Statement of Case — Neil Gibbs:

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
The Definitive Map and Statement of
Public Rights of Way for Gloucestershire

Ref: ROW/3377321 - Additional Public Footpaths across land known as Verney Fields and Surrounding Area, Stonehouse Parish Modification Order 2025

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Ref: & ROW/3365454 - Additional Public Footpath Connecting Oak Way and MST30, Stonehouse Parish Modification Order 2025

1. My name is Neil Gibbs and I am a retired Police Sergeant and have lived and worked in the Stonehouse area of Gloucestershire since roughly 1976. For the last 13 years of my police service, I was the Sergeant in Charge of community policing in the Dursley and surrounding areas, but I have also served in Stonehouse, Stroud, Nailsworth and Gloucester city. During my service I have had to deal with many disputes over land ownership and disputes between neighbours. I am quite aware how challenging and protracted some of these types of issue are.

2. I have lived in Stonehouse all of that time and for all of that time have been a keen walker and runner, using roads and footpaths around the local area at all times of the year and in all weathers.

3. For several decades I have used Verney Fields and the woodland above as a place to run and walk. It would be impossible for me to list specific dates and times when I have used Verney Fields, but it would be reasonable to say I have done so several times each month since the mid 1980's.

4. The woods are owned by the Town Council but for many years it was unclear, even to the Town Council, who owned Verney Fields. Whoever the landowner was, they certainly had no interest in maintaining or using the land which is crossed by two public footpaths marked on the Ordnance Survey map. In my memory, the land has never been farmed or cultivated and had been left simply to its own devices which made it a

haven for wildlife and plants. In consequence, for decades, the land was openly used by the people of Stonehouse as an area of free recreation. There were no barriers or restrictions imposed, no notices and I do not ever recall seeing the land in question grazed by farm animals. In consequence, I believe the land was effectively in practice a rough recreational area. I never felt the need to seek permission to go across the land, either on or off the official footpaths. I do understand the legal difference between land which is has permitted public access, such a common land and that which is privately owned with no access. I think it fair and reasonable to say that most local people looked upon Verney Fields as a place for free resort and unfettered enjoyment as it offers an excellent viewpoint over the town and has a well-known local landmark – the Verney Oak which for decades had a public bench beneath it.

5. All of this changed when it became apparent that the land had been sold to a party in 2023 who initially refused to even identify themselves. Thereafter, followed a sad and quite unnecessary series of events whereby the land was barred with barbed wire, aggressive signage threatening legal action installed and video surveillance of the fields imposed. There has been so much barbed wire installed that the previously open aspect of the land has been literally ruined. In addition, there have been several caravans dumped on the land and a series of suspicious fires which have polluted the land and damaged the Verney Oak.

6. If ever there was a case where the local people of a town had a well-established (if unstated) right to use the countryside on the verges of their settlement, this is surely it.

7. I hereby declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief this is a true statement

Signature *Neil Gibbs* [redacted] **Date 24.08.2026**.....