

# BROCKWEIR CHARACTER APPRAISAL

## NOVEMBER 2016



**Village pre-bridge with graving dock**



**V & A Watercolour of Brockweir**

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# 1. The Purpose of the Character Appraisal

1.1 This document has been produced by Hewelsfield and Brockweir Parish Council following a comprehensive local study of the design and character of both the natural and built environment of Brockweir and its immediate surroundings.

1.2 The development of this document has been guided by a number of planning policies. Of particular relevance is paragraph 58 of the National Planning Policy Framework:

Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics. **Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:**

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;
- optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;
- **respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;**
- create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.

1.3. The document's development has also been guided by the Local Character and Assets statement included in the Forest of Dean District Council's Allocation Plan (Interim Draft):

This statement above expresses the intention to use and improve local evidence to inform planning decisions including plan making. It applies to character and design generally but also to information in respect of additional or existing heritage assets.

1.4. The document has been subject to public consultation and subsequent revision and was adopted by Hewelsfield & Brockweir Parish Council on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016. Formal endorsement by the Forest of Dean District Council is now sought. Subject to this endorsement it is expected that the document will form a material consideration in relation to future planning applications.

1.5. The document has been produced primarily to promote high standards of new development design that respects, conserves and enhances the character of the Parish. Developers are encouraged to refer to it when considering the location and design of their proposals.

- 1.6. The document identifies a range of both national and local heritage assets that make an important contribution to the character of the Parish. This list of assets will form the basis of a future study to help recognize and protect local heritage assets.

## Process

This Character Appraisal is written to establish the characteristics that make up the value of Conservation Area designation and of the village itself. The assessment process includes a review of the existing boundaries, whether they are appropriate, and any possible modifications that could be made. The process of adopting a character appraisal has a number of stages; the draft document is the subject of a public consultation. The local community and residents within the villages are consulted, as are a number of interested local and national organisations. All the comments received during the consultation period are considered and any amendments made, a final draft is then produced. This document is formally considered by members of the Forest of Dean District Council and if approved it is then formally adopted.

## Consultation Stages

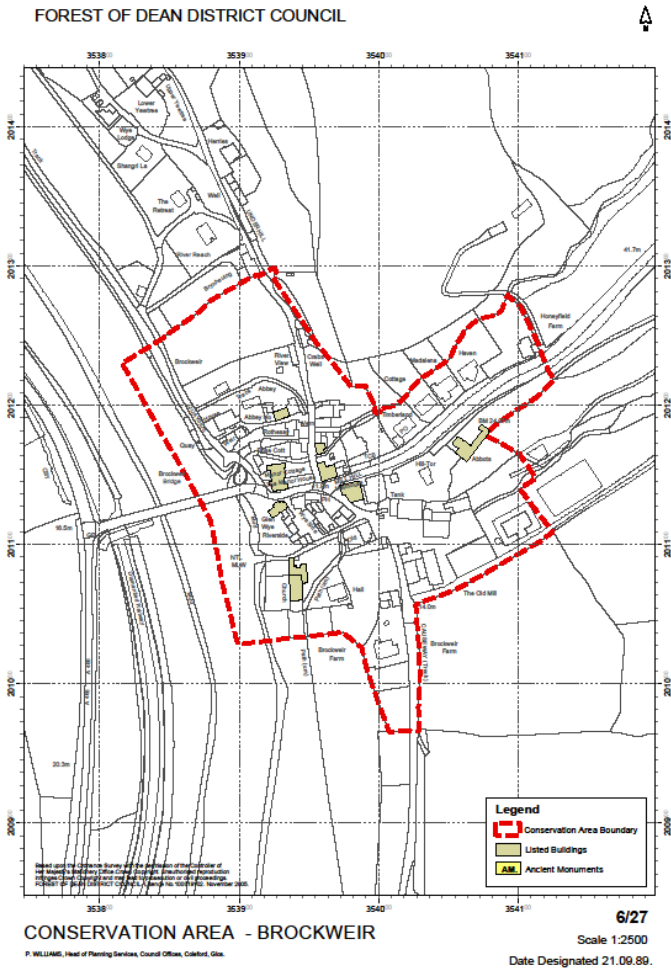
Stage	Date
Initial meeting with Forest of Dean District Council	22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2015
First draft presentation to Forest of Dean District Council	20 <sup>th</sup> April 2016
Second draft document sent to Forest of Dean District Council	24 <sup>th</sup> October 2016
Adoption of final character assessment by Parish Council	1 <sup>st</sup> November 2016
Endorsement by Forest of Dean District Council	November/December 2016

As identified in the Local Development Plan, there are no suitable sites for development save the possible development on the former CPL site.

