not as varied as other parts of the conservation area. Most colour tones are subtle variations of yellows, creams and greys. They are mostly complementary and make a positive contribution towards the character

and appearance of the conservation area. Some windows, door architraves and frames and other architectural features are brought out in contrasting colours to accentuate them (Fig.19). Some brick is seen; both a red and a buff brick often used together. Nos. 65-69 Bridge Street are good examples and prominent in the street scene given their corner location to the junction of New Market Street (Fig.20). Roofs are of varied pitch but are almost entirely natural slate. Some have attractive decorative ridge tiles. Some of the steeper pitched roofs have small simple rooflights but are generally free of later dormer additions leaving a series of long uninterrupted roof planes which form a positive element of the longer views along the street (Fig.21 next page).



Fig.19 Windows, door architraves and quoins are painted to accentuate these architectural details emphasizing buildings with this treatment in the street scene – pictured No. 59 Bridge Street



Fig.20 The distinctive use of red and buff brickwork on prominent buildings in the street scene – pictured No.69 Bridge Street



Fig.21 Generally uninterrupted roof planes facing the street form a positive part of the character of some parts of Bridge Street

7.3.7 There are well defined views along the length of Bridge Street looking both north-east and south-west. The views are funneled by the strong building line of the street. To the south, mature trees set to the west side of the river on the ridge provide a backdrop for the town on looking west (Fig.22). From the western sections of Castle Parade, the castle can be glimpsed in places. This is much reduced in the summer months when trees almost completely obscure the monument from Bridge Street and Castle Parade (Fig.23).



Fig.22 The view looking southwest along Bridge Street is funneled by the townscape, with the trees of the ridgeline to the west of the town providing the wider setting



Fig.23 The castle is glimpsed from sections of Castle Parade – here the southern most tower and the roof of the barn can be seen over roofs and between trees

7.3.8 Of considerable local note is the quality and survival of late 19th century shopfronts to this part of the conservation area (**Fig.24**). They maintain the high quality of the townscape and make for an interesting and vibrant commercial core.

7.3.9 The stone boundary walls to the north side of Bridge Street are important features in the street scene. They maintain the almost continuous building line of the street and remind the visitor of the original locally sourced Old Red Sandstone which is seen to both buildings and walls (**Fig.25**).

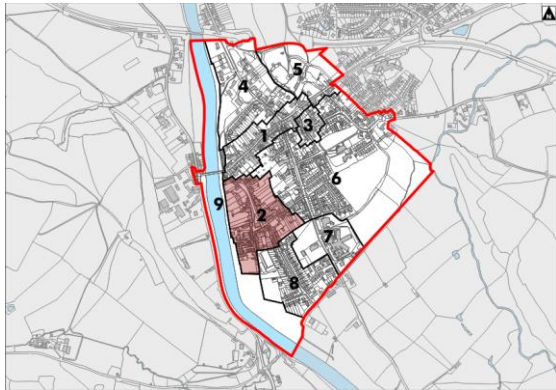


Fig.25 An important rubblestone wall maintaining enclosure to the street along Castle Parade



Fig.24 A sample of traditional shopfronts in Bridge Street.

CHARACTER AREA 2 New Market Street & Environs



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6B

7.3.10 New Market Street is most notable as a character area for the way the street widens and narrows at two points. One on entry from the north (**Fig.26**) and one further along New Market Street which then widens to form a triangular space within which sits the Town Hall. Both of these well-defined spaces are lined with buildings of very high historic and architectural significance and quality (**Fig.27** & **Fig.28**). In addition, these houses are diverse in their architectural styles, period and use of materials. These include stone, timber-framing, stucco, painted render and buff brick (**Fig.29**).

7.3.11 There is some variation in scale, with two and two and a half storey houses, the latter mostly with dormer windows to pitched roofs. There are some larger three storey town houses together with the British Legion (formerly the Town Hall) which is a large building set within the former market place. Buildings tend to diminish in scale as they radiate out from the British Legion, with houses dropping from three storeys to two and a half storeys down to two and one and a half storeys to the lanes which feed into the former market place. This is particularly the case on travelling south from New Market Street. The result is a well-ordered and coherent townscape which accentuates the importance of the space occupied by the Town Hall and provides it with a fitting grand setting.



Fig.26 Entrance to New Market Street from the north is between a narrowing street frontage



Fig.27 Looking north along New Market Street



Fig.28 Looking south along New Market Street, the British Legion closes the view



Fig.29 The complexity of the character of this part of the conservation area is partly due to the wide palette of materials seen to houses throughout

7.3.12 The building line, as with other parts of the conservation area considered to form part of the older core of the town, is consistent and has buildings either to the back of pavement or slightly set back from the back of pavement but maintaining the street line with cast iron railings on low boundary walls (**Fig.30**). Where the houses break this pattern on the western side of New Market Street, high rubble stone boundary walls continue this strong line of the street.



Fig.30 Cast iron railings are a common feature to this part of the conservation area and maintain a strong line to the street at the back of the pavement

7.3.13 Listed and unlisted buildings make up significant groups of buildings throughout this character area. The groups relate to the form of the townscape with the northern section of the street characterised by a more modest scale and buildings of a vernacular character (**Fig.31**) with the mix of small casement windows in addition to vertical sliding sashes, rubble stone walling and steeply pitched roofs. In the group associated with the British Legion there is a more polite character to the buildings with much use of stucco and painted render, bays, cast iron railings and generally a grander scale reflective of the almost continuous use of the vertical sliding sash with multiple glazing bars (**Fig.32**). Three further small groups are to be found lining the narrow roads which enter New Market Street from the south and east; Baron Street, Mill Street and Old Market Street. These are characterised by terraced houses generally of a more modest scale to those seen to the British Legion group. Nonetheless they are cohesive and of a high quality with a high number of listed buildings forming groups with unlisted buildings making a particularly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area (**Fig.33**).



Fig.32 Buildings forming a group with the Town Hall are generally polite in character with much classical detailing and proportions. Railings are a particular feature seen to a good number of buildings which surround the Town Hall



Fig.33 A terrace of more modest cottage-style houses to Baron Street (Grade II listed) contrasting with the grander houses forming a group with the Town Hall



Fig.31 Buildings to the northern section of New Market Street are more vernacular in character

7.3.14 There is some variation to the use of materials to this part of the conservation area. The use of painted render or stucco is dominant, with a series of colour washes but this is complemented by the painting of rubble stone walls (seen particularly to flank walls and to the terrace in Old Market Street (Nos. 17-27)). This group of houses has particular significance as it originated as a mid-16th century town mansion built with stone taken from the castle. Unpainted stone is also seen to some properties and is of a quality of stonework not seen elsewhere in the town, other than at the castle. Good examples are Min Yr Afon and Ynys Hafod to the west side of New Market Street (**Fig.34**). Timber-framing is present: No.18, a rare and good survival of a timber-framed cross wing jettied to the road frontage. Similar timber frames may well survive behind later stone and stucco/render façades throughout the older core of the town. There is a noticeable absence of brick within this character area with the exception of the semi-detached villas to the east side of the street fronted with a fine set of cast iron railings, contributing to the sizeable number of front garden railings to this part of the conservation area.

7.3.15 Brick is also seen to the north end of Mill Street where a well-fired red brick is contrasted with a buff brick for window and door dressings. Roofs are natural slate throughout though the steeper pitch of some roofs may indicate that they were formerly stone slated or thatched. The front roof slope to two storey houses are generally uninterrupted with only limited numbers of small rooflights present to the road facing slopes (**Fig.35**).

7.3.16 The well-defined building line funnels local views along streets and most buildings within this part of the conservation area sit within groups which strongly define the high quality townscape. Such is the diversity and mix of buildings of historic and architectural interest combined with other features such as walls and trees meaning that local views are constantly changing and developing when moving along New Market Street (**Fig.36**). The British Legion closes the view south along New

Market Street although the effect is somewhat diminished by the presence of the large cedar tree to the north of the building.



Fig.34 Min Yr Afon and Ynys Hafod, New Market Street – a long range of Old Red Sandstone with cast iron railings. An example of the quality and survival of local building materials seen in this part of the conservation area



Fig.35 Roofs are generally natural slate with a number of attractive groups of uninterrupted roof slopes such as these houses to the east side of New Market Street



Fig.36 One of a number of developing views on approaching the former market place from the east – a combination of buildings (with their varied materials), trees and other features such as the distinctive pavements

7.3.17 There are a number of particularly distinctive local features to this part of the conservation area which greatly contribute to the positive character and appearance of the Usk Conservation Area. There are a series of cast iron decorative brackets to door hoods (Fig.37). These are of a distinctive pattern and are seen to a number of houses within the character area. The use of cast iron is also seen to great effect in the remarkable survival of such a large number of 19th century (and some possibly earlier) railings to front garden areas. These are typical Victorian designs, painted various colours and set into low brick or stone walls which are generally rendered, often to match the host building. These greatly add to the quality of the streetscape and their survival in such numbers is of considerable local if not national significance (Fig.38). Combined with the railings the cobble and stone slab pavements add to the sense of a very high quality public realm. A survival of historic floor surfaces on this scale is relatively rare and of great significance (Fig.39).

7.3.18 There are some large scale trees of considerable townscape significance to this part of the conservation area. The copper beech to the gardens of The Lawns, west side of New Market Street, is a particularly important tree in local townscape terms. Similarly, the tree to the north of Town Hall is prominent but does partially obscure views of the British Legion.



Fig.37 Cast iron decorative brackets to door hoods – a distinctive pattern which is repeated on a number of notable buildings



Fig.38 A typical set of cast iron railings to small front gardens, these examples may date to the late 18th century



Fig.39 The historic use of cobbles for pavement finishes is an increasingly rare survival and significantly adds to the quality of the public realm within the conservation area

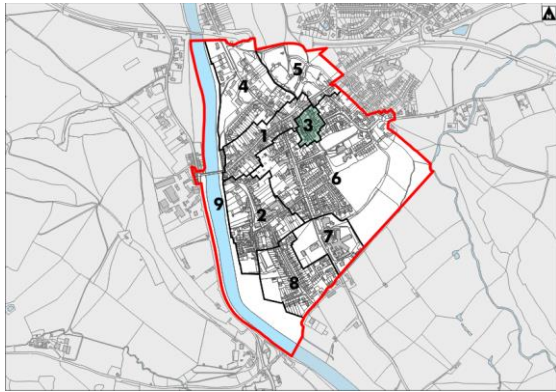
7.3.19 There are a limited number of 19th century shopfronts which are valuable survivals of social history reflecting the changing character of areas within the town. Good examples can be found at No.37 (**Fig.40**) and at the Royal Hotel (west side). This is a particular fine example of a late Georgian/early Victorian shopfront set into one side of what is now a hotel.



Fig.40 No.37 New Market Street – the shopfront is a reminder of former use patterns within this part of the conservation area

CHARACTER AREA 3

Twyn Square



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6C



Fig.41 Twyn Square, a pleasant well enclosed part of the conservation area with a modest scale to the townscape



Fig.42 Houses on Priory Street leading towards the south-west corner of Twyn Square. Three storey houses have much reduced upper level window openings thus maintaining the modest scale of houses throughout this part of the conservation area

7.3.20 Despite the two ‘bookend’ buildings on Twyn Square: the large Georgian townhouse, (HSBC Bank), and the former Congregational Chapel, it is striking that other buildings are of a modest scale. These buildings enclose the square. The small brick clock tower (erected in 1887) acts as a centerpiece, but it is somewhat compromised by the fact that it sits on a roundabout with a car park immediately adjacent. Despite frequent through traffic, the square is an attractive open space (**Fig.41**).

7.3.21 The houses are generally two storey with steeply pitched roofs. With the exception of No.2 Twyn Square (HSBC Bank) and the former Congregational Chapel (now a gallery) there is a modest scale to buildings throughout this character area. Where houses extend to a third storey the windows are tucked up into the eaves or break the eaves line reducing the scale of these houses when compared with other grander houses of the same period found elsewhere in the conservation area (**Fig.42**). Most buildings are set with their ridge parallel to the roadside. There is, however, a varied eaves line and tall brick chimneys which give some animation to the roofscape adding to the character and appearance of groups that line the sides of the square. The stair turret to the former Congregational Church is an attractive and striking local landmark in the street scene and adds further interest to the skyline (**Fig.43** next page). The building line, consistent with much of the historic core of the town, comprises buildings set to the back of the pavement or with very small front areas enclosed by railings. The general result is a well-defined space with almost continuous built form to all sides. Rear areas are generally accessed via carriage arches or alleyways. The only exception to this is to the north-west edge of the square which is effectively closed by the boundary wall and cedar of Lebanon to the far side of Castle Parade which passes through the square to its north-western side. Houses and the castle ruins are set back from the roadside but the street line is maintained by boundary walls and hedging to the north-western side of the road.



