Order Decisions

Site visit made on 28 March 2017

by Alan Beckett BA MSc MIPROW

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Decision date: 26 April 2017

Order Ref: FPS/Q2500/7/86 ('Order A')

- This Order is made under Section 53 (2) (b) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 ('the 1981 Act') and is known as the Lincolnshire County Council (Amendment of Lindsey County Council (Rural District of Louth) Definitive Map and Statement Evidential Events (No. 2) Modification Order 1992.
- The Order is dated 19 June 1992 and proposes to modify the Definitive Map and Statement for the area by adding a public footpath as shown in the Order plan and described in the Order Schedule.
- There was one objection outstanding when Lincolnshire County Council submitted the Order to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for determination.

Summary of Decision: The Order is not confirmed.

Order Ref: FPS/Q2500/7/87 ('Order B')

- This Order is made under Section 53 (2) (b) of the 1981 Act and is known as the Lincolnshire County Council (Amendment of Lindsey County Council (Rural District of Louth) Definitive Map and Statement – Evidential Events (No. 1) Modification Order 2008.
- The Order is dated 12 December 2008 and proposes to modify the Definitive Map and Statement for the area by adding a public footpath as shown in the Order plan and described in the Order Schedule.
- There was one objection outstanding when Lincolnshire County Council submitted the Order to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for determination.

Summary of Decision: The Order is not confirmed.

Order Ref: FPS/Q2500/7/88 ('Order C')

- This Order is made under Section 53 (2) (b) of the 1981 Act and is known as the Lincolnshire County Council (Amendment of Lindsey County Council (Rural District of Louth) Definitive Map and Statement – Evidential Events (No. 4) Modification Order 1992
- The Order is dated 19 June 1992 and proposes to modify the Definitive Map and Statement for the area by adding a public footpath as shown in the Order plan and described in the Order Schedule.
- There was one objection outstanding when Lincolnshire County Council submitted the Order to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for determination.

Summary of Decision: The Order is proposed for confirmation subject to the modifications set out in the Formal decision.

Procedural Matters

- 1. None of the parties requested an inquiry or hearing into the Order. I have therefore considered this case on the basis of the written representations forwarded to me. I made an unaccompanied inspection of the paths at issue on Tuesday 28 March 2017.
- 2. The Orders were made in response to applications made on 30 April 1986 by South Willingham Parish Council for the addition of claimed footpaths within the parish. None of the applications made by the parish council appear to have been accompanied by a plan showing the claimed routes and although the applications were not therefore fully compliant with the requirements of Schedule 14 to the 1981 Act, the Council had processed the applications in the normal way.
- 3. The Council made Orders A and C in 1992. The Council had also made an order relating to the route shown in Order B in 1992 but that order had been found to be fundamentally flawed and incapable of being confirmed. The Council subsequently re-made the order as Order B. All the Orders were made on the basis that a reasonable allegation of the existence of the claimed footpaths could be made. However, as the Council acknowledges, the test to be applied to the evidence for the Order to be confirmed is the civil standard of proof; that is, on a balance of probabilities. The Council has conducted a review of the evidence submitted in support of the applications and now considers the evidence to be unreliable; the Council no longer supports the confirmation of Orders A and B; however, the Council considers that the evidence is sufficient for Order C to be confirmed in part. South Willingham Parish Council no longer supports the confirmation of any of the Orders.

The Main Issues

- 4. The main issue in relation to all three Orders is the requirements of section 53 (3) (c) (i) of the 1981 Act namely, whether the evidence discovered, when considered with all other relevant evidence available, shows on the balance of probabilities that public rights of way not shown in the map and statement subsist over the land in question.
- 5. In a case where there is evidence of claimed use of a way by the public over a prolonged period of time, the provisions of section 31 of the Highways Act 1980 ('the 1980 Act') are relevant. Section 31 provides that where a way has been actually enjoyed by the public as of right and without interruption for a full period of 20 years, that way is deemed to have been dedicated as a highway unless there is sufficient evidence that there was no intention during that period to dedicate it. The period of 20 years is to be calculated retrospectively from the date when the right of the public to use the way was brought into question, either by a notice or otherwise.
- 6. If the statutory tests set out in section 31 of the 1980 Act are not satisfied I am required to consider whether dedication of the claimed route has taken place at common law.

Reasons

Orders A, B and C

The date on which the right of the public to use the way was brought into question

7. It is not known what prompted South Willingham Parish Council to make the applications on 30 April 1986. In the absence of any specific event such as the obstruction of the claimed paths or the erection of prohibitive notices, section 31 (7A) and (7B) of the 1980 Act provides that the date of the application to add the path to the definitive map can be taken as the date public use was called into question for the purposes of section 31 (2). Accordingly, the relevant 20-year period for all three Orders is 1 May 1966 to 30 April 1986.