# Brockweir Conservation Area

Brockweir was designated a Conservation Area on September 21st 1989 and extends beyond a defined settlement boundary in places and the settlement boundary as now in the Allocations Plan Draft goes beyond the Conservation Area in one area.

It covers the village itself – see attached map.



There are 9 listed buildings within the Conservation Area.

For avoidance of doubt, where the boundary of the Conservation Area is shown on a wall, fence, hedgerow, tree line or other means of enclosure, it shall be deemed to be included within the Conservation Area.

## 2. Parish Overview

### 2.1 Evolution of area

#### *Development*

*'In a wooded cove at the foot of the lofty Forest Hills, situate in the Hundreds of St. Briavels, divided by the River Wye from Tinteryne, in the county of Monmouth as the crow flies, forty-eight furlongs distant North from Chepstow, fifty-six furlongs distant South West from Coleford and sixty-four furlongs distant South East from Monmouth, lies a village, and a small port, from which iron and timber and other commodities are conveyed to Bristol.'*

The name Brockweir dates from about the 7th century; previously it was known in Welsh as *Pwll Brochuail*, the pool of Brochuail or Brockmael, a prince of Gwent. The place name is mentioned in the Book of Llandaff (a 12th century compilation of documents) in relation to the traditions of king Tewdrig, a king of the early Welsh kingdoms of Gwent and Glywysing. The village sits below Offa's Dyke.

The weir was once owned by Monmouth Priory and later Tintern Abbey and the oldest existing building, the Malthouse, is believed to have formed part of a grange owned by Tintern Abbey. The Wye has a history of conflict between being a navigable river, and its flow being harnessed to power mills. The weir at Brockweir was certainly used by the monks of Tintern Abbey as a salmon fishery.

The development of Brockweir owes much to the river Wye, with Brockweir being the furthest point upstream that it was possible for seagoing vessels to reach. This led to the development of Brockweir as a significant port, a transit point for cargoes that were transferred to shallow barges and hauled upriver by teams of men and horses, and a loading place for produce from the Forest of Dean.

There was also a thriving ship-building, fitting-out and repair industry with a ship-building yard next to Quay House (now a domestic garden) and several slips. In fact, Brockweir boasts an original quay that continues to be used by canoeists and adventure groups. The view of this from the bridge forms part of the opening scenes for a popular television property program, and Brockweir is generally regarded as a 'jewel of the Forest'. The Moravian presence in Brockweir dates back to 1833. In those days Brockweir had a population of about 350. The nearest place of worship was Hewelsfield, a long walk up a steep hill. However, the village boasted many cider houses, with up to 16 being reported. A contemporary writer described it as being 'noted as a city of refuge for persons of desperate and lawless character. The Lord's Day was kept as a day of unhallowed revelling and desecrated by cock-fighting, gambling and quarrelling.' The peaceful river-bank setting where the Moravian Church is now situated was once the site of much of this revelry.

Originally only one narrow road led into the village and a ferryman transported passengers across the river Wye until 1906, when a bridge across the river was completed. In a well-documented high court case between the owner of the ferry and the bridge developers, it was recorded that

rates for the ferry were: 1d per adult, ½ d for a child, and 1d for a pig, sheep or bicycle. Annual earnings were £305 in 1905, the year before the bridge was built.

Brockweir is now a much-visited tourist destination, especially for walkers, hikers and lovers of nature. Both the Wye Valley Walk and Offa's Dyke path overlook the village, and Brockweir sits within the AONB and is a SSSI in the Lower Wye Valley.



## Geology

The geology of the parish is fairly simple; essentially it consists of a lower section of Devonian red sandstone overlain in part by Carboniferous limestone.

The sands are approximately 350 million years old and were deposited over 30 million years in a semi-arid delta in restricted stretches of water, rivers with intermittent floods and with the addition of added windblown material from surrounding deserts called loess.

The lowest and oldest of this lower series are the Brownstones, fine grained purple grey micaceous sands. They occur in the lower valley but are not seen as outcrops because they are relatively soft; they are often encountered in foundation excavations in lower Brockweir. After a break in deposition associated with the Caledonian tectonic event the rocks of the Upper Old Red Sandstone were deposited. These were more significant for the area both geographically and historically. They consist initially of very hard coarse conglomerates, cemented with silica called 'Jackstones'. They form the upper resistant lip of the valley's profile and were extensively quarried for the manufacture of millstones, gateposts and as building material.