Fig.43 The north-east side of Twyn Square – a subtle but attractive variation to the roofline culminating in the gable and stair turret of the former Congregational Chapel adds considerable character to the townscape of this part of the conservation area

7.3.22 All the buildings which enclose Twyn Square form a group of considerable historic and architectural quality. There is a general consistency to their modest scale (for such a large space) their roof form, subtle variation in materials and continuous, almost unbroken, building line. These characteristics strongly define the groups to the north-east and south-west sides of the square. The houses lining Castle Parade also form a group with buildings to Castle Parade and Bridge Street. This is an area of complex transition between Castle Parade and Twyn Square. In townscape terms, the attractive qualities are the juxtaposition between enclosed views south-west along Castle Parade to Bridge Street in contrast with the opening out of Twyn Square.

7.3.23 Most buildings which front the square are painted render over rubble stone. There are some painted stone and notable unpainted stone buildings and boundary walls. The former Congregational Church is the most striking using mauve Old Red Sandstone with buff ashlar stonework for dressings (Fig.44 next page). Roofs are natural slate throughout. There is a notable absence of dormer windows or rooflights to almost all roof slopes. These uninterrupted roof slopes of natural slate make an important contribution to the special character of this space and maintain the modest scale of built form enclosing the square (see Fig.43).

7.3.24 There is a good use of colour to painted render. This is varied: pinks, greens, creams and white but generally successful and

subtle in its application and its relationship between adjacent buildings. This is far more strongly defined to the north-east side of the square than to the south-west.

7.3.25 There are glimpsed views to both the castle (to the north) and parish church (to the south). The enclosing townscape and presence of trees restricts uninterrupted views but forms part of the character of this space (Fig.45 next page). Trees form an important part of local views within the character area, as both landmarks in their own right; for example the cedar of Lebanon to the far side of Castle Parade (to the garden of No.11 Castle Parade) and as a backdrop to built form; as seen to the south-east side of the square (Fig.46 next page).

7.3.26 The clock tower, dated 1887, is a notable local landmark, if a little understated for the square. It presently forms the centre of a roundabout within the square which is regrettable and detracts from the setting of this Grade II listed building. The traditional red K6 telephone kiosk forms a positive group of historic townscape significance with the former Congregational Chapel and adjacent buildings.



Fig.44 The former Congregational Church, Twyn Square, one of the few buildings in this part of the conservation area to use unpainted stone

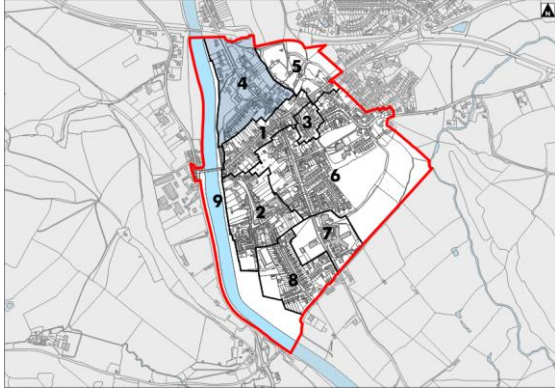


Fig.46 Mature trees form important backdrops to built form in general townscape views across the square



Fig.45 View into Twyn Square from the tower of the parish church. The roofline variation and tree cover can be appreciated in this view

CHARACTER AREA 4
Porthycarne Street



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6D

7.3.27 Porthycarne Street forms part of one of the principal routes north to and from the town (**Fig.47**). It is lined with larger houses than are seen to most of Usk. Some are set to the roadside and others, which could be considered as villas, are set in sometimes considerable landscaped grounds such as Porthycarne House. The castle which sits to the east of the street and at the top of a steep sided ridge running along the rear of the gardens is ever-present with glimpsed and more developed views to be had between houses and other buildings on travelling along the street. The northern extent of the conservation area is presently clearly defined by the low bridge which carried the former railway across the road at this point (the boundary is slightly forward of the bridge but this is an effective visual stop to the extent of the conservation area). The station was accessed from the road to the side of the bridge.



Fig.47 Porthycarne Street looking north – a series of large detached houses line the roadside out to the railway bridge (the extent of the conservation area)



Fig.48 Porthycarne Street – houses are generally two storey with some use of roof spaces lit by windows to gables. Most houses however are on a grand scale

7.3.28 Houses are almost consistently two storey but mostly on a grand scale. There is some variation to the way houses address the street with the occasional use of gables incorporating attic windows for accommodation in the roof spaces (Fig.48). The building line varies considerably throughout with some houses set to the back of pavement. This is very much the case to the junction with Bridge Street and Castle Parade where the townscape tightens considerably to this junction with the narrowing of the roads and buildings hard to the back edge of the pavement to all corners. On moving north out of the town houses are, in places, set back some way from the roadside. Boundary walls, railings and structural planting of hedges and mature trees continue the line of the street

almost throughout this character area. This mix of built form and natural boundaries creates an almost semi-rural character in places forming an important part of the special character and appearance of this part of the conservation area (Fig.49).



Fig.49 The combination of boundary wall, railings, landscaped gardens and trees forms part of the special character and appearance of the Porthycarne Street area of the town

7.3.29 There are three groups of buildings to this part of the conservation area. The first group strongly defines the junction of Porthycarne Street with Bridge Street and Castle Parade and comprises a mix of uses; large houses and other buildings such as a hotel/public house and its associated stables mostly set to the back of the pavement or with small areas enclosed by railings, formal in character and classical in architectural detailing and proportions. This group also forms a wider group with buildings on Bridge Street and Castle Parade. There is a mix of statutory listed and unlisted buildings to this group which together form townscape of considerable importance to the special character of the conservation area. The second group comprises houses to Conigar Crescent. They are very different in character from those to Porthycarne Street. This crescent of semi-detached houses forms part of the late development of the town which has generally taken the form of pockets of development from a particular period. In this case, the 1930s semi-detached pairs of houses are good examples of their type with a good use of materials, a high survival of original windows and doors and references to the local vernacular with colour tones to the painted render and stone boundary walls (**Fig.50**). The third group is a mix of historic and modern houses to both sides of the street. These are large houses, architecturally accomplished, some are on the Statutory List and others are of a very recent construction date but are of a high quality design (**Fig.51**). They are set in generous grounds, often partially obscured by landscaping to their grounds (**Fig.52**) and fronted by gates, gate piers, railings and walls in addition to hedging and trees.



Fig.50 Conigar Crescent – a pleasant group of semi-detached houses with a good use of materials; made locally distinctive with stone boundary walls and colour tones to the painted render



Fig.51 A large modern house set in landscaped grounds. One of a group of houses, some historic and some of recent construction that form a group within this part of the conservation area



Fig.52 Porthycarne House seen through its landscape screen from the roadside

7.3.30 There is some consistency to materials to this part of the conservation area with the majority of buildings being painted stucco or render with low pitched natural slate roofs. The Three Salmons Hotel is notable for its strong use of colour to accentuate architectural features giving the impression almost of timber-framing from a distance (**Fig.53**). The stone faced stables to the north of the street are an exception. It is a building of some quality given the squared nature of the stone components used in its construction. This reflects the status and importance of this building type in association with the hotel originally built as a coaching inn in the early 19th century. The SS Francis Xavier and David Lewis Catholic Church (1847) is also distinctive for its use of Old Red Sandstone with ashlar stone dressings and steeply pitched natural slate roofs.

7.3.31 There are an important series of glimpsed views between houses which line the north-east side of Porthycarne Street. They focus on the stone walls and towers of the Inner Ward of the castle (**Fig.54** next page). To the north-east side of Porthycarne Street the castle ruins often define the skyline complemented by mature trees. There are important views into this part of the conservation area from the former railway bridge over the River Usk focused on the unusual tower to the Catholic church of St Francis Xavier and St David Lewis. There are also views from the west side of the river which provide a full appreciation of Porthycarne House in its landscaped garden context. The castle is also seen on the skyline with views passing over buildings forming part of its wider setting within this part of the conservation area.

7.3.32 There are a series of gates, gate piers and railings to houses lining Porthycarne Street which are of considerable local interest (and in most cases are statutory listed as they form part of the curtilage to buildings on the Statutory List). Particularly good examples are to be found to Porthycarne House (south-west side) (**Fig.55**) and Plas Newydd (north-east side) (**Fig.56**).



Fig.53 The Three Salmons seen from Castle Parade - a strong use of black and white to accentuate architectural detailing



Fig.55 Gates and gate piers to the entrance to Porthycarne House

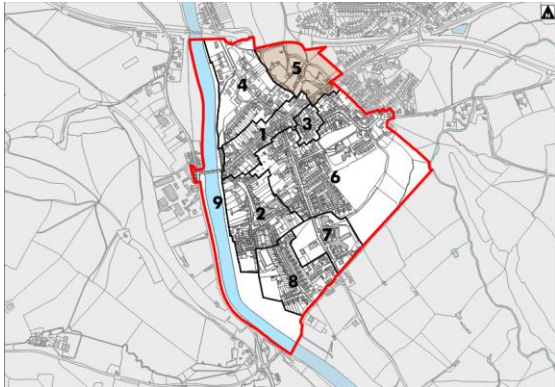


Fig.56 Gates and gate piers to the entrance to Plas Newydd

Fig.54 One of a series views to the castle between buildings on the north-east side of Porthycarne Street



CHARACTER AREA 5 Castle & Castle Parade



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6E

7.3.33 Over half of this character area is a Scheduled Ancient Monument which covers the standing and buried remains of the inner and outer wards of Usk Castle (**Fig.57**). It is important to note that the castle is privately owned, although open to the public at regular times. The castle sits on high ground above the town and is accessed from a lane leading from Castle Parade. Castle Parade sits at the base of the castle grounds to its south-east but has a small number of houses which are set on the roadside and form a loose group with houses to the south side of Castle Parade (**Fig.58**). Castle Parade itself is a continuation of Bridge Street and passes through the north-west end of Twyn Square to the immediate south of the castle.

7.3.34 Houses to this section of Castle Parade are of a modest two storey scale (with occasional exceptions) with a mix of ridge lines parallel to the street and small and large gables. Houses to the north-west side are set slightly higher off the street accentuating their scale. The building line varies to this part of Castle Parade with some houses to the back of pavement and others set back in gardens. There is a long stretch of stone boundary wall which is Grade II listed and has an inset Victorian Posting Box to its northern end. This is backed by structural hedge planting. The combination of wall and mature hedging strongly defines the line of the street to this part of the conservation area (**Fig.59**).



Fig.57 Usk Castle has a picturesque setting high above the town with much of the remains still partially or completely obscured by vegetation and mature trees



Fig.58 Castle Parade to the south-east of the castle – houses on both sides form a loose group of special townscape interest



Fig.59 The long stretch of rubble stone boundary wall to the north-west side of Castle Parade is Grade II listed and forms an important historic element giving structure and definition to the street scene

7.3.35 The remains of Usk Castle are on a large scale and a number of the surviving towers and the gatehouse can be seen in key views. However, much of the castle is obscured by trees and vegetation. The Gatehouse and Castle House can be seen from the footpath which skirts the castle to the north. Its three storey scale is accentuated by its coloured limewash finish which strongly defines the building despite being partially obscured by trees and vegetation (**Fig.60**).

7.3.36 The houses to Castle Parade form a loose group of buildings but they are disparate and diverse in their character and there is some duality between Castle Parade and Castle Street (included within Character Area 6), where the houses to the latter also address Castle Parade. The castle ruins, including the Gatehouse and Castle House form a group of buildings of national significance and are a Scheduled Ancient Monument. Whilst some structures are better preserved than others, it is generally difficult to get a real sense of the original scale and functioning character of the castle. However, surviving buildings such as the Gatehouse, tithe barn and sections of Inner Ward do form groups of considerable historic and architectural significance although they

can only be fully appreciated from inside the castle (**Fig.61**).



Fig.60 The Gatehouse and Castle House to the south-east of the remains of the Inner Ward, Usk Castle. The house is clearly seen from the public footpath through dense vegetation due partially to its scale and partially to its use of coloured limewash



Fig.61 The Gatehouse, its outbuildings, Castle House, the barn and sections of the inner ward form the best surviving group of elements of Usk Castle. They can only really be appreciated from inside the castle

7.3.37 The predominant material within the character area is the Old Red Sandstone of the castle and its associated structures. The Gatehouse and Castle House have lime render and coloured limewash applied to stonework giving them a very distinctive and authentic appearance, somewhat at odds with the generally adopted aesthetic for castle ruins (but not unwelcome) (**Fig.62**). The houses to Castle Parade are predominantly, and unusually for the conservation area, red brick. Roofs are natural slate, generally seen at low pitches. Boundary walls are mostly stone.

