

CDM/FMW0647

10 April 2012

Mr David M. Thomas
Traffic Engineering Manager
Traffic and Network Management
Wiltshire Council
Shurnhold
Bath Road
Melksham
Wiltshire
SN12 8DQ

Dear Mr Thomas

HOLT MANOR ESTATE – ROUTE BETWEEN LEIGH ROAD AND SUMMER LANE

Many thanks for meeting myself and Mr Harris, owner of Holt Manor, on site on Wednesday 4th April to discuss the above highway through the Holt Manor Estate. This letter seeks to summarise the matters discussed and to make suggestions for changes to local signage directing visitors to the nearby Great Chalfield Manor National Trust property. This issue is not related to the current application to divert the route of Public Footpath No 8.

Existing Situation

When departing Holt village via Leigh Road, Great Chalfield is signed through the Holt Manor Estate. Similarly, when heading in the opposite direction from Summer Lane, Holt and Trowbridge are signed through the Estate. The use of the signed route gives rise to a number of road safety issues as follows:

- Visibility in both directions when pulling out of the road through the Estate on to Leigh Road is poor. This leads to the risk of conflicts with straight ahead traffic travelling along Leigh Road;
- The route through the Estate is restricted in width such that only one car travelling in one direction or the other can use it at a time. There are very few opportunities for vehicles to pass without over running the well maintained verges which leads to long reversing distances and the associated safety risks when vehicles do meet;
- The need to reverse is greater at peak times for visitors to Great Chalfield Manor particularly when there are special events. The snowdrop charity open day on 12th of February this year for instance gave rise to numerous occasions when four or five vehicles at a time needed to reverse long distances. The lack of suitable passing places compounded the difficulties that arose with drivers at one stage attempting to force the locked gate to the old cricket pavilion area in order to create an additional passing place;

- The section between The Dower House and Summer Lane is particularly narrow with little or no verge and very poor forward visibility. The safety risks when opposing vehicles meet on this section are self-explanatory particularly given the traffic speeds used by some drivers when not anticipating oncoming vehicles;
- Visibility in both directions when pulling out of the road through the Estate on to Summer Lane is again poor particularly when looking towards Great Chalfield. The risks of conflicts at this junction are therefore high. Observations on site also show that drivers turning right on to Summer Lane frequently 'cut the corner' at the junction such that they are effectively on the wrong side of the road and could therefore come in to conflict with drivers turning left from Summer Lane;
- The route through the Estate is well used by walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The narrow road width and occasional high traffic speeds along the route leads to safety concerns for these road users. This is particularly the case on the section between The Dower House and Summer Lane where the road is very narrow and there are limited opportunities to step out of the carriageway when a vehicle approaches.

Drivers aiming to visit Great Chalfield Manor are also frequently confused when driving through the Estate and often mistake Holt Manor for Great Chalfield Manor. A driver departing Holt via Leigh Road is signed towards Great Chalfield through the Estate and having turned right is immediately faced by the Lodge House and large Estate gates. Beyond these the road narrows and clearly takes on the feel of a driveway through a parkland setting leading to a large Country House, i.e., a sense of arrival. It is obvious how the signage and these highway features can confuse visitors from outside the local area into thinking they have arrived at Great Chalfield Manor whereas in reality they need to continue on past Holt Manor. This confusion is evidenced by:

- The occupiers of The Lodge (Mr Harris himself for a number of months in late 2011) frequently experience disruption by people stopping, trying to turn around in the limited space available and knocking on the door for directions. When asked, they often say that they followed the road signs towards Great Chalfield but then got confused by the presence of The Lodge and the pillars/gates and thought they were on a private road;
- There are regular occurrences where people push the buzzer on the access panel to Holt Manor to ask/complain about why the gates aren't open in the false assumption that they are at Great Chalfield Manor;
- The main gates to Holt Manor itself used to be left open however drivers would enter, park outside the house, knock at the door and start wandering around the gardens in the mistaken belief that they were at Great Chalfield Manor. The previous occupiers of the house even had a car and caravan start setting up to stay directly in front of the house. The gates are now kept closed; and
- The occupiers of The Dower House, Mr Harris's daughter and family, have also encountered people walking around their gardens and opening the door to the house. When challenged, the 'intruders' have consistently stated surprise as they had assumed they were at Great Chalfield Manor. All gates and doors to The Dower House are also now kept locked although this shouldn't be necessary.