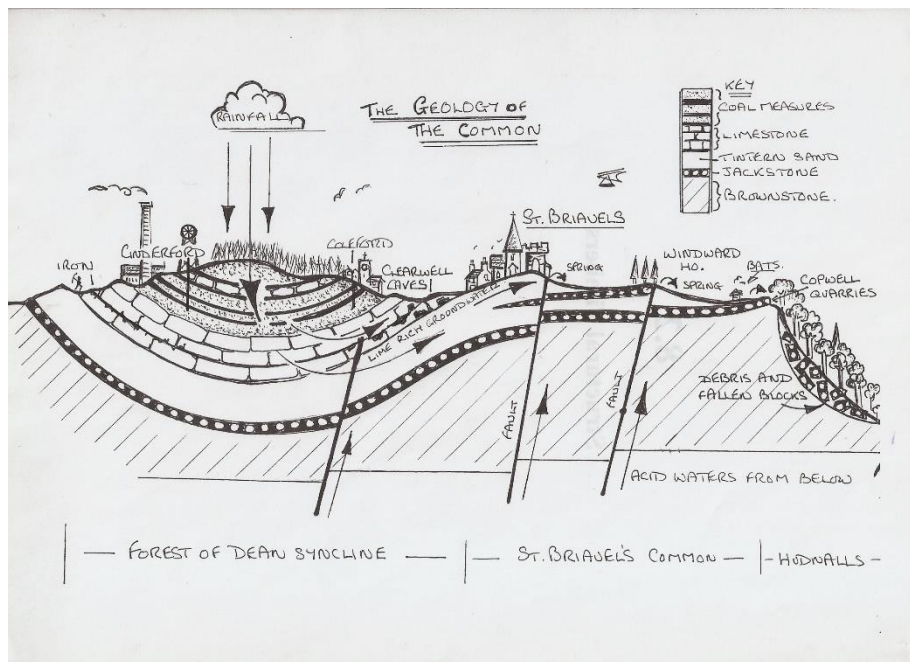
In turn these are overlain by the softer buff sandstones of the Tintern Group which outcrop in the Hudnalls over to Harthill and north to the valleys of Mork. The soils they produce are called brown earths, typically well drained coarse loams, acid and only moderately fertile supporting poor grassland and even heath. Because Brockweir sits at the bottom of a steep valley, these naturally occurring stones have provided a ready source of building material. The houses, cottages and walls including field boundaries of Brockweir are largely constructed from a combination of Jackstone and sandstone.

The end of the Devonian period is marked by an extensive rise in sea level and the transition from a land based fluvial system to a clear warm marine environment rich in life shown by the lower

limestone group abundant in fossils. These rocks, which used to be quarried for building lime, are currently economically the most significant being actively quarried at Stow. They cap the higher areas of the parish from Poolfield, east of Hewelsfield and St Briavels onto Bearse Common providing the richer farmland capable of arable production.

This sequence of outcrops repeats in reverse to the east down to Clanna, after it was deposited there followed the Hercynian tectonic event causing major uplift erosion and faulting. These faults, though not active today are lines of weakness and cross all over the parish witnessed by the numerous springs. The largest, the St Briavels Fault runs beneath the castle and over the common, an offshoot of which runs down the valley to Brockweir, along the course of Merricks Brook and passing through the heart of the village, creating the weir and then on to Tintern. These faults provide communication with deep aquifers and are the origin of the permanent wells that were traditionally the source of drinking water. Numerous springs saturate the ground and combine with surface run off, consequently streams in the area are often full and at times of high rainfall and tide are prone to flooding. A recent report estimates that in the future, accounting for global warming, the stream in Brockweir that drains 4 square kilometres of steep grassland will have to accommodate up to 940 gallons or 3 1/2 tons per second. This flows directly through the demolished CPL Oil depot site. A copy of the report is attached as an appendix.

Predominantly as a result of underlying geology the parish can be divided into five distinct geographical areas.



### *Upland calcareous farmland*

Larger hedged fields, lighter more fertile soils arable crops, little woodland.

### *Upland acid farmland*

Smaller hedged fields predominantly grassland, little woodland.

### *Valley slopes*

Small stone walled relic smallholdings now residential, much woodland with many springs and streams.



## *Flood plain*

Rough pasture prone to flooding.  
Village boundaries.



## *Archaeological significance*

### *Townscape Analysis*

#### *Setting*

Brockweir is a small, tightly clustered riverside settlement situated on the eastern bank of the river Wye. It is located within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

To the north and south narrow floodplain pastures bound the village. These can be seen extending up the valley sides to the north of the village and up Madgetts Hill to the east. There is no settlement along the valley sides to the south of the Conservation Area due to the steep landscape. To the north, linear settlements have developed along Underhill at various stages throughout Brockweir's history.