7.3.38 There are glimpsed views of the castle ruins from both Castle Parade and Porthycarne Street. There are also longer views to the castle from the west side of the River Usk. From here, the castle walls form part of the skyline of the town in places, although much is obscured by mature trees and vegetation. Glimpsed views to the castle are often picturesque in their structure and character comprising semi-ruinous remains and generally what appears to be an unmanaged growth of trees and vegetation (**Fig.63**). There are important views from the castle grounds across the town and in particular into Twyn Square although these views are in places partially obscured by vegetation (**Fig.64**).

7.3.39 The public footpath access to part of the castle remains and the historic gardens formed within the castle grounds are a

valuable local amenity. The castle is open to the public and holds events and exhibitions. Its local communal value as well as its historic and architectural value is of significance.



Fig.62 The Gatehouse to Usk Castle is lime rendered and has an applied coloured limewash giving the building a very distinctive and unusual appearance, but is possibly based on historic precedent

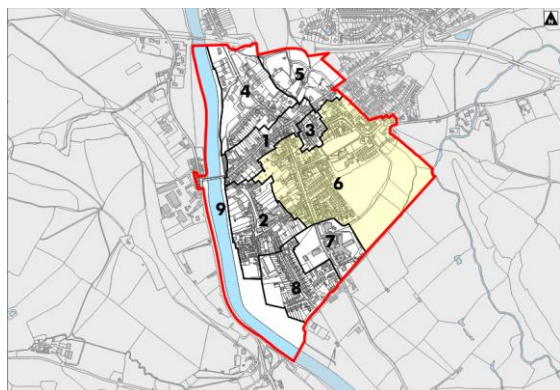


Fig.63 Views of the castle ruins are often picturesque in character and composition

Fig.64 One of a number of views from the castle into Twyn Square. Note the tower of the parish church to the left and roofs of the gaol in the distance



CHARACTER AREA 6
Maryport Street, Church Street & Castle Street



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6F

7.3.40 This large character area within the conservation area comprises a number of key sections of the town plan. This includes Maryport Street, the principal route south from Usk (**Fig.65**), the church and remains of the priory to Church Street (**Fig.66**) Castle Street and Four Ash Street, the latter comprising a relatively isolated group of older houses to the north-eastern edge of the conservation area (**Fig.67**). A common characteristic that unites these areas, in contrast to other parts of the conservation area, is the significant encroachment of 20th century development. There are small developments such as those of single houses or a short terrace, to flats and sheltered housing (such as those to The Meadows on the eastern edge of the conservation area). And there are large groups

of late 20th century housing of the 1970s (such as to St Mary's Way and Priory Gardens to the east and fronting Maryport Street in-part). These late 20th century interventions are invariably of an indifferent architectural quality although very much products of their time. They occasionally form part of a much older street pattern, such as the late 20th century houses on Maryport Street. In this respect, although of limited architectural value, they are part of the historic setting.



Fig.65 View looking north along Maryport Street – a key route into and out of the town to the south



Fig.66 The church of St Mary and the Priory Gatehouse form an important group to the corner of Church Street and Priory Street



Fig.67 An attractive group of vernacular cottages to Four Ash Street

7.3.41 The scale of buildings to this part of the conservation area is two storey to most streets with the ridge parallel to the street. There is some variation to smaller groups and this adds to the townscape quality, particularly to Maryport Street. There are larger buildings to this part of the conservation area, the parish church being one example, but they are generally not grouped together. Groups to Maryport Street, Castle Street and Four Ash Street are occasionally only one and a half storey with dormer windows to attic floors or small casement windows (some with horizontal sliding sashes) up under the eaves or crossing the eaves line (**Fig.68**). The building line is consistent to groups with some sections strongly defined by houses set to the back of the pavement. This is particularly the case to much of Maryport Street (**Fig.69**) and to Castle Street and sections of Four Ash Street, although there is more variation to the latter with some houses set back in small gardens. Modern late 20th century housing invariably breaks this consistency throughout with houses being set back in small gardens but a semblance of the street line being maintained by low stone boundary walls.



Fig.68 A group of houses to Maryport Street showing the variation in scale and architectural treatments which contribute to their townscape quality



Fig.69 The strong consistent building line to this group of houses on Maryport Street is an important part of the townscape character of the street. The townscape is less successful where this has not been maintained by late 20th century development

7.3.42 There are three groups of buildings which form significant sections of the townscape character to this part of the conservation area. Houses to the west side of Maryport Street and to the east side around and to the north of the Church Street junction form a large group of statutory listed and unlisted buildings making a particularly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Usk Conservation Area. The subtle variation in scale, the combination of architectural features such as bays, dormers, door cases, windows dressings and roof details (ridges and finials) and the presence of an historic streetscape in the form of cobbled sections of pavement characterise this group. The second group comprises the church of St Mary and its gates, the Priory Gatehouse, The Priory (in a poor state of repair and a Building at Risk) and the churchyard walls and monuments (a number of which are individually included on the Statutory List).

This group is characterised by the use of Old Red Sandstone, the strong definition of the junction between Priory Street and Church Street which forms an informal space to the front of the church (**Fig.70**) and the trees within the churchyard which frame the Gatehouse and the church in longer views. The third group is to Castle Street and Four Ash Street. This group is characterised by a modest scale to the houses and vernacular materials and built form.



Fig.70 The space forming the junction of Church Street and Priory Street is well-defined by the Priory Gatehouse and the Churchyard wall

7.3.43 There is some variation in materials used to this part of the conservation area with marginally more examples of the Old Red Sandstone, clearly seen to the church and Priory Gate group. Where used for buildings it is generally uncoursed rubble stone with the use of a shaped block (but not quite as tooled as ashlar stonework) for the quoins (**Fig.71**). Most buildings are rendered and painted. There is much variation to the use of colour particularly to Maryport Street. Stronger colour tones have been used on some buildings with varying success. The colour use is not as subtle as to other parts of the conservation area (**Fig.72**).



Fig.71 An example of the use of stone to this part of the conservation area- No.35 Four Ash Street formerly a monastic building

7.3.44 There is much variation to roof pitch through the character area with some natural slate coverings to older houses probably replacing stone slates and possibly thatch. Historic buildings have natural slate roof coverings almost throughout. Modern 20th century housing almost without exception has low pitched roofs and concrete interlocking tiles, generally plain in appearance.



Fig.72 A bolder use of colour is seen to this part of the conservation area –particularly Maryport Street

7.3.45 Boundary walls throughout this character area are invariably stone rubble with varied capping details. Some are very early (possibly forming part of the monastic complex which sat to the southern extent of the character area). They consistently make a particularly positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area where found (**Fig.73**).



Fig.73 Section of historic stone boundary wall to the north-east side of Priory Street. The combination of stone boundary wall and traditional paving make up part of the general high quality of the public realm to this part of the conservation area

7.3.46 There are a series of long views particularly from the open fields to the eastern corner of the conservation area which take in the priory buildings and the stone tower of the church of St Mary. The tower is a well-defined landmark to this part of the conservation area and is often glimpsed along streets and lanes (**Fig.74**) and over roofs. The castle is also glimpsed particularly in longer views from the south and is occasionally seen in relation to the parish church providing a very attractive and complex ensemble of views with important heritage assets as their subject. Trees greatly add to the quality of these views and often frame buildings (**Fig.75**). The buildings to Maryport Street successfully terminate views looking south-west along Church Street (**Fig.76**) and the southern arm of Priory Gardens. Attractive views to open countryside can be appreciated from the junction of Four Ash Street and Chepstow Road. The Priory Gatehouse figures in local views along Priory Street and is seen within the historic context of the church, its churchyard and funerary monuments.

7.3.47 The cobbled paving and pennant stone flags to Maryport Street combined with the general high quality of the buildings and well-defined townscape make for a high quality, locally distinctive public realm greatly contributing to the special character and appearance of the conservation area (**Fig.77** next page).

7.3.48 A number of the monuments within the churchyard of St Mary's, which includes chest tombs and railed graves, are Grade II listed giving them national importance. All historic gravestones and other monuments form a group of considerable local significance complemented by the quality and survival of the older examples.



Fig.74 View from Chepstow Road looking west towards the tower of the church of St Mary – an important landmark in this part of the conservation area



Fig.75 A view from the churchyard framing a well-designed relatively modern intervention to the rear of houses in Twyn Square

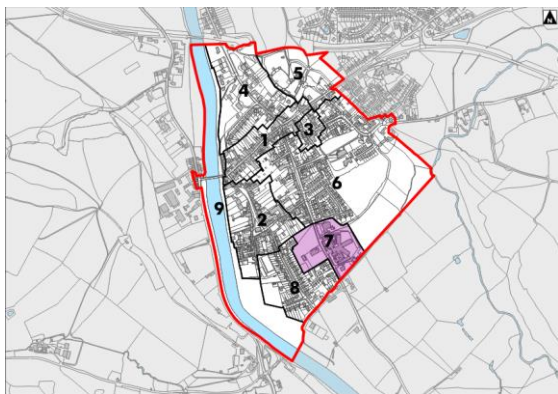


Fig.76 View looking south-west along Church Street successfully closed by houses to Maryport Street



CHARACTER AREA 7

Prison, Courthouse & Environs



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6G

7.3.49 This part of the conservation area is focused on the gaol (HMP Usk) and Sessions House fronting the southern section of Maryport Street. Both gaol and The Sessions House were built by TH Wyatt, in circa 1841-2 and circa 1875-7. The gaol is laid out on a Benthamite Panopticon plan following that set by Pentonville Prison, London (1840) which defined the model for prison planning throughout the period. The subtleties of the plan form are largely lost on those other than inmates and employees of the prison but can be appreciated when viewed on a map or aerial photograph or from further long distance views (e.g. from the castle).

7.3.50 The overarching impression of the gaol building is in the scale of the battered sandstone walls which line the Maryport Street elevation. The solidity of the walls with their projecting towers strongly define the street scene and dominate buildings (including the Sessions House) in the immediate vicinity (**Fig.78** & see **Fig.79**). The Sessions House is single storey to the road and set back. A slight change in level and the raising of the front elevation has enabled a two storey element to be accommodated towards the rear of the plan. This is clearly seen from Priory Gardens but not from Maryport Street. Set aside the gaol it appears somewhat squat and has an almost colonial character to its design and proportions. An impressive set of cast iron railings continue the line of the street to the front of the Sessions House.



Fig.78 The scale and extent of the walls to the gaol fronting Maryport Street dominate the townscape to this part of the conservation area

7.3.51 The gaol, The Sessions House and railings to the Sessions House frontage form an interesting and diverse group complemented by the mature trees to the area between The Sessions House and the roadside.

7.3.52 Old Red Sandstone is used for both the gaol and The Sessions House. To the former, the stone is in coursed rubble stone blocks, the latter is in rock faced squared stones and complemented by buff coloured ashlar stonework to the central open colonnade and aspects of architectural detail such as columns, quoins and parapet (**Fig.80**). Roofs are natural slate.

7.3.53 There are long views along Maryport Street from outside the conservation area towards the gaol with the projecting towers either side of the original entrance a landmark feature in the townscape. There are glimpsed views towards the castle between and over the roofs of the modern housing to Priory Gardens.

7.3.54 The Sessions House is of considerable local interest as it retains original court room fixtures and fittings and is now the home of the Town Council and houses a small law library – The Mather Jackson Library. The huge wisterias on the prison walls are a noted local feature.

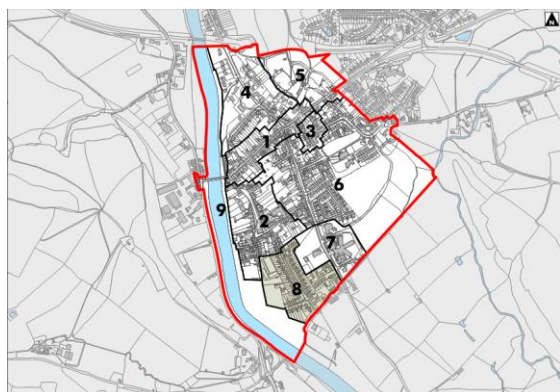


Fig.79 The gaol seen from the car park



Fig.80 The central bays with colonnade to the Sessions House, an unusual design and vaguely colonial in character

CHARACTER AREA 8 Mill Street & Environs



Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6H

7.3.55 Mill Street comprises a series of inter-war and post-war houses generally set in mirrored pairs. These houses as a group form a pleasant suburb to the town.

7.3.56 Houses are set back from the roadside in pairs with gardens usually laid to grass and with some ornamental trees. Most of the paired houses have a low rubble stone boundary wall (**Fig.81**).

