Proof of Evidence – Mark Organ:

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. My name is Mark Organ, and I live at [redacted] Oak Way, Stonehouse, GL10 2QJ. I was born in 1959 and have lived in Stonehouse continuously since September 1986. Having lived in the town for almost forty years, I have become very familiar with the footpaths, countryside and surrounding area, including the land known locally as Verney Fields. I have personally used the claimed routes from shortly after moving to Stonehouse in 1986 until the change of ownership in 2023. My evidence is based entirely upon my own personal experience and observations.

2. The routes covered by my evidence include the claimed paths linking MST27, MST28, MST30 and MST62, together with other claimed links shown on the Order Plan appended **MO1.** Throughout my years in Stonehouse, I used these routes on foot for exercise, recreation and family walks, frequently incorporating them into circular walks around Verney Fields and the surrounding countryside.

3. There were short periods when my use reduced due to family commitments, particularly between about 1991 and 1994 when my children were very young and again around 2003 to 2004 during my wife's pregnancy. Outside those periods I continued to use the routes regularly.

4. When I first moved to Stonehouse, my use of the routes was mainly for my own recreation and local walking. However, my use increased considerably from around 1996 when my eldest son was about four or five years old and able to enjoy longer

walks. From then onwards the claimed routes became an important part of family life. My wife and I regularly walked them with our three children, both as destinations in themselves and as part of longer circular walks. This pattern continued throughout their childhood years and remained frequent until my youngest child was around twelve years old, approximately in 2016. Even after the children became young adults, we continued to walk these routes together as a family right up until 2023. As a result, throughout most of the challenge period from 2003 to 2023, I was using the claimed routes regularly and openly with my family.

5. Whilst walking in the area, we routinely used the claimed routes because they were clearly visible, easy to follow and formed an obvious network linking different parts of the countryside. Throughout the years that I used them, the routes remained open, apparent on the ground and readily navigable. There was always a clear line to follow, and I never experienced any difficulty finding the way.

6. The condition of the routes was one of the reasons they became such an important part of our family walks. They provided safe and enjoyable opportunities for my children to experience nature at first hand. The fields, hedgerows, wildlife and open countryside made the area particularly attractive for family outings. The routes also offered spectacular views across the surrounding landscape, which was one of the main reasons we returned to them repeatedly over many years. The paths formed an important part of our family's recreational life and continued to do so until 2023.

7. Throughout my use of the routes, I always believed them to be available for public use. I never sought permission from any landowner or occupier, nor was permission ever offered to me. If I had believed permission was required, I would have expected to seek it. No such request was ever made because the routes appeared to be openly available to anyone wishing to use them.

8. For the vast majority of the period during which I used the routes, I saw no signs suggesting that access was private, prohibited or dependent upon permission. My recollection is that signs only began appearing around 2022 or 2023, shortly before or around the change of ownership. Their appearance came as a genuine surprise because it was completely inconsistent with my experience of using the routes over the

preceding decades. Prior to that time, I had seen nothing to indicate that members of the public should not use them.

9. I was never stopped, turned back, challenged or told that I was trespassing. No landowner, tenant, employee or representative ever informed me that the routes were not public. Had such an event occurred, I would have remembered it clearly. The absence of challenge over such a long period reinforced my belief that public use was accepted.

10. The routes were not only important to my family but also formed part of community life. During periods of snowfall the fields were regularly used for sledging and similar outdoor activities. My own family took part in these activities on numerous occasions. Such use was entirely open and visible.

11. I also disagree with suggestions that the existence and use of the claimed paths contributed to damage to fences, gates or other structures. During the many years that I used the routes, I observed that walkers generally kept to the established paths. The routes were obvious, well used and easy to follow. In my experience, having clearly defined routes encouraged people to remain on them rather than wander elsewhere across the land. I never personally witnessed users of the claimed paths damaging fences, gates, boundary features or other property. The use I observed was recreational in nature and consisted mainly of walkers, families and local residents enjoying the countryside and views. This does not accord with suggestions that use of the routes led to damage or misuse of the land.

12. In relation to points raised by objectors, I respectfully disagree with any suggestion that public use of the claimed routes was limited, infrequent, permissive or unknown to landowners. My experience was the opposite. From 1986 until 2023 I used the routes openly and without interference. There was no need to seek permission, no indication that permission was required and no challenge from anyone associated with the land. If owners or occupiers wished to demonstrate that public use was not accepted, there was ample opportunity to communicate that position. In my experience, that did not occur until signs appeared very recently.

13. I also disagree with any implication that the recent signs reflect the historic position. Whatever the intention behind signs erected around 2022 to 2023, they do not alter what I personally witnessed during the preceding decades. My evidence relates principally to that long period when the routes were used openly and without objection.

