

Proposal for changes to UC 6020 and its vicinity

Unclassified road from Holt to Great Chalfield

These are the detailed comments by Holt Parish Council on CDM/FMW0647 dated 10 April 2012, and are to be read in conjunction with the covering letter to David Thomas dated May 2012.

General comments

1. The submission repeatedly refers to the route as the road “through Holt Manor Estate”, as if that were its principal characteristic. In fact it performs a number of functions; being amongst other things the access to Holt Manor and associated buildings, the principal route between Holt and Great Chalfield and for some a better route between Holt and Broughton Gifford than the busy B3107.
2. The general proposition is that UC 6020 is somehow different from the rural road network of which it is a part, or exceptionally poor. It is neither of these – it is typical of the mixed use country roads in this area; many of which are narrower still and/or have greater visibility problems. Drivers, local or not, are conditioned to them and behave appropriately. Perversely, the worst problem referred to in the submission is one of the applicant’s deliberate making – the installation of bollards, causing UC 6020 to be unsafe for cyclists and creating unnecessary difficulty when two vehicles meet.
3. The only complaints that we are aware of from the general public, at this time, concern measures which, perversely, have been implemented without approval and remain in place despite requests to remove them. We request the immediate removal of:
 - a. Bollards on UC 6020, which are a danger to cyclists and the subject of complaints.
 - b. The various unapproved signs around the junction of UC 6020 and Leigh Road, which are ludicrously confusing, resulting in complaints by visitors to Great Chalfield Manor.
4. We have not commented in detail on the proposed changes, which are deficient in many respects, as we see no valid reason to implement them in the first place.

Specific comments

Existing situation

1. Adverse comment is made about visibility at the junction of UC 6020 and Leigh Road. In the context of the rural environment this is a perfectly satisfactory junction, better than many, and drivers approach and use it in that context. We are not aware, among many users over many years, of any problems or complaints with respect to this junction either from local residents or from previous occupants of Holt Manor.
This is in marked contrast with the very difficult junction between Summer Lane and Leigh Road where there are known to have been minor accidents over the years. A valid argument has not been made for making inconvenient changes here and elsewhere in the road network.

2. The comment about UC 6020 being restricted in width reminds one of the boy who killed his parents and then pleaded for leniency on the grounds that he was an orphan. Before the bollards were installed, without Highways approval, the road handled its natural traffic volume perfectly well and whilst vehicles certainly did cross the verges from time to time the frequency of this happening was so low that it did not materially affect condition of the verges. This is a completely manufactured problem, readily fixed by taking the bollards out again. It is in no way a justification for making inconvenient changes here and elsewhere in the road network.
3. The “need to reverse” is simply an extension of point 2. above and is amenable to the same simple cure.
In passing, we note that no previous occupant of Holt Manor has ever reported or mentioned any such issues, nor have they apparently been observed by anyone local but the occupant of Holt Manor.
The National Trust (who can speak for themselves of course, and will, we trust also be consulted) have not made known any complaints from visitors to Great Chalfield Manor (except as at the end of this paragraph).
In their literature and guidance the National Trust is particular to guide visitors to appropriate access routes which do not – as it happens – include UC 6020.
Insofar as any specific problems with visitors to Great Chalfield Manor might exist, a preferred approach would be for the occupants of Holt Manor to engage in a constructive dialogue with the National Trust rather than to use these reported incidents to make inconvenient and dangerous changes here and elsewhere in the road network.
In the meantime, as with the bollards on UC 6020 (see paragraph 2. above), at least some of the problems which visitors to Great Chalfield experience are of Holt Manor’s own making – of late visitors have been complaining about the confusing, unapproved signage at the junction of Leigh Road and UC 6020.
4. The section of UC 6020 between the Dower House and Summer Lane is no different from many other stretches on roads along the various routes under consideration and in this rural area in general. Drivers are used to tackling them and we are not aware of any unusual problems having arisen in this specific stretch. It seems therefore that this theoretical argument is not being advanced for road safety but is to simply move vehicles away from Holt Manor.
5. The observations about visibility at the junction between UC 6020 and Summer Lane are not appropriate to the context of a rural road network. This appears to be a perfectly normal junction and is not one at which we, representing Holt Residents, are aware of any problems at all.
When referring to drivers “turning left from Summer Lane” it is said that drivers on UC 6020 are “effectively on the wrong side of the road”. As the author has already stated repeatedly, these are all largely single track roads with passing places and drivers are fully conditioned to such occurrences, indeed expect them and drive with appropriate caution if only for their own safety.
The observations about traffic behaviour at this junction are taken out of their proper context and are not an appropriate justification to make inconvenient changes here and elsewhere in the road network.
6. The concern for walkers, cyclists and horse riders is commendable but enquiries among those users have not, to date, elicited any such concerns or any deterioration over a 30 year time span except as below. This would seem to indicate that the arguments are theoretical in order to justify a desired conclusion, as opposed to being evidential, in support of inconvenient changes here and elsewhere in the road network.