7.3.57 All the houses to Mill Street form a group. Collectively, this is a well-defined suburban street. The rhythm of the façades and consistency of the stone boundary walls add to the quality of the townscape despite the houses being of limited special character. None of the houses to this group have original windows or doors. The brick chimneys form a strongly defined skyline. There is a small group of late Victorian houses to the southern section of Maryport Street. These form a group with the low stone wall opposite. The mature trees set behind the wall provide comfortable enclosure to this part of the street and add to the attractive suburban character of this part of the conservation area.

7.3.58 The houses are rendered and painted white or cream. There is a consistency to this treatment which adds to the quality of the townscape but is at odds with the general character of much of the rest of the housing to the town. There are brick plinths and wide

deep roofs of a mix of clay tile and natural slate.

7.3.59 There are occasional glimpsed views to the gaol through gaps between paired houses. To the south end of Mill Street there are long open landscape views across open countryside to a distant green ridgeline. The long view into the conservation area along Maryport Street is enclosed by the mature trees to the north-east side and is partially closed by the towers of the gaol in the distance. A group of small attractive semi-detached Victorian villas line the south-west side of the street (**Fig.82**).

7.3.60 The townscape quality and public realm of this suburb to the town which includes grass verges to one side of the street is of local significance but does not warrant conservation area status.

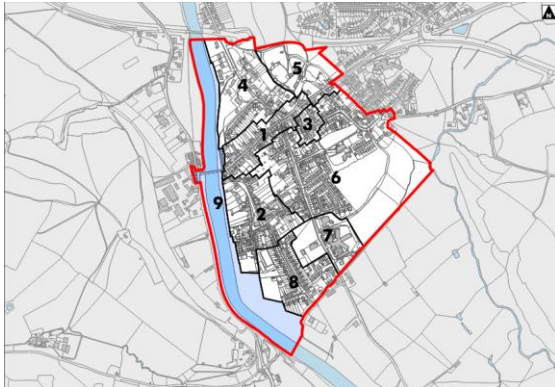


Fig.81 Mill Street, a mid 20th century suburb to the south of the town centre forming a pleasant group of houses



Fig.82 View looking north into the conservation area along Maryport Street. The view is well-defined by the mature trees, stone boundary wall and older houses to the south-west side

**CHARACTER AREA 9
Riverside (including Woodside)**



**Refer to:
Part D - Plan 6I**

7.3.61 The riverside is an important part of the conservation area despite the fact that very little development actually fronts onto the waterside. With the exception of the area known as Woodside and new development immediately to the north of the bridge on the east side of the river, most of the riverside comprises gardens which run down to a footpath which runs the length of the riverside within the conservation area and beyond (to the south). The bridge is Grade II listed and forms one of the principal gateways into the town. Its stone voussoirs are a striking feature in the landscape dominated views along the river corridor (**Fig.83** next page).

7.3.62 The built form within this character area comprises the western side's bridge head enclosure with houses which form a small group known as Woodside. This group is somewhat disparate and varied in scale from single storey to two storey cottages and houses side by side but is nonetheless an interesting group of buildings which includes a former turnpike toll house. The canted bay of the toll house is a prominent feature of the building and successfully closes the views across the river from the town and is also seen in views looking south along the A472 (**Fig.84**).

7.3.63 The building line to this small group of houses is consistent and helps strongly define

this entrance to the town. Most houses are set slightly back from the roadside with low stone and brick boundary walls to the back of pavement, many of which are capped with railings (**Fig.85**).



Fig.84 The view west across the bridge from the town is closed by the wide canted bay and gable of the former turnpike toll house, Woodside



Fig.85 A view looking south into the conservation area along the A472. Note the well-defined townscape which forms the approach to the conservation area which includes a good survival of cast iron railings



Fig.83 The historic bridge (Grade II listed) over the River Usk has an almost sculptural quality in the landscape

7.3.64 All of the buildings to this small area to the west side of the river form a group of some considerable special historic and architectural character. The houses to the north lining the A472 despite being outside the conservation area complement this group and form an important setting to the present extent of the conservation area (it is recommended that this area be included within the conservation area – see paragraph **11.2.1**) (**Fig.86**).

7.3.65 There is a consistent use of painted render with brick dressings with natural slate roofs. Some use of colour is present in the group but most buildings are a cream or white. The former Britannia Inn is the exception with the use of red brick. Its tall chimneys are a

particularly prominent feature in views across the river from the town.

7.3.66 Perhaps the most important role of the river corridor is its complementary role to other parts of the conservation area most notably Porthycarne Street and New Market Street. From the bridges and the riverside the full extent of the gardens to houses in these areas can be appreciated, particularly the mature trees and boundary walls where present (**Fig.87**).



Fig.86 Woodside to the west side of the River Usk, a disparate but attractive group of buildings surrounding the western bridge head



Fig.87 The gardens and most notably the trees and boundary walls to New Market Street make a particularly positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and can be fully appreciated in the context of the riverside

7.3.67 There are long reaching views south and north along the river corridor from the former railway bridge across the river forming part of the northern boundary to the conservation area. These are characterised by the extensive tree cover to back gardens to Porthycarne Street and to the setting of the castle. Houses and other landmarks such as the tower of the church of St Francis Xavier and St David Lewis are only glimpsed through this thick tree canopy (although the extent of this may be seasonal) (**Fig.88**). The long views stretch as far as the slender arches of Usk

Bridge seen in the context of a wider mature landscape which encloses the town on the west side of the river. The railway bridge is one of the best points from which to fully appreciate the landscape setting of the town in the context of the river (**Fig.89**).

7.3.68 The stone bridge, in addition to being a Grade II listed building, is of considerable local significance and as a landmark along with the castle, church and remains of the priory helps define the local distinctiveness of the town.



Fig.88 View looking south from the former railway bridge – note the extensive tree cover to gardens of houses on Porthycarne Street. The top of the tower of the church of St Francis Xavier and St David Lewis is glimpsed between trees



Fig.89 The stone bridge forming such an important western gateway to the town is glimpsed within its landscape setting from the railway bridge to the north

7.4 Architectural & Historic Qualities of Buildings



Fig.90 Usk Castle, the inner ward

7.4.1 The long history of Usk is largely reflected in its heritage of architecturally important buildings dating from almost every period, from the early medieval to the present.

7.4.2 The significance of Usk can be traced in the number and type of statutory Listed Buildings in the conservation area and additionally those which whilst not listed make a particularly positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. As there are more than 140 buildings entered on the List, a representative selection is highlighted in this section. The selection is examined in chronological order, although as older buildings have been altered and extended, cross reference is necessary.

7.4.3 The medieval inheritance is apparent in preserved buildings throughout the core of the town, whilst the classicism of the 18th and early 19th centuries, in its various sub styles is perhaps the most widely represented on the Statutory List. Many apparently 18th century buildings are in fact re-fronted medieval and 17th century structures.

7.4.4 This section has been compiled following survey visits by the consultants and reference to the Historic Building Condition Database for Usk (MCC) and the section on Usk in the Gwent/Monmouthshire volume of the Buildings of Wales series by John Newman (*Yale U.P 2002*).

Medieval

7.4.5 Usk Castle (Grade I Listed, **Fig.90**), now largely a ruin, was constructed and altered throughout the medieval period, from its Norman origins (prior to first records of it in 1138), to the Gatehouse (Grade I Listed) dating from 1368-99 and converted and enlarged in the 19th century. The Keep is the earliest visible structure, although this was altered in later medieval times. It is comparatively small, simple and irregular for a Norman Keep, but its sandstone rubble walls rise impressively from deep battered buttresses. The main feature of the castle visible from the town (mainly Twyn Square and Porthycarne Street), when the trees are not in leaf, is the massive drum of the Garrison Tower, dating from the early 13th

century. The tower projects from a long curtain wall, atop a sharp escarpment. The tower is remarkably intact, with battlements, lancet openings, round headed entrance door and garderobe. The remains of the hall and Chapel are not visible from the conservation area. The Gatehouse (**Fig.91**), visible from the roadway leading to the castle car park, is an impressive structure built in the 14th century, partly built into the steep hillside. The central pointed gothic arched doorway is recessed and the entrance way is vaulted. Otherwise, the oriel window over the gateway and house to the side are 19th century additions in late medieval styling.

7.4.6 The Priory Church of St Mary (Grade I Listed, **Fig.92**) was founded at approximately the same time as the castle, between 1154 and 1170. The stonework of the nave and the massive crossing tower date from this period, and their Norman origins can be seen in the round headed arches in the tower. The Norman east end including its probably semi-circular apse, and its transepts were demolished, leaving the tower as the east end of the church.



Fig.91 Usk Castle: the Gatehouse



Fig.92 The Priory Church. The massive Norman tower and the later north aisle

7.4.7 The north aisle was added to the long narrow nave in the 13th century and further widened in the 16th century as the Priory became the parish church. The main entrance to the church (**Fig.93**) is therefore unusually, through the west end of the aisle, as well as via the north porch, to the same aisle. Both porches, almost identical, are fine examples of late medieval architecture with wide pointed arches, quatrefoil decoration to flat parapets and diagonal buttresses. The west end of the nave projecting forward of the west porch, is a Gothic Revival addition, with a Perpendicular style mullioned west window.



Fig.93 The Priory Church. West front with the main entrance porch

7.4.8 The Priory Gatehouse (Grade I Listed, **Fig.94**) is 'a rare and almost complete surviving monastic gatehouse' (Cadw List description). The broad, almost round, late Gothic arch, rather crudely constructed, is centrally located in this rubble walled structure. The flat topped four light, each with a Perpendicular arch in ashlar stone is the only visible Gothic refinement in this simple building, half covered in ivy.



Fig.94 The Priory gatehouse, clad in ivy

7.4.9 The Priory (**Fig.95**), although now largely a stone Victorian house, is of medieval origin. The central range of the present house shows some original 16th century stone mullion windows with stone bearing arches, possibly representing the southern claustral range of the Benedictine Priory, founded in about 1135, and dissolved 1536. Part of a timber frieze inside is dateable between 1530 and 1533. Wings to east and south are 19th century additions, contemporary with the major reconstruction of the central range done in two stages in 1868 and 1894. The building is at present in a poor state of repair and a Building at Risk.



Fig.95 The Priory, as seen from the church tower

7.4.10 Moving north up Four Ash Street, No.35 Whitefriars Cottage (Grade II Listed, **Fig.96**), is a late medieval former guest house of the Nunnery. This substantial two storey rubble stone building with dressed quoins, stands gable-end to the street. Whilst it has been altered at various periods its essential external character has been retained. The smaller windows (former stair lights) and the massive side chimney stack are important elements.



Fig.96 The former Guest House for the Priory

7.4.11 The Priory complex was extensive and Ty Brith (Grade II Listed, **Fig.97**), at the corner of Priory Street and the south side of Twyn

Square is built on the site of priory buildings and incorporates evidence of late medieval stonework in the re-fronting of the early 19th century. The Tudor stone arch over the door on Priory Street is an indication of its earlier origin.

7.4.12 A number of buildings in the core of the town are medieval in origin but were subsequently remodelled. An example of this practice is seen in Olde Malsters (Grade II* Listed, **Fig.98**). The building is the crosswing of a large medieval house, as can be seen in its rubble wall flank elevation to the lane, with a lateral chimney and having its Tudor arched stone doorway on the New Market Street elevation. No.9 to the left was originally the Hall, since converted, with 18th century sash windows.

7.4.13 Further down New Market Street, No.18 is the Old House (Grade II Listed, **Fig.99**). The house has a prominent timber-framed first floor gable end facing the street. The first floor is jettied, a typical structural device of medieval and Tudor domestic design. The house was constructed before 1550. A number of buildings along Bridge Street have the low wide frontages of medieval buildings including Ty Tadcu (Grade II Listed, **Fig.100**) dating from about 1480 although remodelled externally quite recently whilst retaining the Tudor arched front door.



Fig.97 Ty Brith



Fig.98 The 'Olde Malsters'



Fig.99 The Old House, with 16th century timber framed gable end



Fig.100 'Ty Tadcu', Bridge Street

7.4.14 The Nags Head public house in Twyn Square (Grade II Listed, **Fig.101**) is typical of a number of broad fronted inns of late medieval origin which were refronted later. The two substantial buttresses at its north east corner and the low ground floor ceilings, indicate that this is a medieval building, confirmed by internal details such as chamfered beams.

7.4.15 The Great House of Roger Williams, High Sheriff of Monmouthshire (Grade II Listed, **Fig.102**) on the south side of Old Market Street is striking because of its tall three storeys. The building was constructed in c1521 mainly of stone from Usk Castle. The house is perhaps difficult to decipher as it has been subdivided into houses (Nos. 17-27) and has 18th and 19th century sash windows along its street frontage. However, traces of the original structure can be detected. A corbelled stone former lateral stack projects from the street elevation. A sash window was inserted later in this structure. The building's Tudor origin can be seen in many of the decorated plaster ceilings and the timber barrel vaulted ceiling on its second floor.