To the east, Brockweir & Hewelsfield Common is surrounded by relatively steep sided hills characterised by fields and scattered buildings, and in parts, dense woodlands. Across the river to the west, the landscape is characterised by steep sided hills with dense woodlands.



## *Skyline*

From the centre of the village, buildings climb up the hills to the east and the north and in these directions, the skyline is dominated by the varying shapes and heights of rooftops due to the haphazard development of the settlement, giving Brockweir village much of its characteristic outlook.

Further views can be obtained between buildings and on the outskirts of the settlement towards the hills surrounding the village to the south and the west, with wooded ridges of these hills dominating the skyline. The surrounding area is sparsely populated by rural homesteads, predominantly refurbished farm cottages interspersed with a number of 20<sup>th</sup> century bungalows. Fortunately, the traditional stone cottages are in the majority. Where new properties have been proposed, it has always been of paramount importance to the Parish Council that the rural atmosphere of the surrounding countryside needs to be maintained.

Long distance views of wooded hills and open countryside exist from the riverside towards the north along the river Wye, while a meander in the river to the south cuts off the long-distance views in this direction.



## Approaches

Vehicular access is from the east down Mill Hill with a relatively steep descent into the village, past 20<sup>th</sup> century suburban outlying houses on both sides of the road. A long-distance view down Mill Hill and across the river is terminated by the wooded hills on the other side of the river.

The centre of the village, where Mill Hill intersects with Underhill and the road to the oil yard past the Malt House and Monks Hall, is a natural hazard for unwary walkers from vehicles and bicycles descending Mill Hill.

Travelling from the west, Brockweir is approached across the tall cast iron bridge over the river Wye that provides views across and down into the village below. Situated directly opposite the bridge is the 16th century Manor House, and rooftops of surrounding buildings can also be seen. The ground around the foot of the bridge was raised considerably during its construction, causing a steep slope down towards the village once the bridge has been crossed. Glen Wye, another Tudor house, had a wing removed to enable the construction of the bridge. The road passes above the quayside before skirting the southern corner of the Manor House to reach the centre of the village where a visitor can fully appreciate its historic character.

A number of historic routes into the village are preserved as footpaths. From the north, Brockweir is approached down Underhill along narrow lanes lined with mature trees, hedgerows, walls and houses. Towards the centre of the village, the view is characterised by the roofscape and built environment of varying historic architectural styles.

Approaching from the south it is possible to enter the village either through the pastures along the riverbank and across a stile, past the Moravian church leading onto narrow lanes running between stone walls that cross the brook before entering the village, or via the Monks Path, an ancient (14<sup>th</sup> century) footpath that leads from Tintern Abbey into the heart of the village. The view approaching the village from the pastures is dominated by the 19th century Moravian chapel and Brockweir Farm. The view from the historic Monks Path that runs beneath overhanging tree canopies until it reaches the village, is of various ancient buildings including the Monks Hall and Malt House. This historic route emerges at the centre of the village by the derelict site of the old oil depot behind which rises the characteristic roofscape of Brockweir. Unfortunately, newer houses built up Mill Hill overlook the village, and some of these contribute little to the historic architecture of the village. However, there is little opportunity for further such development within the settlement boundary except at the old oil yard site, and any re-development should contribute to the aesthetics of the village.

There are long distance views of the village from Madgetts Hill along the Offa's Dyke footpath, and there is a well-trodden unmade road that leads down into the village with views that would be impacted by any ill-considered development of the oil yard.



## *Landmarks*

Due to its location on the valley bottom, there are few landmarks that can readily be observed from a distance other than the village itself and the cast iron bridge crossing the river Wye. This was completed in 1906 and is built in the style of a typical railway bridge, but it can only be observed from riverside locations in the village or from the Offa's Dyke footpath on Madgetts Hill. The river constitutes the boundary between England and Wales.

The listed Moravian Church, unlike many churches which have a chosen location on a hill or prominent landscape feature, was constructed on the location of a cock fighting pit, and lies on the very edge of the riverbank on the outskirts of the village and lower than the majority of buildings. Whilst it is relatively young in comparison with most of the buildings in the village itself, it certainly adds to the character through its simple arts & crafts architectural style.