We are however aware of complaints about the newly installed bollards which make it much more difficult for cyclists simply to veer on to the verge of UC 6020, as they used to do. They now have to dismount in the road first, which makes them quite vulnerable in the face of an oncoming vehicle.

7. The reported confusion between Holt Manor and Great Chalfield Manor seems to be a new phenomenon, as those previous occupants of Holt Manor who have been contacted do not recollect any such incidents.
A principal cause of any such confusion, should it exist – and there are no reports that we are aware of from visitors to Great Chalfield Manor – is the lack of a clear enough sign at Holt Manor identifying it as such. This would very easily be rectified. The occupant of Holt Manor is clearly not averse to adding signs (many signs) to the rural locale, so a sign to Great Chalfield Manor attached to either or both of the Holt Manor wall and the Dower House itself would be a simple and effective solution and one which does not rely on drivers having made the right choice at junctions. However the focus on getting rid of the traffic rather than stopping people from ringing the wrong bell illustrates what this submission is really aimed at. As above, these reported issues should also be worked on with the National Trust.
8. It is normal to keep ones gates closed – that is what gates are for. As in point 7, local signage would address this issue.
9. Anyone who wandered into the Dower House garden – with no indication or clues whatsoever of it being a National Trust property – is not going to be deterred by distant traffic signs. As above, if this really is an issue, a sign to Great Chalfield Manor at the affected spot would be the best approach.
Other local residents find it perfectly normal to keep their doors locked and the argument that the Dower House doors should be able to be kept unlocked is faintly ludicrous.
10. The submission goes on to say that “it is clear from the above that there are a number of safety, privacy and security issues . . .”. Holt Parish Council does not find these matters clear at all, either as evidenced by their own observations or by the weak, manufactured and sometimes specious arguments put forward in the submission. In the ensuing section some of the proposals for changes are considered to make safety and convenience worse, not better.
11. The assertions about visitors to Great Chalfield Manor and the routes which people take are largely anecdotal and are not supported by our own experience, for instance visitor complaints or extensive, long-standing local experience. You can rest assured that people are quick to complain when such issues genuinely arise! Contrary to the assertions made, it is not at all clear to Holt Parish Council that the standard of driving is inappropriate to the UC 6020 or its junctions at either end, that there are real safety issues, that the “privacy” issues are any different from those experienced by anyone who lives beside a road or that “the number of such incidents is relatively high”. Holt residents are also occasionally asked for directions to facilities in the village, or to local destinations, and we regard such activity as being part of the fabric of community life. To set one small area apart from such generosity of spirit may be a personal objective and one on which we have no comment to make, but to use it as a reason to inconvenience the majority of users of a public highway is regarded as inappropriate.

Proposed signage alterations

There is no evidence that we are aware of that visitors in general drive inappropriately on the local rural road network, or specifically on UC 6020.

The National Trust works hard to plan and publicise appropriate routes to Great Chalfield Manor and, if there remain problems, the best way to address these, as indicated above, is considered to be signage on Holt Manor wall and on the Dower House itself, as well as constructive dialogue with the National Trust.

A summary of the proposed signage alterations is that they are considered to be unnecessary, inconvenient and in general will create a situation which is less safe than the present arrangements.

Holt Parish Council opposes in principle the unnecessary concentration of traffic on any part of the rural road network, albeit that local people may disregard the signs. If there are not a lot of “lost” visitors, then re-routing them will make no difference to anything, and if there are (which we doubt) then concentrating them on any particular road will only shift problems from one place to another which we feel is singularly unproductive.

1. The idea of directing traffic heading for Great Chalfield up Leigh Road to turn right into Summer Lane is regarded as a significantly backward step. However you modify the geometry, the right turn into Summer Lane is inherently very dangerous being on a sharp, blind bend where we are aware of a number of minor accidents over the years. This route is also significantly longer, which is a retrograde step for a number of reasons.
2. The idea of signing traffic from Great Chalfield to Holt via Summer Lane suffers from the same negative aspects. If this were a genuine attempt to even out the traffic flows and avoid problems of vehicles meeting each other on narrow roads, rather than simply shifting them away from a particular stretch of road, why has the proposal to create a one-way system not been considered? Traffic to Great Chalfield could go along UC 6020 and traffic from Great Chalfield along Summer Lane. This would completely avoid any difficult turns into Summer Lane and obviate any traffic meeting on narrow roads in a far better way than “passing places” which are never where you want them.

Improvements to Leigh Road and Summer Lane

Changes to Summer Lane are only worth considering if the proposition that there are material safety, privacy and security issues with UC 6020 holds water. As we do not accept this proposition, we see no reason to comment on what therefore appear to be pointless proposals which are anyway of no particular intrinsic merit.

Remedial action

Whilst this theoretical debate continues, UC 6020 has seriously misleading signage and dangerous bollards – and we have direct evidence of both of these negative aspects. We ask that these be removed immediately to restore the previously satisfactory situation and as a practical demonstration that safety really is one of the driving forces behind the submission.