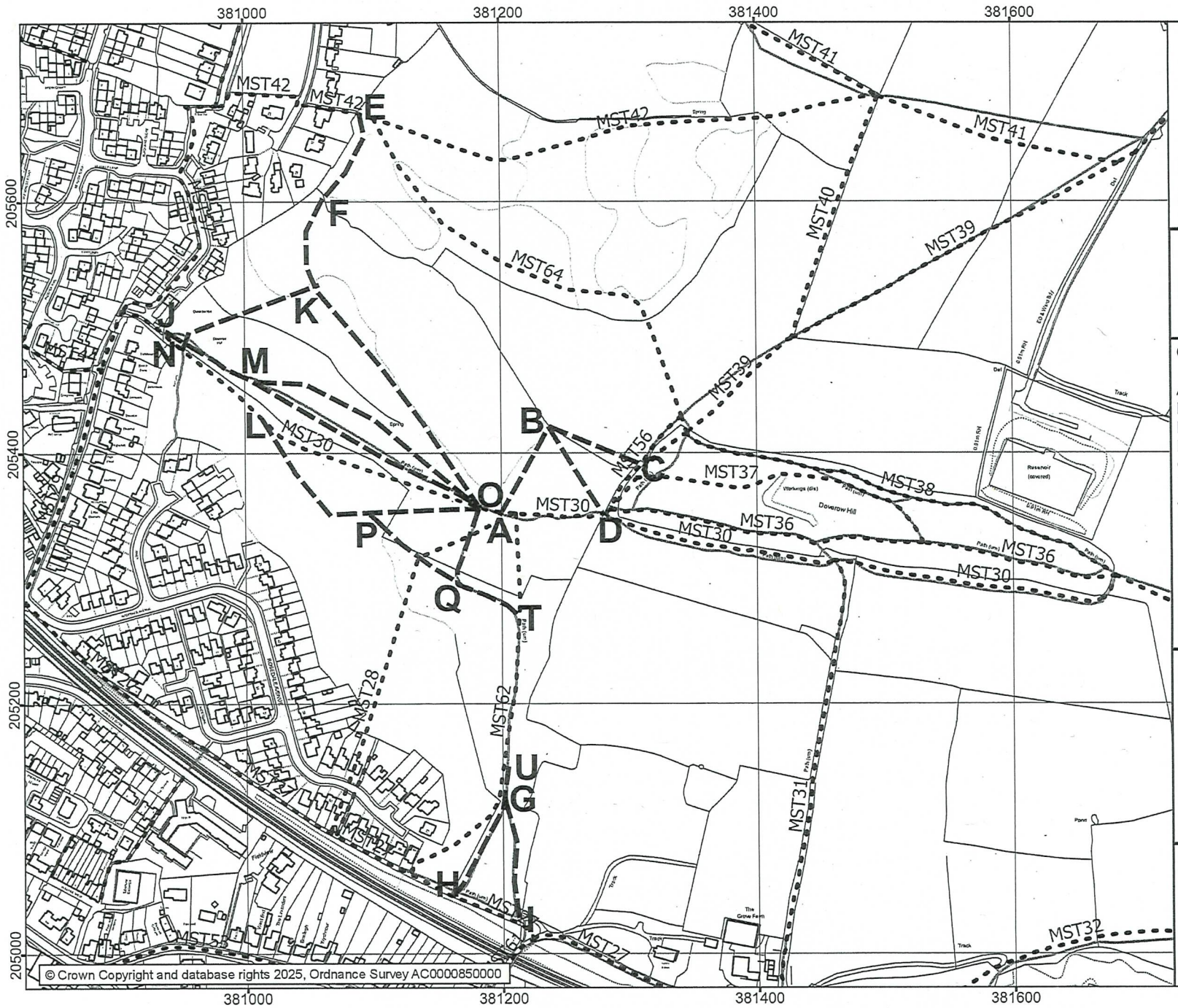
14. In summary, I have lived in Stonehouse since September 1986 and have personally used the claimed routes throughout most of that period. They formed an important part of my own recreation and my family's outdoor life, particularly between 1996 and 2023. My use was always open, without force, secrecy or permission. I was never challenged, never turned back and never told that the routes were private. Until very recently I saw no signs indicating that public use was not accepted. For these reasons, based on my own experiences over nearly four decades, I believe the evidence supports the recording of the claimed routes as public footpaths.

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

Signed: _[redacted]
M.Organ

Dated: __27/08/2026_____

M01



ADDITIONAL PUBLIC FOOTPATHS ACROSS LAND KNOWN AS VERNEY FIELDS & SURROUNDING AREA, STONEHOUSE PARISH

DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDER 2025

Claimed footpaths:

A-B
B-D
B-C
E-F-K-O
O-Q-T
N-K
J-O
M-O
L-O
P-Q
U-H
G-I

Public paths unaffected by this Order

Highway Records
Shire Hall, Westgate Street,
Gloucester GL1 2TG
Tel. 01452 328981
www.gloucestershire.gov.uk

Drawn by: J Harris
SCALE: 1:4,000
DATE: 08/01/2025

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