## Views

The tightly clustered centre of the village with buildings climbing up the hill to the east leaves magnificent views of the fields and woodlands on the surrounding hills from within the village. Around the perimeter of the village there are good views into the surrounding countryside. These views change throughout the seasons due to the amount of tree cover, and the valley in autumn is a glorious sight. From the riverside and the bridge there are views both north and south along the river Wye. The wooded hills with their seasonal colour have inspired the likes of Wordsworth, Turner and Gainsborough as well as many amateur artists, many of who are regular repeat visitors along with the walkers and hikers.



## Structure

The built environment is characterised by a sporadic development with no predominant building pattern, giving Brockweir its unique character. The older historic buildings dating from the 14th to the 17th century are spread throughout the village with more recent infills, many of which can be dated to the 18th and 19th century. The majority of buildings are one and a half to two storey buildings, but due to the long historic development of the village, there is very little uniformity to the form and architectural styles of buildings. The houses and cottages are primarily constructed from local stone, and roofs are either clay tile or slate. Some of the older houses even have features that seem rather high-brow for humble village cottages. These include carved mullions, one of which has actually been used backwards. It suggests that Tintern Abbey was used as a quarry after Henry VIII had it destroyed in 1536.

Mill Hill road cuts through the centre of the village in an east-west direction. There are no other vehicular thoroughfares through the village, leaving navigation around the core of the village to narrow lanes with tight or no vehicular access, and to narrow cul-de-sac lanes to the settlements along Quayside, Brockweir House and Underhill to the north, and to Brockweir Farm to the south.

Buildings are set back from the roadside on Mill Hill except in the centre of the village, but are otherwise located alongside the roads and lanes. Most houses have no front gardens and entrances are directly onto the pavement or lanes. The focal point of the historic buildings in the village is the river, with most of these facing the riverside.

Apart from the village green by the Moravian Chapel and the quay, both of which are protected open spaces, there are no open public spaces between buildings.

The demolition in the late 1940's of a row of Victorian Cottages fronting the northern side of Mill Hill Lane has led to an open space now being used as a garden and parking. The demolition of the former HAPPA stables has led to an open space around the former oil depot, and the only building still standing on the site is the Old Mill. This demolition has opened up views into the heart of the village from the unmade road that descends Madgetts Hill.

Modern development (1950s and onwards) is concentrated to a few properties on both sides of Mill Hill Road, with the majority of buildings in the village dating to the late 19th century or earlier.

Property boundaries consist mainly of stone walls, on a few instances fences and hedgerows.





## *Hierarchy*

The oldest standing building in the village is the c14th century Malt House and Monks Hall, a Grade II\* listed building, originally a single building reputed to be a grange belonging to Tintern Abbey. Situated in the heart of the village, the building is a prominent feature. In the 19th century the building was used as a malthouse by the notable Jane family.

Other noticeable buildings in the village are the c16th Manor House directly opposite the bridge on the north side of the road and Glen Wye, a 15<sup>th</sup>/16th century house on the riverbank on the south side of the road. These are both Grade II listed buildings.

Historically, the Moravian Chapel (dated to 1832 and a Grade II listed building) and the adjacent Moravian Hall became important social, cultural and religious focal points for the community, and continue to perform this function.

Another socially important building is the pub “The Brockweir Country Inn”, the only remaining pub in the village. Brockweir was reputed to have had as many as 16 inns during the heyday of the river trade.

Brockweir Farm is a prominent building if the village is approached on foot from the south. This is reported to have a priest hole inside the chimney breast.

Of importance to the history of the village is the only remaining structure of the c18th century mill (in use until the early 20th century). Historic maps indicate that the mill comprised several buildings associated with a mill stream. There is evidence of a mill pond and leat further up the stream, and historic records record another mill in the 12th century of which no thing remains.

The Grade II listed Brockweir Bridge is a significant structure due the impact its construction had upon communications, social life, and the local economy historically, as well as being a well-known and much photographed landmark of today.

Other Grade II listed buildings within the Conservation Area are the Manse, attached to the chapel and now a dwelling; Abbey House (c16th); the Post Office (c16th); Spring Cottage (c17th)



and a 18th century field barn at Honeyfield Farm, all which are examples of the rich and varied local history.



## *Quality of Spaces*

Due to the tight boundaries around the built-up area as well as the nature and shape of the settlement, there are very few open spaces within the village itself. However, the surrounding countryside with its plethora of public rights of way are only a few steps away (including the Offa's Dyke Path, the Monks Path and the Wye Valley Walk on the Welsh side of the river).

Adjacent to the Moravian Chapel and Hall is a protected open space covered in grass and surrounded by stone walls and some mature trees.

The quay on the riverfront is protected as an important open area and is both aesthetically and historically of interest. In fact, it is a favourite spot for walkers to rest on a well-sited bench next to the river.