It is clear from the above that there are a number of significant safety, privacy and security issues associated with the current signing of Great Chalfield via the route through the Holt Manor Estate.

Great Chalfield Manor currently attracts approximately 20,000 visitors over its seven month annual opening period many of whom are first time visitors and unaware of the safety issues associated with the route. Many of these visitors arrive from the Holt direction and even if only a small proportion confuse Holt Manor with Great Chalfield Manor, it is clear that the number of such incidents is relatively high. It is understood that the National Trust is also looking to improve parking and other facilities at Great Chalfield Manor with the aim of increasing visitor numbers so if nothing is done the existing problems are likely to increase over time. There is no objection in principle to the National Trust's proposals however it is believed that changes to the road signage is now required to help offset the additional safety, privacy and security issues that are likely to arise.

Proposed Signage Alterations

Local residents and frequent visitors to Great Chalfield Manor will be aware of the limitations of the route and its associated safety issues and will be able to keep using the route in an appropriate way. These frequent users are also aware that Holt Manor is not Great Chalfield Manor and hence do not and will not cause the privacy and security issues.

The proposals are therefore aimed at drivers who are likely to be first time or occasional users of the route who will be unaware of the safety issues and could confuse Holt Manor with Great Chalfield Manor. Such drivers are likely to be primarily visitors to Great Chalfield Manor and hence their route choice could be influenced best through the introduction of additional brown tourist signs.

It is suggested that the existing 'Great Chalfield' directional sign at the Leigh Road junction near the Lodge and main entrance gates be removed. Local residents will be aware that they can turn right and use the route through Holt Manor to reach Great Chalfield however removal of the sign would likely result in first time and occasional users continuing along Leigh Road. This could be further encouraged through the introduction of an appropriate brown tourist sign guiding them towards Great Chalfield Manor via Leigh Road.

At the junction of Leigh Road and Summer Lane it is suggested that additional brown tourist signage could be introduced to guide Great Chalfield Manor visitors to turn right from Leigh Road to Summer Lane. A further brown tourist sign where Summer Lane passes the other end of the route through the Holt Manor Estate would complete the guidance signage.

For return journeys, it is suggested that the existing Holt and Trowbridge signage at the Summer Lane junction with the route through the Holt Manor Estate be removed and replaced with an 'All Routes' sign directing use of Summer Lane. Again, local residents and frequent users could continue to use the route past Holt Manor while first time and occasional users would be more likely to use Summer Lane and Leigh Road. New directional signage towards Holt and Trowbridge would also be required at the Summer Lane / Leigh Road junction.

It is believed that the above simple changes to signage would reduce the volume of traffic on the route through the Holt Manor Estate thereby reducing the safety risks to all road users. More appropriate guidance to Great Chalfield Manor would also assist in reducing the confusion that can occur thereby helping to address the current privacy and security issues. In doing so, local residents and frequent users of the route through the Holt Manor Estate would not be inconvenienced; indeed the safety of their journeys, whether by car, cycle or on foot, would also be enhanced.

10 April 2012
Mr David M. Thomas

Improvements to Leigh Road and Summer Lane

The standard of Leigh Road and Summer Lane, while for the most part better than the route through the Holt Manor Estate, also has a number of existing constraints. Increasing the volume of traffic using these alternative routes may therefore simply relocate the problems that currently arise unless improvements can be made.

The attached plans FMW0647-SK01A to SK04A identify locations where improvements to existing passing places and visibility will appropriately mitigate for the increased traffic flows on Leigh Road and Summer Lane. At present Summer Lane is narrow with limited forward visibility however, by improving and formalising the passing opportunities along this route, it will be possible to ensure inter-visibility between opposing vehicle movements which will be a significant improvement over the existing situation.

The land required to undertake the above is all either within the highway boundary or in the control of Mr Harris. It is suggested that Wiltshire Council implement the improved passing places to an appropriate standard and amend the signage as discussed above. Mr Harris would be willing to make a contribution towards the costs of the necessary works required.

I trust the above fully explains the justification for changes to the existing directional signage in the vicinity of Holt Manor. Your consideration of the above suggestions would be appreciated as soon as possible. In the short term, should you have any questions or require any additional information please feel free to call me on the numbers shown.

Yours sincerely

Chris Miles
Director

Mobile: 07912 444460

Email: chris.miles@fmwconsultancy.com

cc Mr P Harris Holt Manor
Ms K Howe Clarke Willmott

Enc: FMW0647-SK01A to SK04A