7.4.16 Several houses conceal medieval fabric such as No.42 Maryport Street, situated near the junction of Old Market Street. A medieval garderobe is located halfway up the stone

spiral staircase in the south facing gable. This emptied onto the street near the site of the second market place, now occupied by the former Lamb and Flag Inn (now flats). A Tudor four-centred arched door, now blocked, formed the original entrance from the historic passageway between No.42 and No.40. Buxton House, Old Market Street is also deceptive; its exterior hides its origins as an end-door lower hall house of c.1590. The western gable contains a spiral stair. Rose Cottage No.21, New Market Street contains a 16th century style wall painting above a fireplace.



Fig.102 Part of the Great House of Roger Williams, in Old Market Street, illustrating some of the subtlety of the construction, which raises questions regarding the age of its construction.



Fig.101 The Nags Head, Twyn Square

Vernacular

7.4.17 Throughout Usk there are a number of simple farm buildings and ancillary buildings, again difficult to date, as they were built for utilitarian purposes requiring few if any architectural or stylistic flourishes. They were built in a timeless way from generation to generation, using materials close to hand. In this way they have become indicators of local distinctiveness.

7.4.18 The building now housing the Usk Rural Life Museum (Grade II Listed, **Fig.103**) was a malt barn, possibly originally a hall house. The many irregularly placed openings have timber lintels which were created at different times. The large central opening is recent.

7.4.19 The Dairy Barn (Grade II Listed, **Fig.104**) in Chepstow Road, converted to domestic use, with low extensions to its left side, is a reminder of the agricultural functions within the town centre. The barn was built in the early 18th century from rubble stone with squared quoins. Another large barn within the bounds of the town is that associated with Castle House (Grade II Listed, **Fig.105**). This long building retains its original character, with a central large cart door, ventilation slit openings and two dormers lighting the interior. It was constructed in the early 19th century, but it is difficult to be more precise. The massive walls are of rubble, including large blocks, with dressed quoins

7.4.20 The building set back from the main frontage of Bridge Street, No.28 (Grade II Listed, **Fig.106**), has late medieval origins, as indicated by the remnant hoodmoulds to the infilled windows. It was originally part of the Priory Hospital, but has undergone a number of storage and workshop uses. The segmental arch on the right side of the painted rubble wall probably dates from the 18th century, the canopy and sliding door to the left are more recent. The building performs a valuable role accommodating the mixed non retail uses, which adds to the character of the town centre.



Fig.103 The Usk Rural Life Museum, formerly a Malt Warehouse.



Fig.104 Dairy Barn: the original barn is on the right.



Fig.105 The Castle Barn, adjacent to Castle House



Fig.106 No.28 Bridge Street.

7.4.21 A number of other, small storage and workshop buildings (all unlisted) contribute to the streetscape character of Usk. These include: the barn on the west side of Porthycarne Street (**Fig.107**) its plain rubble wall flanking the street; Mandalay Books (**Fig.108**); The Ironmonger outhouse (**Fig.109**) almost at the corner of New Market Street and Bridge Street; The Old Smithy (**Fig.110**) on the west side of Maryport Street; two small stone buildings, one behind the Old Bakery on the corner of Twyn Square (**Fig.111**) of painted rubble with, unusually, a pantiled roof, and one on the north side of Old Market Street (**Fig.112**). There are also numerous stables and coach house buildings associated with inns.



Fig.107 Former Barn in Porthycarne Street



Fig.108 Former ancillary building converted to a bookshop. Twyn Square.



Fig.109 Former outhouse behind the former Cardiff Arms on New Market Street.



Fig.110 The Old Smithy (centre), Maryport Street



Fig.111 Storehouse to rear of the Old Bakery



Fig.112 Storehouse on the north side of Old Market Street

7.4.22 Modest terraces and ranges of houses (unlisted, **Fig.113**) contribute to the character of the conservation area such as the terrace on the north side of Four Ash Street, probably dating from the mid 19th century. Whilst they have been recently had their windows replaced, they retain their sense of unity, especially their tall semi-circular headed original doorways, deeply recessed, many of which are infilled. Another terrace (unlisted, **Fig.114**), on the south side of Church Street, perhaps built somewhat earlier, as evidenced by the slightly lower eaves height and large chimneys, establishes and continues the scale and sense of enclosure of the street. Whilst many windows have been replaced, some original casements remain. The Woodcutters Cottage (Grade II Listed, **Fig.115**), in Maryport Street is one of a pair of broad fronted single storey cottages with an attic storey lit by dormers. Unusually they have relatively deep overhanging eaves with bracketed gutters. Other than the dormer casements, few original external features survive in these rendered cottages which have deep plinths and remnant cobbled paving along their frontages.

7.4.23 The terrace in Baron Street (Grade II Listed, **Fig.116**) is particularly interesting in that the houses retain their 18th century sash windows. These two storey broad frontage cottages set back behind front gardens, may have been for slightly more affluent artisans. They too have projecting eaves, possibly reflecting something of the prevailing architectural tastes. The rubble stone construction is exposed in these cottages, whilst the others were rendered.



Fig.113 19th century cottages in Four Ash Street



Fig.114 Early 19th century range of cottages, Church Street.



Fig.115 The Woodcutters Cottage, Maryport Street.



Fig.116 Fine late 18th century terraced cottages, Baron Street.

7.4.24 A much later artisan terrace is found in Mill Street (unlisted, **Fig.117**). The red semi-engineering brick and buff brick dressings are untypical of Usk. The brickwork detailing, especially the canted arches over windows and doors is well executed. Whilst few original windows survive, the terrace demonstrates the continuity and scale of this type of terrace throughout the town.



Fig.117 Late 19th century red brick terrace in Mill Street.

7.4.25 Individual cottages and small groups maintain the enclosure of streetscapes; for example the two cottages Nos.5 and 7 New Market Street (Grade II Listed, **Fig.118**), create a pleasant south facing 'place' at the head of the street. The low headroom doors and windows, broad fronts, steep roofs and end stacks indicate an early date, although No.5 had sashes fitted in the 18th century. The cottages at the corner of Old Market Street (Grade II Listed, **Fig.119**), Church Street (**Fig.120**), and Four Ash Street (**Fig.121**), are critical in maintaining and defining important corners.



Fig.118 Cottages at the head of New Market Street.



Fig.119 Corner building Old Market Street and Maryport Street.



Fig.120 Corner building Church Street and Maryport Street.



Fig.121 Cottages at the corner of Four Ash Street and Castle Street.

Classical (18th and early 19th centuries)

7.4.26 A number of refined examples of Georgian, late Regency and neo classical town houses are to be seen throughout the core of the conservation area. Their style is also reflected in smaller houses and in the extensive re-fronting and re-glazing within the main streets. The predominant walling materials are render and stucco, slates are invariably the roofing material.



Fig.122 HSBC Bank Twyn Square, a prominent former Georgian townhouse.

7.4.27 One of the most prominent Georgian townhouses is the HSBC Bank on the corner of Castle Parade and Twyn Square (Grade II Listed, **Fig.122**). Whilst this house has been altered internally and to some extent externally (especially the poorly proportioned central door), it does retain the 6 over 6 pane sashes on the ground and first floors. The second floor windows appear to have been altered. The steeply pitched hipped roof would suggest early Georgian origins, but the house is dated c1800.



Fig.123 No.49 Bridge Street, another large Georgian townhouse, with flank wall to site of stables on the right.

7.4.28 Along Bridge Street another large three storey, five bay town house, N^o 49 (Grade II Listed, **Fig.123**), dominates the street scene. The house was built some thirty years later, but the basic proportions and sash windows are a constant theme. Some details such as the bracketed eaves and the doorcase belie the neo classical influences of the later Georgian period. An elegant tripartite window to the left breaks the general symmetry. To the right is a massive screen wall, originally to the

stables. A glance upwards reveals that this is a double pile house, with a central roof gutter.



Fig.124 No.10 Old Market Street- a fine Georgian town house in very poor condition.

7.4.29 No.10 Old Market Street (Grade II Listed, **Fig.124**), although in a very poor state of repair, is a very finely proportioned Georgian townhouse. Like No.49 Bridge Street, this three storey house has bracketed eaves, but unlike the previous two houses, this is three bays wide, with flanking tripartite windows on each floor. Unusually it has a circular 'oculus' window on the central axis of the second floor, with a round headed arched window on the first floor. The central doorcase with an elegant recessed fanlight, has a broken pediment supported by Tuscan pilasters.



Fig.125 The Lawns- a large Georgian house set back from New Market Street behind a large specimen tree.

7.4.30 The Lawns (Grade II Listed, **Fig.125**), in New Market Street, set well back behind a magnificent spreading cedar, is the last in this sequence of tall Georgian town houses. Its three bays have sash windows of diminishing sizes rising up the elevation. The slightly recessed, narrow central bay and the semi-

circular arched front door without doorcase seem a little diminutive for such a large house.

7.4.31 The Laurels (Grade II Listed, **Fig.126**), No.7 Porthycarne Street, is an attractive version of the remodelling of a 17th century farmhouse into an early 19th century Georgian townhouse. There are a number of these remodelled buildings throughout the historic core of Usk, especially in New Market Street and Maryport Street. The Laurels' broad front, steep pitched roof, end stacks and shallow plan belie its early origins. The symmetrical fenestration and front door indicate its incorporation of Georgian ideals. The house has four tripartite windows, indicating its later Georgian date; the bracketed doorcase surrounds a six panel door and glazed fanlight.

7.4.32 Gordon House Bridge Street (Grade II Listed, **Fig.127**) and the Royal Hotel (Grade II Listed, **Fig.128**) are examples of the versatility of Georgian architecture in adapting different sizes of building, tenures and uses.



Fig.126 The Laurels, Porthycarne Street



Fig.127 Gordon House, Bridge Street



Fig.128 The Royal Hotel, New Market Street

7.4.33 The neo classical influence on Georgian architecture can be seen in a few of the larger houses dating from the first decades of the 19th century. Particularly good examples are located in Porthycarne Street. Immediately south of the Roman Catholic Church stands No.24 (Grade II Listed, **Fig.129**), a refined villa with characteristic projecting eaves, round headed sash windows in recesses flanking a porch with Greek Doric columns and pilasters, crowned by a low pitched pediment. This well considered stucco façade has a continuous first floor cillband linking the three 6 over 6 pane sashes balancing the verticality of the slight projections and recessions in the façade.



Fig.129 Fine neo classic townhouse, Porthycarne Street.

7.4.34 Porthycarne House (Grade II Listed, **Fig.130**) built in 1834-5, standing well back from the street frontage behind a stone wall, is slightly larger variant of No.24 (above). It has similar features, the low pitched hipped roof, in this case behind a parapet, the interplay of projecting and recessed bays, a Doric Order porch, but with entablature rather than pediment. The two ground floor tripartite windows enhance this attractive villa.



Fig.130 Porthycarne House, Porthycarne Street

7.4.35 The NatWest Bank (Grade II Listed, **Fig.131**), in Bridge Street, with its most unusual lotus capital, paired columned portico, is an example of late classicism, and the interest in the exotic. The surrounds of the sash windows and the bracketed cills are also typical of the period.



Fig.131 NatWest Bank, with Lotus capitals on the columns of its portico.

7.4.36 The British Legion, formerly the Town Hall (Grade II Listed, **Fig.132**), at the head of New Market Street is a more complex building than it may appear. The coursed rubble arcaded ground floor dates from 1771; the north side from about 1816. The south wing with shallow hipped roof topped by a cupola has a simple classical elevation with five 'blind' oculae giving some lightness to an otherwise blank wall area above the first floor segmented arched sashes. The previously open market space was converted to other civic uses when the arcading was infilled later in the 19th century.



Fig.132 The Town Hall, south and west elevations. The ground floor arcading was infilled in the later 19th century.

7.4.37 The Baptist Chapel (Grade II Listed, **Fig.133**), in Old Market Street dated 1842 has a restrained but elegant façade conscious of the simplicities of neo classical design. The spreading gable end has the proportions of the pediment over the central main entrance. The pilasters are correctly Tuscan. The two very tall flank windows have the margin glazing bars typical of the late classical tradition. Interestingly a slight change of style is visible in the hint of Tudor arches on the flank windows.

7.4.38 The panopticon plan gaol (Grade II Listed, **Fig.134**), built 1841-2 is appropriately severe and robust in design and massing. The symmetry and elementalism of the design and the low pitch of the roofs place the building within the classical tradition rather than the emergence of the medieval revivalism of the time, despite the arrow slits and (unbattlemented) flank towers either side of the original main entrance.

7.4.39 The recently remodelled entrance on the north-west corner of the gaol, whilst contemporary in design does not detract from the overall character of the building.