There are some areas of negative space, these will be dealt with under a separate heading.



## **Landscape setting**

### *Topography*

### *Identification of Sub Areas*

Brockweir is a small Conservation Area. The riverside sub-area includes an ancient wharf, as well as a path running North along the bounded by the river, river meadows, woods and river. This path was originally used to tow the trows that carried goods on the river above Brockweir. Some of the older houses show signs of historical use associated with the river trade.

The River Wye is a nationally designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an internationally designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The River Wye forms one of the longest, near natural rivers in England and Wales. The River Wye (Lower Wye) is a rare example of a near natural, large western eutrophic river which, unlike many rivers of a similar type, has not been subject to significant modification from human activities. The river is of special interest for three main aquatic plant community types - rivers on sandstone, mudstone and hard limestone, clay rivers and lowland rivers with minimal gradient, as well as for certain flowering plants and bryophytes.

The river is also designated for its importance for certain species including White-clawed crayfish, Sea lamprey, Brook lamprey, River lamprey, Twaites shad, Atlantic salmon, Bullhead and Otter.

There is another sub-area to the south of the village which is associated with the Moravian chapel. It includes the chapel itself, the old Sunday School which is used by various village societies and groups, the village grave-yards and some lawns.

The old CPL oil yard is currently a demolition site with the derelict old mill. A proposal to build a high-density development of 3 storey modern townhouses was refused planning Permission under P1543/14/FUL on 12th August 2015. The reasons for the Council's decision to refuse permission were:-

01. The proposed development, by virtue of its height, scale and prominence, fails to take proper account of and, causes unacceptable harm to the significance of the affected designated heritage assets and their settings, in this case the Grade II\* listed Malt House and the Brockweir Conservation Area. As a consequence it fails to preserve or enhance the setting of the nearby listed buildings and the character or appearance of the Conservation Area, as required under sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and is contrary to Section 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy CSP.1 of the Core Strategy.

02. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposed development would not have an unacceptable impact upon the biodiversity and ecology of the area contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and Policy CSP.1 of the Core Strategy.

The developer has since submitted a revised planning application with very little change to the previously refused scheme. The site itself is bisected by a stream that can flood badly after prolonged or heavy rainfall. When the oil company sold the site, it was cleaned up to an industrial rather than residential standard. A Flood Risk Review Report and Contaminated Land Review produced by HYDOGEO Groundwater and Environment were commissioned on behalf of Hewelsfield and Brockweir Parish Council on this site and are available to view on the parish website independent of this document.

The area could lend itself well for village use – perhaps a combination of light industrial and craft type premises along with much-needed parking. A sympathetic redevelopment of the site might include the restoration of the mill to generate electricity for the village for example.

About ¼ mile East up Mill Hill the village has both a village hall and an award-winning eco-shop and café with play area. These serve the larger community of Brockweir and Hewelsfield as well as the large number of tourists, hikers and guests of local holiday cottages.

## *Condition of built fabric*

The buildings in Brockweir are generally in good condition and are well maintained by their owners.

One exception is the former mill, which is currently preserved as an upstanding structure, but is in a poor condition. This building, whilst perhaps not significant in its architecture, is a significant remnant of Brockweir's past.

## *Buildings*

Brockweir contains houses of varying age and architectural styles, with a significant number of Tudor houses compared to other riverside settlements along the river Wye.

The buildings in Brockweir are largely of one and a half or two storeys in height. The historic buildings are of stone, roughcast render or stone rubble with slate and clay tiles roofs. Where taller buildings occur these are the exception. However, it is not just the height that gives Brockweir its unique appearance - it is the way buildings are positioned in the landscape. What is noticeable is that in the view eastwards from the bridge the buildings all appear very uniform in height despite the steeply sloping ground. But when looking from the south you see the modern houses on the south side of Mill Hill opposite the allotments standing out high above the old oil yard site, and their particularly light colour gives them far greater landscape impact. The historic buildings in the heart of the village are very obvious when viewed from the South East and immediately identify Brockweir as an ancient settlement. This is particularly obvious when walking the ancient Monks Path, the path from Tintern Abbey to Brockweir. Any development should not impact this view.

## *Occupation levels*

All houses in Brockweir are occupied, although some are used as holiday homes for rental and a further few as private holiday homes. The infrastructure of the village is already stretched with little communal parking, no centralised sewage system, and few facilities. Any significant development within the village boundaries should consider this. The only shop is run mostly by community volunteers and is located ¼ mile up Mill Hill. Whilst it is very popular, it probably would not be utilised for a weekly shop. There is no school within the parish, children travel to nearby towns for their education. There is also no bus service within the village, to access the local bus service where concessions can be used means walking uphill to the B4228. Travel concessions cannot be used by English residents on bus services which use the A466 on the Welsh side of the valley.'

