Proof of Evidence – Sarah Douglas:

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

&

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

1. I am not related to the current landowner, nor to any of the previous landowners.

2. My name is Sarah Douglas. I live in Pearcroft Road in Stonehouse. I have lived on this road since 1993. I have walked the footpaths through Verney Fields and up to, and around Doverow Hill throughout the period 1993-2026. I have worked from my home on Pearcroft Road since 1993 and have walked on the network of paths most weekdays throughout the last 33 years, including the period 2003-2023. I walked on the paths mainly in the mornings between 7.30 and 9.00am, but also during the day at weekends and in the evening in summertime. The network of footpaths around Verney Fields and Doverow Hill were key factors in my decision to buy a house in Pearcroft Road, as the paths provide direct and easy access to the nearby countryside and rural landscapes.

3. My morning walks through Verney Fields were my 'commute' to work, valuable for my physical health and mental wellbeing. I usually walked a circular route, starting from, and returning to, Pearcroft Road, going up to Far Westrip Farm using a section of the Cotswold Way National Trail and returning via Doverow Woods and the well-used paths through Verney Fields. The route was just over 2 miles. I usually walked the paths alone during the week, and with my partner, child and sometimes with friends, at weekends.

4. I walked through Verney Fields on well-used paths at least 4 times a week, most weeks, from 1993 until 2023, throughout the year. I cannot recall any obstacles on the paths prior to 2023. I have never used force to gain access to any of the paths. I do not recall seeing damage or obstructions to the paths until 2023, when notices, fencing and cameras appeared, limiting access. I have never been stopped by a landowner or asked to leave the route, when I have been walking on the paths through Verney Fields.

5. I knew Martin Fletcher when he farmed at Grove Farm as I occasionally took his granddaughter to or from her school in Kings Stanley. He knew that I walked through his fields regularly and we talked amicably about the wildlife in the fields. I often saw Martin on my walks, when he was on his tractor or with his stock in the fields, and we always said hello or waved at each other. He seemed content to have people walking through his fields. My perception is that people appreciated this and treated his land with respect. I never heard anyone abusing Martin or shouting at him. Martin Fletcher never asked me not to walk through his fields at any time, nor to stay off his land. He never told me that he objected to me or other people walking through the fields.

6. The paths through Verney Fields were, and are, well-used by local people walking to and from Stonehouse for work, school and access to the town and its train station. The paths are also used by runners and people exercising their dogs throughout the year. Over the 33 years that I have lived in Stonehouse, from 1993 to 2026, I have frequently met, and continue to meet, the same people each day, along the paths. I pick up any litter I find along my walks and notice other people doing this too. I have also noticed that most of the dog walkers pick up their dogs' faeces. I have never seen a dog 'out of control' when I have been walking on Verney Fields or Doverow.

7. I used the footpath that runs parallel to MST30 whenever I needed to extend my daily walk to go into Stonehouse, to go to the shops, the post office, dentist or library. I chose to walk on the path that runs parallel to MST30, rather than on MST30 itself, because it gave me a route through open landscape, with good visibility. MST30 passes through a strip of woodland and as a lone female walker, I didn't, and don't, feel safe to walk through dark woodland on my own. I used the route that runs parallel

to MST30 about once a month from 1993 to 2023. It gave me a short cut from my circular walk, into central and north Stonehouse via Verney Road.

8. The people of Stonehouse value Verney Fields highly. The site is an important 'green lung' for the town, easily accessible from the town's roads and housing, and giving access to Doverow Hill, one of the town's key natural assets. My son and I walked through the Verney Fields up to Doverow throughout his childhood, visiting the woods to look at the wildlife and enjoy the views. We tobogganed down the slope below Doverow towards Verney Road whenever there was enough snow and we loved sitting on the bench under the oak tree, looking across town to the Malverns.

9. Verney Fields and Doverow are also a valuable ecological resource for local people, with a range of wildlife habitats including pasture, scrub, hedgerows and woodland. The sites are important accessible countryside for the people of Stonehouse, offering outstanding views along the Cotswold Edge and the Severn as well as the Stroud Valleys. Access for local people to the countryside to the west and south of Stonehouse is restricted by the need to cross working railway lines and the former Stroudwater Canal, making Doverow and Verney Fields particularly valuable as green space for the town.

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

Signature [redacted] ..... **Date** 4 Sept 2026