7.4.40 The Italianate style, with its references to early Renaissance architecture and its use of arched windows is reflected in the design of a few mid 19th century buildings in Usk.

7.4.41 The broad fronted semi-detached villas including Walton Lodge (unlisted, **Fig.135**), on Maryport Street, is an almost intact example of a domestic version of this style, with low pitched pedimented gables, paired arched windows and a generally livelier attitude to the classical norms. The purplish rock faced stonework is counterbalanced by the light sandstone of the quoins, cillbands, mullions and arches.

7.4.42 The Usk Pharmacy, Bridge Street (**Fig.136** next page), dates from the late 19th century demonstrating the persistence of the Italianate throughout the Victorian era. The tall projecting wing rises in stages marked by corner pilasters to a low pitched pedimented gable, with bracketed eaves. Round arched

windows are paired on the first floor and tripled on the second. The prominent chimneys are also typical of the Italianate, having boldly bracketed cornices. This pink stuccoed, white detailed building makes a striking accent in the generally two storey Bridge Street.



Fig.133 The Baptist Church, Old Market Street- a simple neo classic design



Fig.134 The gaol- the former main entrance



Fig.135 Italianate double villa, Maryport Street

7.4.43 Further west along Bridge Street, the Barclays Bank building (Grade II Listed, **Fig.137**), appropriately terminates the vista south from Porthycarne Street and creates a strong corner at Maryport Street. It is a later Victorian building with recognisable but less convincing Italianate features, namely the round headed windows and low slightly projecting pediments. Its role in the townscape is critical.

7.4.44 The Sessions House (Grade II Listed, **Fig.138**), built in 1875-7, has an almost 'colonial' character, but its central triple arched loggia, bold use of Tuscan pilasters and skilful interplay of rock faced purple sandstone and ashlar Bath Stone entablature, window surrounds and dressings, in general establishes its Italianate style.



Fig.136 The Usk Pharmacy, Bridge Street



Fig.137 Barclays Bank, from Porthycarne Street



Fig.138 The colonial style Sessions House

Victorian Tudor and Gothic Revivals

7.4.45 Classical design ideas declined throughout the second half of the 19th century and were gradually supplanted by interest in reviving pre-classical style. This radical change of approach can be detected in its earlier, neo Tudor and 'Gothick' phase, chiefly in two houses in Usk.

7.4.46 Mulberry House (Grade II Listed, **Fig.139**), in Castle Parade, has a very early origin, probably connected with the nearby castle. It was probably originally a first floor hall; the vaulted cellar has been described as possibly Norman. It is suggested that it may have served as the early market hall, with its first entrance facing towards the castle. The house was extensively remodelled in the early decades of the 19th century, to recall the architecture of over 300 years previously. Hence the elevations become asymmetrical, mullioned and transomed casement windows replace sashes and on the first floor a canted oriel window with a traceried head to each window makes its appearance. Over the front door a Tudor four centred arch proclaims this revival of late medieval forms. Mulberry House effectively terminates the vista to the north from Twyn Square, nestling below the trees framing the medieval tower of Usk Castle.

7.4.47 Considerably less visible from the public realm is Plas Newydd (Grade II Listed, not illustrated) in a secluded setting at the northern end of Porthycarne Street. The large house built in 1835, incorporates most of the architectural details characteristic of the period, ogee arches, mullioned and transomed windows with hoodmoulds and a generally less regular elevational design.

7.4.48 The Toll House (Grade II Listed, **Fig.140**), built in 1837 on the west side of the Usk Bridge has the distinctive polygonal plan typical of this building type. The decorative bargeboards and bold neo Tudor drip moulds on casement windows contribute to this attractive building.

7.4.49 The chief building reflecting the Gothic, rather than Tudor Revival in Usk is the Roman

Catholic Church of St Francis Xavier and St David Lewis (**Fig.141** next page), in Porthycarne Street. This church dating from 1847 shows how far the scholarly study of medieval Gothic architecture had progressed since the more purely picturesque Tudor Gothick of the previous decades. The church with its steep pitched roof has its west front facing the street, dominated by its west window in the Decorated style of the 14th century, with cusped tracery. Large diagonal buttresses support the west front and the handsome porch, entered by a pointed gothic arch. The tower added in 1865, set towards the east end is a definite enhancement architecturally, confirming the status of the church. Built of Old Red Sandstone with creamy Bath Stone dressings, the tower has a steep pavilion slate roof, perhaps more familiar in French architecture, with small dormer-type lucarnes.



Fig.139 Mulberry House, Castle Parade



Fig.140 The Old Toll House on the west side of the Bridge.

7.4.50 The other Gothic Revival church is the former Congregational Church (unlisted, **Fig.142**), on the corner of Twyn Square and Castle Parade. The similarities with the Catholic Church are the materials, the steep pitched roof and the Decorated style west window. The gothic arched porch is centred on the west front. Buttresses, less pronounced here, alternate with the single traceried windows on the north front. The north west tower topped by a spirelet, is particularly well placed as a landmark when looking east or west along Bridge Street or Castle Parade, as well as being a 'pivot' turning the corner into Twyn Square. The conversion work has been sensitively handled, maintaining the character of this important building in the townscape.

7.4.51 There are few other buildings in the conservation area that were so wholeheartedly Gothic Revival in their character as the two above. However those identified below incorporate Victorian Revivalist ideas. Priory Lodge (unlisted, **Fig.143**) in Maryport Street is a typical and largely intact later Victorian lodge, robustly designed and detailed, asymmetric in elevation. The front door has a late Gothic arch, otherwise the mullioned windows are square headed, with drip moulds above. Coursed rubble walls contribute to the slightly rustic character, contrasting with the dressed stone of the mullions and lintels and the engineering red brick of the massive chimney. The gatepiers to the Lodge are an integral part of the design.



Fig.141 St Francis Xavier and St David Lewis – a high Victorian Gothic Revival church.



Fig.142 The former Congregational Church.



Fig.143 Priory Lodge, Maryport Street

7.4.52 Ashley House (Grade II listed, **Fig.144**) is more idiosyncratic and playful in design than Priory Lodge, in the same street. This is a late 19th century building in what the Cadw List

describes as 'Tudoresque', but it is freer in its motifs than that description implies. The decorative bargeboards with bold pinnacles are true Victorian domestic gothic. The most unusual feature is the small gothic arched bay window at the very apex of the larger gable, below which is an oriel window with a deep lozenge decorated frieze, topped by an exaggeratedly projecting cornice, with a hipped roof culminating in the arched bay. A rather crude version of a pediment forms a porch supported on a squared column of no particular Order. Otherwise quoins are used in abundance, and mullions surround otherwise conventional sashes.

7.4.53 Interestingly, across the street, Fernlea, No.29 (unlisted, **Fig.145**) complements Ashley House in its inventive use of various historic features. The bracketed porch suggests a pediment, but its recessed, straight canted arch beneath suggests a Tudor arch. The triple mullioned ground floor windows have flat arches; the elaborately bracketed oriel has gothic-type panelling beneath conventional sashes. The boldly projecting gable is supported by Jacobean style brackets. The whole of the elevation of this small red brick terrace house has been designed with enthusiasm and delight.

7.4.54 In New Market Street, a massive double villa (**Fig.146**), makes a significant impact on the street scene. The almost exclusive use of buff brick is perhaps an acknowledgement of the predominance of light colours in the street. This hard brick is not seen elsewhere in the town centre, but is probably the same as that used more widely in Abergavenny. The house is, if anything neo-Jacobean in style, especially in the design of its twin gables with pinnacled shoulders. Hoodmoulds are used above the attic windows and on the ground floor. Otherwise, except for arched porches and dentilled cornices, the building is simply expressed and bold in massing.



Fig.144 Ashley House, Maryport Street.



Fig.145 Fernlea, No.29 Maryport Street



Fig.146 Double Villas in Victorian Jacobean Style, New Market Street



Fig.147 Victorian Double Villas, Porthycarne Street.



Fig.148 The Conservative Club, a well proportioned Victorian House



Fig.149 The former Cardiff Arms to the right and commercial premises to the left.



Fig.150 Domestic Revival Shop and Commercial premises, Bridge Street.

7.4.55 The double villas Nos.10-12 Porthycarne Street (unlisted, **Fig.147** previous page) are an interesting variation on this theme. Here the double gables are closer to the centreline, which in this case is shared by recessed paired entrances. Paired mullioned and transomed windows are used to great unifying effect. The only adornments are the decorative bargeboards and finials to the gables. An intriguing small oriel window is

glimpsed on the side elevation, otherwise the building is effective in maintaining the continuity and enclosure of the street in Victorian style, between classical neighbours.

7.4.56 The Conservative Club (unlisted, **Fig.148**) in Maryport Street, is a good example of a large detached Victorian house, complementing the adjacent Listed school. Unusually it has no gables, instead opting for a steep hipped roof (with three elegant hipped dormers with finials) and flat roofed square bay windows, mullioned on both storeys. Nevertheless, this is a handsome well-proportioned villa, skilfully using the colours and shapes of irregular coursed stone quoins and red and buff brickwork.

7.4.57 The former Cardiff Arms, (Grade II listed, **Fig.149**) on the corner of Bridge Street and New Market Street and its adjacent three storey shop (Grade II listed), return to the exuberance of late Victorian architecture identified earlier in this section. The corner building celebrates its corner location by a rounded, scrolled raised parapet, substituting for a 'pepperpot' turret. The red brick of the building is relieved by buff brick banding quoins and segmental voussoirs. The shop building is a free design, using extensive areas of plate glass, which was becoming widely used in the second half of the 19th century, topped by a shallow canopied balcony, in turn capped by a half round window with terracotta voussoirs between a wide, scrolled, but surprisingly wider flat-topped gable (the top section of the gable has been removed historically). What these buildings may lack in scholarly sophistication, they provide in liveliness, colour, texture and roofline in the street scene.

7.4.58 Further east up Bridge Street, adjacent to Barclays Bank, is an attractive example of a commercial building in late Victorian Domestic Revival Style (Grade II listed, **Fig.150**). The interplay of black and white half timbered gables, mullioned and transomed timber windows, including canted bays, and red brick, are the hallmarks of this style. The survival of apparently contemporary shopfronts also adds to the value of this building.

Twentieth Century

The Edwardian period

7.4.59 Relatively little was built in the early years of the 20th century, following a quite prolific period of building in the Victorian era. No.4 Bridge Street (Grade II Listed, **Fig.151**) known as Portland House is a two storey commercial building in a lively Queen Anne Revival style. Despite its modest size, the salmon pink painted street elevation with slightly exaggerated dentilled cornice picked out in white, is further articulated by two first floor canted oriel windows and two pedimented gables.

7.4.60 Edwardian stylistic features can be detected on buildings of earlier origins, for example the lettering associated with the main entrance to the Three Salmons Hotel, is distinctly Edwardian in style.

7.4.61 Otherwise buildings of this period are of modest design. The infill terrace unlisted (**Fig.152**) on the west side of Twyn Square at the junction with Priory Street, contrasts with its wholly rendered neighbours, being

constructed in hard red brick, relieved by a rendered first floor. Paired narrow sash windows alternating with single sashes on the wide fronted units, are well proportioned. The terrace plays an important part in terminating the long view from Four Ash Street.



Fig.151 Portland House, No.4 Bridge Street. Queen Anne style Edwardian building.

Post-war

7.4.62 Most development of the first half of this period within the conservation area in term of in layout, form and materials is typical of suburban housing throughout most of the United Kingdom. One scheme, Four Ash Court (**Fig.153**) is a good example of a housing scheme which incorporates original design elements and has been specifically designed for its enclosed context. The house units are arranged to create two linked courtyards, partially defined by existing high walls and well considered landscaping, including small communal lawns. Projecting concrete crosswalls create a vertical balance offsetting the horizontality of the black painted first floor weatherboarding. The southern court leads to a parking court via a wide undercroft between pilotis formed by the crosswalls. The high level of maintenance and the intact original detailing enhance the quality of the scheme.