## *Negative spaces*

The former oil depot and site of the former HAPPA stables are both negative spaces, but are in the process of being developed subject to planning permission. Any possible contamination or pollution issues arising from the former oil depot would need to be fully resolved at the time of any redevelopment if not before. The Parish Council would like to draw your attention to the Hydrogeo Contaminated Land and Flood Risk Review Reports which were commissioned by the Parish Council to inform future development of this sensitive site on the contamination and flood issues which need to be addressed within the site and these are available to view on the Hewelsfield and Brockweir Parish Council website.



### *Potential areas which could be enhanced*

The lack of car parking in the village is a cause of concern and impacts negatively on the village due to the number of cars being parked along the road down Mill Hill. Since the demolition of the buildings in the former oil yard no informal parking has been available on this site, and parked vehicles now extend some way up Mill Hill. This area also sees an excessive use of road markings.

On the northernmost perimeter of the Conservation Area is an open space that is privately owned. Having been cleared to a certain degree, the space is still used for storage of old haybales and could be enhanced.

### *Street Furniture*

There are a couple of wooden benches on the riverside overlooking the river Wye that are much used by walkers in the area. A traditional phone box is tucked away in a corner behind the car park on Mill Hill Lane. The approach into the village down Mill Hill is not subject to a 30mph speed limit, therefore street lighting is sparse. There are a few bollards to protect pavements from illegal parking.

### *Paving traditions*

Pavements are mainly tarmac. The amount of tarmac particularly in the centre of the village is in contrast to the historic houses. In the narrow lanes from the quay to Underhill and from the Moravian Chapel to the brook, there is a mixture of ancient cobbled surfaces and tarmac.

To the east there are grass verges rather than pavements, with vegetation that creeps over the road edge and softens its appearance. Paths along the verges have recently been tarmaced.

The historical surfacing was likely to have been cobbles, and some examples remain although most have been replaced with or drowned by tarmac. Certainly, cobbles would be more aesthetically pleasing.

## Wirescape

Overhead wiring is visually dominant in the centre of the village and on the bridge footing. It would be an improvement if these were underground.

## Local Building Patterns

- Vernacular is a term used to describe buildings that are built to suit the needs of the owner, with materials that are to hand, rather than following a set form of architectural style such as neoclassical or Gothic. Vernacular buildings are generally simple in form and primarily functional.
- Polite architecture is the reverse of vernacular; it relates to buildings that are architecturally designed in a well-defined style, using materials sourced from afar that sometimes needed to be transported into the area. This form of architecture generally relates to country houses and other status buildings.

The buildings in Brockweir are all vernacular in style, including the Moravian Chapel, which in many other cases portrays more architectural elements (arts & crafts) than the surrounding properties. The buildings demonstrate elements of almost every period of vernacular architecture, with a significant number of Tudor houses compared to other riverside settlements along the river Wye.

Some buildings do show elements of detailing, such as the windows on the 16th century Manor House, which have chamfered mullion stone casements, possibly salvaged from the site of Tintern Abbey.



The buildings in the centre of the village are important traces of Brockweir's social and economic development. The Malt House is thought to have been part of a grange belonging to Tintern Abbey while Glen Wye, Manor House, Abbey House and Quay House all have histories strongly associated with the trade and shipping industry on the river.

There are very few houses from the 20th century in the village itself and most of these are located to the east up Mill Hill Lane or along Underhill. The decline in building activity coincides with the decline in the trade on the river Wye, with the last ship to sail to Brockweir being the *Belle Marie* in 1914.

The buildings in Brockweir are largely of one and a half or two storeys in height. Where taller buildings occur these are the exception.

## Materials

The historic buildings are of stone, roughcast render or stone rubble with slate or clay tile roofs.

Another characteristic feature of the village are the high enclosed retaining walls either side of some of the lanes through the village, such as between the Moravian Chapel and the brook and between the quay and Underhill.

Brockweir seems to have largely avoided the late 20<sup>th</sup> century plague of concrete, and the buildings and walls are predominantly constructed from local stone. A number of the houses and cottages have been pebble-dashed, others have been returned to their original stone. Residents are proud of their village and there is a tendency to maintain the atmosphere through sympathetic improvements. Any poorly sited or ill-considered proposed developments are fiercely criticised and contested.