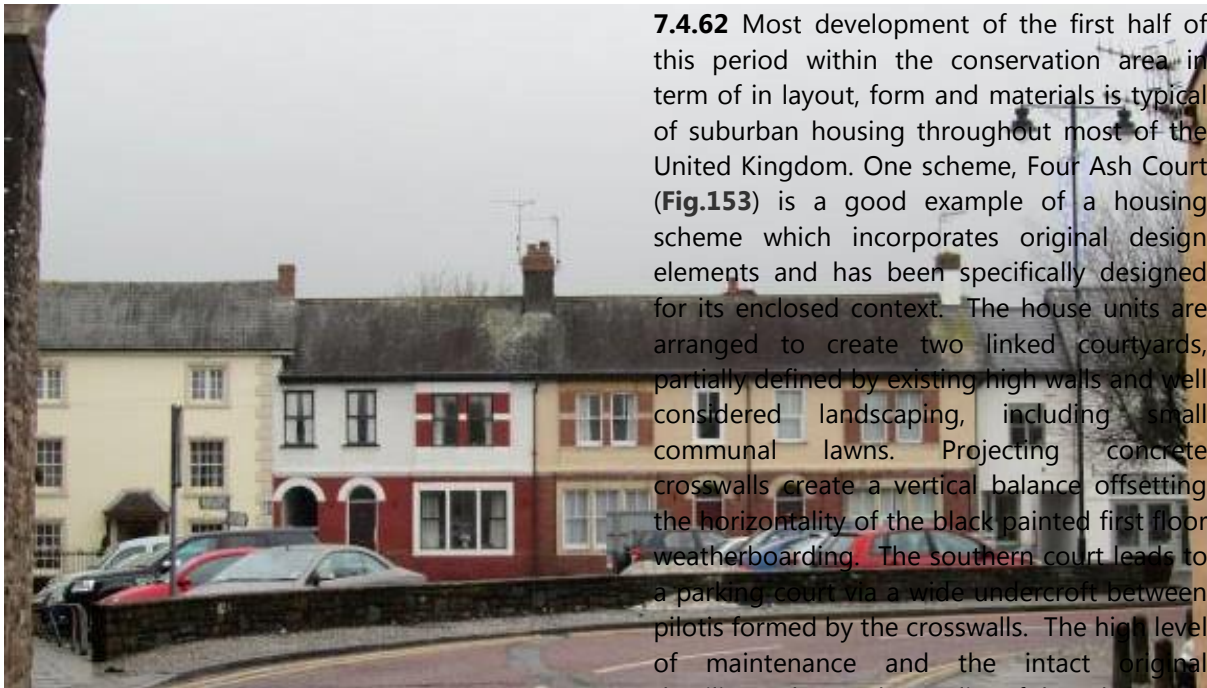


Fig.152 Edwardian terrace Twyn Square viewed from Four Ash Street.

7.4.63 Some recent small residential developments of 'executive' houses have been

carefully sited within the street scene and demonstrate a good understanding of vernacular and historic style and detail. A development of three units comprise the western end of Denbury Mews (Fig.154), and another of two units are set back from the south side of Four Ash Street (Fig.155), continuing the alignment of St Mary's Way and containing the views along the street. The third development, a single house on the north side of Four Ash Street, wide fronted and in pink render, reinstates the street frontage at this point.

7.4.64 A recent new development of a more contemporary design approach is located on the west side of Porthycarne Street, at Porthycarne Gate (Fig 156). Whilst somewhat simpler in design, its form and fenestration is carefully considered within its secluded context.



Fig.153 Four Ash Court, an unusual 1970s housing group.



Fig.154 Recent houses, Denbury Mews

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 5 Listed Buildings & Buildings Making a Particular or Special Positive Contribution



Fig.155 Recent houses, south side of Four Ash Street.



Fig.156 Recent houses at Porthycarne Gate.

7.4.65 Generally, recent design solutions to the alteration and conservation of historic buildings have been handled sensitively, respecting the character of the host building, yet in a contemporary manner. The conversion of the barn comprising the Rural Life Museum is a good example as is that of the former stables, in Twyn Square, converted to a bookshop. 'Ty Castell' in Castle Street (Fig.157), is a particularly well-designed conversion of a late 19th century house, with an equally well considered landscaped forecourt.



Fig.157 Ty Castell, Castle Street

7.5 Activity: Prevailing & Former Uses

7.5.1 Usk, the site of an important and extensive Roman fort on the banks of the River Usk, developed as a key Norman market town secondary in importance to Chepstow. The town developed between castle and priory with market place and burgages. It remained an agricultural market town into the 19th century. Industry was limited to a small-scale Japanning industry, an off-shoot of the works in nearby Pontypool.

7.5.2 Today Usk is a small but busy town with independent shops, public houses and primary school. Usk Rural Life Museum, the parish church and the castle are significant tourist attractions. The 19th century County Gaol remains a significant prison in the country. Large 20th century housing estates provide much residential property. The town still holds markets and an Annual agricultural show just outside the town. The last few years have seen a decline in the retail and pub sectors, affecting Bridge Street in particular, which is starting to impact on its vitality and the upkeep of the buildings which if continued could significantly impact on the quality of the conservation area.

7.6 Contributions Made By Key Unlisted Buildings

7.6.1 There are a number of unlisted buildings which make important positive contributions towards the character and appearance of the conservation area, both individually and in groups. Key groups are:

- Bridge Street shops and town houses
- Baron Street terrace
- Maryport Street terraces
- Four Ash Street terrace
- Twyn Square

7.6.2 Individual properties which make a particularly positive contribution towards the character and appearance of the conservation area and important boundary walls and outbuildings are identified on **Plan 5**.

7.7 Prevalent Local & Traditional Materials

7.7.1 The rural market town is a predominantly rendered stone and natural slate settlement. Render is used heavily with classical treatment including rustication, window dressings and doorcases to key buildings. Render is mostly smooth but with numerous roughcast buildings. A selection of major buildings are constructed of local sandstone and limestone in shades of pink, brown and grey including the church, castle, bridges and Usk Rural Life Museum. Vernacular cottages and medieval houses survive in small quantities displaying the traditions of white-washed rubblestone with natural slate roofs. Historic decorative ironwork is seen, but in small quantities. 19th and early 20th century timber shopfronts survive in numbers on Bridge Street. Much 20th century housing is in brick and render with concrete interlocking tile roofs. There has been some detrimental alteration to historic houses in the form of uPVC windows, concrete tiled and cement fibre slate roofs and the loss of brick and rendered chimneys; this is however reversible.



Fig.158 Squared stone to Usk Gaol



Fig.159 Former school with squared stone and ashlar

Walling

7.7.2 Stone is a mix of local limestone and sandstone with its distinctive pink coloration as seen on the church and castle. It is often seen as rubblestone laid to courses. Stone is also squared to create more formal façades (**Fig.158 & Fig.159**), for example the Usk Gaol Gatehouse. Stone-work to many Victorian buildings is rock-faced with ashlar dressings for example the Sessions House. Stone-work to modest cottage-scale houses often has red or yellow brick dressings. The medieval fabric of many houses is disguised by external alteration. Exposed timber-framing is seen on New Market Street but is rare. Smooth render is used to a great extent on Georgian town houses with stucco and roughcast to a lesser extent, some examples include buildings of the mid to later 19th Century (**Fig.160 & Fig.161**). Classical detailing is prevalent to Georgian buildings. The use of colour is very important in the town with the striking combination of white painted render and black painted detailing (window frames, dressings, pilasters and string bands) found on many properties. Pastel shades are found on some properties, particularly effective in groups, and used in through coloured render. Red brick is found on Victorian terraces, sometimes in combination with yellow brick dressings. There are many Georgian multi-paned timber vertical sliding sashes with thick glazing bars and more slender Victorian sashes. 20th century housing is generally red brick with some use of yellow and buff brick, sometimes with render at first floor level. Concrete is a feature of post-war houses at Four Ash Court.

Roofing

7.7.3 The traditional houses still retain natural slate (**Fig.162 & Fig.163**) or have been replaced with cement fibre slates. This is generally seen at medium to low pitches to simple gabled roofs with brick ridge stacks. Medieval properties, some re-fronted in the Georgian period, retain steeply pitched roofs, often with gabled dormer windows. Large buildings often have hipped roofs, some sproketed. Deep eaves with cornice brackets are also seen. Stone slate is seen to the church

(Fig.164), priory buildings and castle barn but it is rare and the exception rather than the rule. 20th century housing is dominated by the use of concrete interlocking tiles. Late 20th century housing and 21st century housing and flats have natural slate or cement fibre slate roofs.

Boundary walls and retaining walls

7.7.4 Historic boundary walls do not dominate the conservation area but there are many short stretches in front of historic properties and key boundary walls to the church and castle grounds. These local limestone and sandstone rubble stone walls vary in height but are usually low level topped with cants or coping stones. Remnants of medieval buildings and the town gates remain as stretches of rubblestone walls. The conservation area contains a fine variety of historic iron railings to property boundaries (Fig.165).



Fig.160 Colourful painted render typical of the town



Fig.163 The varied roofscape of the town, natural slate dominates



Fig.161 White / cream painted render to the Greyhound Inn



Fig.164 Stone slate is used on a collection of buildings, notably the parish church



Fig.162 Natural slate is still seen to traditional buildings, often behind parapets



Fig.165 Complete collection of historic ironwork

8 Contributions Made by Green Spaces (including Biodiversity Value), Trees, Hedges & Natural Boundaries

8.1 There are a number of important green open spaces within the conservation area. These green spaces are often significant in maintaining the historic landscape setting of the town. Fields south of the priory church are essential to its historic setting and provide views to both church and castle. The castle itself, set high above the town, has a backdrop of mixed woodland to the north and fields and tree cover to the east.

8.2 The green banks to the River Usk on the east side and the area known as The Island on the west side are important to the setting of the river and provide an important wildlife corridor. In addition the gardens to houses on New Market Street are also important semi-open private green spaces which back on to the river and can be appreciated in views from the west bank.

8.3 Private gardens generally but particularly within the grid of houses defined by New and Old Market Street, Maryport Street and Bridge Street are important open spaces appreciated largely from private viewpoints but also forming part of the wider setting of houses set to the back of pavement. These green spaces are an important part of the survival of the historic plot patterns defining the town grid pattern as well as wildlife sanctuaries and private amenity spaces for the housing lining and defining the street grid. Development within these green spaces could destroy the legibility of the space.

8.4 Open fields to the east of the town, especially off Priory Gardens, St Mary's Way and the hedge-lined Chepstow Road, are important in protecting the historic market town's rural landscape setting. Within the town Owen Glyndwr Park, the site of the 20th century livestock market and former site of the Roman fortress of the XXth Legion from 55 – 65AD, provides an attractive green open space at the south end of the town. The priory church churchyard is a significant open space with many fine mature trees including copper

beech, conifers and an avenue of ornamental cherries (**Fig.166** & **Fig.167**). Large cedar trees define the north side of Twyn Square and the west side of New Market Street at The Lawns. The castle, although privately owned, is very much part of the town and its gardens are well-known (**Fig.168**).

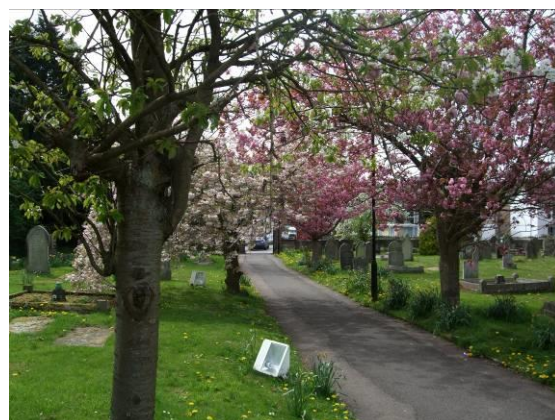


Fig.166 Cherries provide spring colour in the churchyard



Fig.167 The extensive churchyard with a backdrop of specimen trees



Fig.168 Usk Castle's famous gardens set among the ruins

9 Key Views

9.1 Landscape Setting

9.1.1 The rural market town is positioned in the fertile Usk valley. The town is located on the east bank of the river, the stone road bridge crossing over to settlement in the west. Hills rise around the town with Beech Hill to the north, Coed y Mon to the east and Ty'n-y-caeau to the south-west. The town is positioned on low-lying land with a large flood plain. There are distant views north-west from the railway bridge across the flat lands to Llancayo windmill.

Refer to:

Plan 4 Spatial Analysis

9.2 Types of View & Their Relative Significance

Strategic

9.2.1 The nature of the streetscape in the town restricts many views to glimpses and views terminating on crossing roads. Strategic views are to be had north and south along the River Usk from the road bridge and the former

railway bridge west of the town. Important views to the castle in its landscape setting are to be had from the west bank of the river. Other strategic views to both castle and church are seen south of the church from the field at the end of Priory Gardens. Strategic views of the town and castle are to be had from the church tower (inaccessible to the public) (**Fig.169**) and these are mirrored by views from the castle ruins across the town to the church (**Fig.170**). Landmarks include the two bridges over the River Usk, the castle ruins, parish church, County Gaol, market hall and catholic church.



Fig.169 View to the castle ruins perched above the town and enclosed by tree cover



Fig.170 Strategic view from the castle across the town

Glimpsed

9.2.2 There are many glimpsed views throughout the conservation area, many of which are concentrated on the church or castle. There are too many glimpsed views to list them in their entirety but the main views are shown on the townscape plan. Many glimpsed views of the castle, set high above the town, are to be had from Porthycarne Street to the west and Castle Parade to the south. Views to the church tower are prevalent to the north and east from Chepstow Road, Priory Gardens and Maryport Street (**Fig.171**).