### Looking Ahead – conserve, enhance, create

- There is a need to conserve the historic heart of the village and the older dwellings that populate the hillsides;
- Where opportunities arise it would be desirable to improve the material finishes to some buildings and other surfaces for example more use of cobbles rather than tarmac.
- Where opportunities arise it would be desirable to decrease traffic speeds and volumes;
- It would be desirable to create off street public car parking provision for visitors.

## Activities, uses and linkages

The pub, which is dated from 1793, is continually busy and benefits from the large number of tourists who pass through the village, particularly along the footpaths from either Bigsweir or Tintern. It hosts activities such as the village book club and regular 'open mike' sessions.

The Moravian Hall is another community space, which is also regularly in use along with the old Sunday school. Outside of the Conservation Area, the Village Shop was built as the result of a community wide survey which voted for a new 'eco' village shop. The previous shop had closed and become a domestic dwelling prior to becoming a pine furniture shop. The building of the shop was funded by a grant and matched funding from villagers. The shop has received the Telegraph award for small village businesses. It runs with volunteer help and is a viable business. Since the shop opened a children's playground has been added again using grants.

The Mackenzie village hall, about ¾ of a mile up Mill Hill, hosts many and varied activities such as indoor bowls, the Brockweir Amateur Dramatic Society {BADS} productions, and the annual senior citizens lunch, many traveling musical productions and has an adjacent tennis court.

The Moravian Church Hall hosts various community groups such as table tennis, history society, pensioners' lunches and the like.

There are a number of home-based businesses in the village and its immediate vicinity including a leading historical stained glass restorer and a local cider producer. Further mixed development could enhance the village and it may be appropriate for the redevelopment of the oil yard site to offer opportunities for light industry as well as much-needed parking. Brockweir did not benefit from the

'Fastershire' implementation of high-speed broadband. There are a number of professionals who work from home, and fast broadband would certainly be of great benefit to creating local employment.

The parish council has created a number of workgroups aimed at village improvement and of maintenance of the extensive network of foot and bridle paths that surround the village. Brockweir attracts a considerable number of tourists and walkers who appreciate its ancient appeal.

## Images and associations

### *Sounds*

Rural sounds dominate, with birdsong and the more distinctive calls of pheasants, owls and buzzards being heard. However, the noise of the valley road can be intrusive when near the river. The river itself has many moods and only falls truly silent at high tide.

### *Associations*

The writer Flora Klickmann (1867–1958), who wrote several popular books about her experiences of living in the Wye valley as well as on other subjects, is buried in the Moravian churchyard.

Monk Optics observatory in the village is housed in the old school premises and the Brockweir Glass Company is in the village itself. Orchard Cider is produced along Underhill. The Brockweir Inn does a brisk trade from both locals and visitors. There are a number of livestock farmers, as well as some arable farming.

## Conclusion

Brockweir boasts a single surviving pub, an award-winning eco-shop, a Moravian Chapel, a village hall and a vibrant community. Brockweir has retained much of its character from when it was a busy port. It sits within the magnificent scenery of the lower Wye Valley, steeply wooded slopes that run down to the River Wye itself, and is largely a collection of ancient cottages and houses. These were originally inhabited by people who largely made their living from the river, whether through trade, salmon or elver fishing, or indeed providing hospitality to the traders. This eventually led to the Moravians building their chapel, presumably to save the village from debauchery.

This location places Brockweir somewhat at the mercy of the elements, and flooding can come from the rain-swollen streams running down through the village, or spring high tides sometimes exaggerated by low pressure from storms blowing up the Bristol Channel. If all three of these events coincide, then many of the lower lying houses of Brockweir will flood.

This contrasts starkly with the beauty of the setting for most of the year - river meadows surrounding the village, which host events such as an annual cricket match for example. The fauna includes a number of rare species of bats.

Offa's Dyke sits above the village and crosses through the parish, and the Wye Valley Walk is on the opposite bank of the river. The parish is criss-crossed by numerous footpaths, many of which traverse land that bears the evidence of ancient toil.

The village has developed over many centuries and thus created its own special ambiance. This has been recognised through its designation as a Conservation Area. Any development should be sympathetic to preserving this ambiance whilst adding to the facilities to support modern life, and not compounding



the congestion due to the limited underlying infrastructure. Brockweir, as a historic rural community, lacks many of the facilities one would expect in a modern urban environment such as mains sewage, gas etc. The particular character of the community should therefore be preserved by carefully considered sympathetic development including a possible restoration of the mill and leat. Any development should certainly consider the risk of natural factors such as pluvial and fluvial flooding.