Fig.171 Glimpsed view of the parish church tower at the junction of Maryport Street and Church Street

Terminated

9.2.3 Due to the layout of the town with grid roads there are many views terminated by buildings at the end of roads. The stone former school terminates views west along Church Street. Nos. 66-72 Maryport Street terminate views west along Priory Gardens. The stables to the Three Salmons terminates views along the narrow Maryport Street (**Fig.172**).



Fig.172 The stables (now converted) to the Three Salmons terminates views along Maryport Street with the treed hillside of the castle forming a green backdrop

10 Degree of Loss of Architectural and/or Historic Elements

10.1 There is some loss of historic windows, doors, roof coverings and chimneys. This is seen throughout the conservation area. Windows and roof coverings are the most significant and consistent change to historic buildings. In most cases these changes are reversible.

Part C: Management Proposals

11 Boundary Revisions

11.1 Overview

11.1.1 As a result of analysis undertaken, the following are suggested boundary revisions to reflect ownership changes, recent development or a re-appraisal of the special character of a particular part of the town.

11.1.2 For general guidance on why suggested boundary changes are being made, please refer to **Appendix 3**.

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 7 Management Proposals



Fig.173 The railway tunnel and site of the former station



Fig.175 The Glen Yr Afon House Hotel

11.2 Areas for Inclusion (Fig.173 next page)

Usk Woodside on the west bank of the River Usk (Fig.174 & Fig.175)

11.2.1 The conservation area should be extended north and west to include the riverside settlement from the former Toll House north along the A472 to the Glen Yr Afon House incorporating the riverside green known as The Island. The boundary should extend east across the former railway bridge incorporating the site of the railway station and tunnel east through the woodland north of the castle. This area forms part of the essential setting of the town. The riverside settlement of terraces, cottages and large detached houses set in large grounds form an eclectic historic group of architectural merit. Extending the area to follow the railway line and woodland north of the castle secures an important historic area associated with the town. The railway bridge offers defining views of the town in its landscape.

Chepstow Road

11.2.2 The conservation area should be extended east along Chepstow Road from the Greyhound Inn at the junction of Black Barn Lane east to Meadow Cottages. This collection of historic 19th century properties forms a group which, despite alterations, add to the special character of the conservation area.

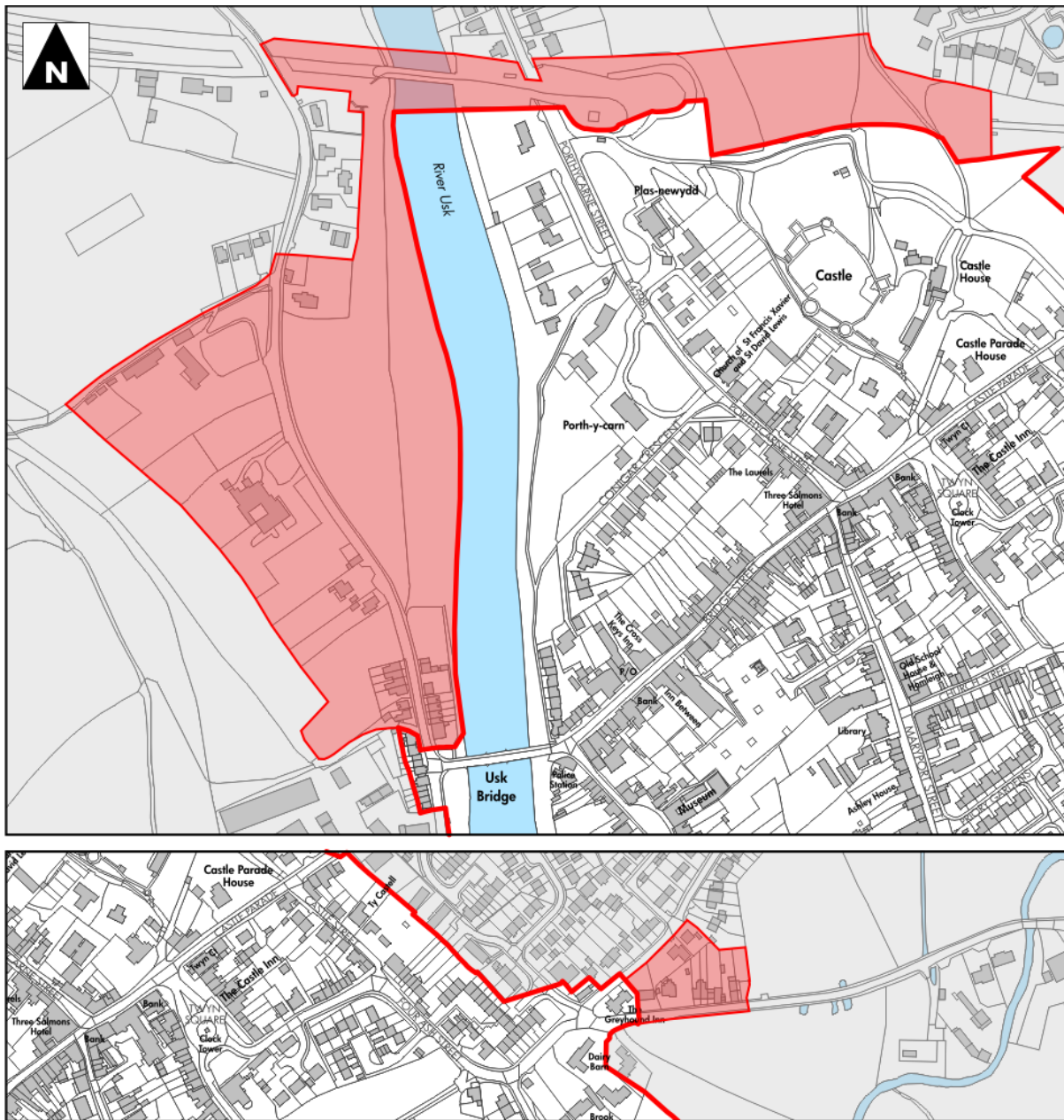


Fig.173 Plan showing suggested area for inclusion within the Usk Conservation Area

11.3 Areas for Exclusion (Fig.176)

11.3.1 There are no proposed exclusions

12 Article 4 Directions

12.1 Under Schedule 2 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment) (Wales) Order 2013, planning permission is granted as 'permitted development' for a range of minor developments subject to limits and conditions designed to protect the amenity of the environment. Due to the sensitive nature of conservation areas and the fact that such 'permitted development' in this environment could be harmful to the character of the area, it is recommended that these 'permitted development rights' are restricted in order to preserve the character of the conservation area.

12.2 Article 4(2) of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) enables local planning authorities to make directions withdrawing the permitted development rights given under the order. These rights should only be withdrawn where there is firm evidence to suggest that permitted development is likely to take place which could damage the character or appearance of a conservation area, and which therefore should be brought within full planning control in the public interest. There are different areas where permitted development rights may be taken away; generally affecting the external appearance of dwelling houses in the conservation area.

12.3 Article 4 Directions may be applied to the whole Conservation Area, to parts of it such as Character Areas, or to individual buildings or groups of buildings, or features. This will be subject to further detailed consideration and recommendation. Their introduction does not mean that development specified within them is automatically precluded, but does seek to ensure that through the exercise of full planning control that such development does not harm the character or appearance of the conservation area and that all alternatives that can avoid this have been fully explored."

12.4 Examples would include:

- The erection, alteration or removal of a chimney
- Various kinds of development fronting a highway – to include gates, fences or walls or any other means of enclosure
- The construction of an external porch
- The painting of the dwelling house
- The construction of a building or enclosure within the curtilage of a building
- Alteration including partial demolition of a gate fence or any other means of enclosure and the construction of a means of access to a property
- Microgeneration – possible restrictions on changes which fall within permitted development rights relating to the retrofitting of renewable energy equipment; for example, wind turbines and photovoltaic cells, where they would have a significant impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Consider more sympathetic solutions to bus stops and shelters

12.5 Within the Usk Conservation Area Article 4 directions should be considered for windows and doors and roof coverings where the original natural slate, clay tile or pantile survives. This is particularly the case for groups of houses to:

- Four Ash Street
- Maryport Street
- Northern end of Mill Street
- Old Market Street
- Twyn Square

12.6 Front stone boundary walls, where they exist, form a positive part of the character and appearance of the conservation area. Where these are fronting domestic properties consideration should be given to the removal of permitted development rights in relation to the partial removal of boundary walls and the creation of hardstandings in gardens. Where not protected by statutory listing, boundary walls and railings should be retained by the use of additional planning controls. This is particularly important for walls to houses within the suggested extension to Chepstow Road.

Refer to:

Part D - Plan 7 Management Proposals

13 Proposals for Enhancement

13.1 General Enhancement Opportunities

13.1.1 A number of opportunities exist that would help to enhance the overall appearance of the conservation area. These include:

- Boundary walls: maintenance and upkeep
- Footpaths and routes
- Maintenance of the public realm
- Traffic, parking and street improvement.
- Signage strategy

13.2 Specific Enhancement Projects

Recommended Enhancement Projects.

13.2.1 As resources become available and subject to consultation with the local community and relevant agencies, the following schemes could be developed for implementation, with the aim of enhancing the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of its numerous listed buildings. These measures are not ranked in any order of priority.

Twyn Square

13.2.2 The Square is dominated by intrusive and complicated highway design works, which have the effect of detracting from the intrinsic simplicity of the space. It is recommended that a simpler scheme for the public realm be implemented, as advocated through the principles of Manual for Streets (2007) and using established placemaking principles. This would include;

- the reduction of road markings
- the use of shared surfaces where appropriate
- removal or lowering of kerbs
- reducing the roundabout effect and the use of generous swept bends (which encourage speed)
- the subsequent improvement of the setting of the Grade II listed clock tower

- the reduction of the change of level of the car park at the southern end of the Square and consequent removal of the low wall.

13.2.3 The effect of a good design and management plan for Twyn Square should be to regain its priority as a central place for Usk, with the priority given to people and the reduction of vehicular speeds. These enhancements would aim to retain a similar amount of parking spaces as at present. It may be possible to increase the number of trees, through a formal tree planting scheme. Improved visitor information should be provided, and a safe foot route to the Castle indicated.

13.2.4 Consideration could be given to subtle lighting of major buildings in the Square. The existing high level lamp standards might be replaced by fittings of a lower, more appropriate height or where possible replacing lamp columns with lighting on buildings.

Entrance Area at the West End of the St Mary's Churchyard and the Priory Gatehouse (at the corner of Church Street and Priory Street).

13.2.5 The existing situation, where tarmac roadway extends to the gate of the churchyard and Gatehouse, defaced by large scale 'Keep Clear' road markings in both languages, detracts from the setting of the Church, churchyard and Gatehouse. It is proposed that the tarmac roadway at this point is replaced by traditional pennant paving slabs for pedestrian use and by granite setts in the area used for occasional vehicular access. The area could be kept clear of unauthorised parking by 4 – 6 cast iron bollards, one of which could be retractable for authorised vehicular access. Additionally the existing street furniture could be replaced by items of more appropriate and robust design. The climbing foliage which covers at least half of the Priory Gatehouse should be inspected regarding its potential damage to the fabric of the gatehouse.

The effect of these enhancements could immediately improve the setting of these two key historic buildings.

East end of The Priory

13.2.6 Any proposal for the rehabilitation and re-use of The Priory should include the enhancement of the eastern boundary of the site, as it fronts onto St Mary's Way. In particular, the semi derelict outhouse which forms part of this boundary should be included in such a scheme of refurbishment and enhancement.

Car Park, Maryport Street

13.2.7 The frontage to the car park on the west side of Maryport Street, facing the HM Prison, should be enhanced by a line of formal street trees, appropriate low boundary treatment and paving.

New Market Street - Southern End.

13.2.8 The setting of the Town Hall and the adjacent fine cedar tree and Grade II listed South African War Memorial is eroded by the intrusive effect of car parking and wide areas of roadway devoted to vehicles. The junction with Old Market Street has resulted in poor quality 'space left over'. The south, east and west frontages of the Town hall however are hemmed in by very narrow pavements.

13.2.9 It is recommended that pavement areas are extended in this area and subtly designed parking bays included. Use should be made of traditional paving materials, designed and laid out with reference to the well established and attractive character of paving in this area.

New Market Street - Northern End

13.2.10 The large area of tarmac pavement outside 'Olde Maltsters', No 9, and the range looking south down the Square should be replaced by traditional paving utilising the same design and layout principles established in New Market Street. The provision of some seating would be appropriate in this attractive Square.