Order A

Whether the claimed right of way was used by the public as of right and without interruption for a period of not less than 20 years ending on the date the public's right to do so was brought into question

- 8. Ten user evidence forms were submitted in support of the application. These UEFs carry two signatures; one from the witness whose evidence is set out in the form with the second signature being that of the person who took their statement. The UEFs were completed between March 1985 and August 1985 and if the UEFs had demonstrated use up to the date the forms were completed, the evidence of use could at best demonstrate use up to a date which is six months prior to the date of bringing into question identified in paragraph 7 above.
- 9. However, an analysis of the UEFs demonstrates that claimed use of the path ceased around 1974. Of those respondents who gave specific dates for their use, the date claimed use ceased was stated to be 1965, 1974, 1960, 1968, 1960, 1970 and 1965. Two respondents gave vague answers to the question as to their period of use; '1950s and 1960s' was one response, 'as a child and twice in the last 12 years' was another. Four respondents therefore provided no evidence of use during the relevant 20-year period and three could only provide collective evidenced of use during the first eight years of the relevant 20-year period. The claimed evidence of use is therefore deficient by 12 years and is wholly insufficient to raise a presumption of dedication under the statutory scheme.
- 10. There are other aspects of the user evidence which give me cause for concern regarding the reliability of the evidence which was submitted. The UEFs state that the evidence relates to a path running from Moors Lane to Poplar Farm but none of the UEFs were accompanied by a map which showed the alignment of the route that is said to have been walked. In the absence of an application map and in the absence of maps accompanying the UEFs, it is by no means certain that the evidence of use set out in the UEFs relates to the route shown in the Order and not to a path on a different alignment. Consequently, in addition to the absence of evidence of use for the full 20-year period prior to 30 April 1986, I cannot be certain that the user evidence put forward in support of the application actually relates to the route identified in the Order.
- 11. Furthermore, on three of the forms the start and finish points have been either written in pencil, or in a different coloured pen or are in someone else's

handwriting. Whilst it may be possible that the terminal points of the route may have been completed by someone in the parish council prior to the forms being handed to witnesses to complete, equally it may be the case that the terminal points were inserted after the form had been completed. If that had been the case, the credibility of the evidence contained in those UEFs would be undermined; it cannot be determined with any degree of certainty that the evidence found in these three forms relates to the route applied for or the route shown in the Order.

12. In summary and for the reasons set out above, I conclude that the evidence of use adduced is insufficient to raise a presumption of dedication under section 31 of the 1980 Act.

Common law

- 13. There is no fixed period of use required for dedication at common law to be inferred but it is generally accepted that the shorter the period, the more intense the use must be. In addition, the use must be of a frequency that the landowner must have been aware of the use and had the opportunity to do something about it if he or she were so inclined. If use was of a frequency to make the landowner aware that a public right was being asserted and the landowner tolerated that use and did nothing to prevent it, it may be inferred that the landowner accepted that the public had a right to use the path as a public right of way.
- 14. Many of those who completed a UEF only provided vague answers with regard to the frequency of their use. One respondent claimed use about 3 or 4 times per year, another claimed use "about twice" per year. One respondent claimed to have used the path "many" times per year and seven respondents stated that they had used the path "several" times; none of the respondents provided any clarification as to what was meant by those terms. Furthermore, three of the respondents indicate on their forms that they or members of their family had owned or occupied some of the land crossed by the claimed path; such use may not therefore have been as members of the public. Two respondents appear to have been members of the same family and may have walked the path together as opposed to having used it independently.
- 15. An analysis of the claimed use shows that the period with the highest number of users is between 1951 and 1960 when six individuals claimed to have used the path throughout that period with two other respondents using it for part of that period. If three of these respondents had used the path in a private capacity, then use by six people "several" times per year is unlikely to have brought home to the owner of the land (whoever he, she or they might have been) that the claimed path was being used as a public highway. Although the claimed path is in a rural location, I consider that the limited extent of use is unlikely to have come to the attention of the landowner.
- 16. The objector contends that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate the existence of a public right of way over the route shown in Order A. It is not unusual for a landowner to deny knowledge of use of a path as a defence against a claim for a right of way. Where such a claim is made, it has to be viewed in the light of the user evidence and a determination made as to whether the extent of use would have led a reasonable on the spot landowner to realise that the public were using his land in such a manner as to assert that a right to do so existed. In those cases where the user evidence is of a daily or

weekly frequency and is in the physical numbers commensurate with the location of the path in relation to its proximity to a town or village, the likelihood of a reasonable owner being unaware of such use is less than where use is sporadic, infrequent and limited in number or where the path is in a remote location.

- 17. Where use is frequent and in large numbers the lack of action on the part of the landowner is more likely to be ascribed to acquiescence in the use of the path as opposed to ignorance of that use. However, in the current case, the limited extent and frequency of the use of the claimed path is such that it is highly likely that the owner was unaware of the claimed use. If the landowner had been aware of that use, the infrequent and sporadic nature of it is more likely than not to have been viewed as occasional trespass as opposed to members of the public asserting a right to cross the land.
- 18. There is no evidence of the landowner having taken any action to prevent use of the claimed path by the public or of any attempt having been made to dissuade the public from doing so. In the circumstances of this case, it would not be possible to reasonably ascribe the inaction of the landowner to toleration or acquiescence of the claimed use as he is unlikely to have been aware of it. I conclude that the frequency and extent of use in this case is insufficient for an inference of dedication to be drawn at common law.

Conclusion - Order A

19. Having regard to these and all other matters raised in the written representations I conclude that Order A should not be confirmed.

Order B

Whether the claimed right of way was used by the public as of right and without interruption for a period of not less than 20 years ending on the date the public's right to do so was brought into question

- 20. Eighteen UEFs were submitted in support of the application. Two of these forms have been discounted as one respondent used his UEF to provide evidence for all four paths claimed by the parish council and one respondent failed to provide any answers to the majority of questions posed by the form. The sixteen remaining UEFs were completed between August 1985 and October 1985 and provide evidence of use prior to the date when each form was completed. The period of claimed use ranges from 1911 to 1985. Taking October 1985 as the latest use evidenced by the forms, the evidence of use can at best demonstrate use up to a date which is six months prior to the date of bringing into question identified in paragraph 7 above.
- 21. Four respondents claimed continuous use of the path back to the mid-1960s. Despite there being individual and collective use of the path from 1966 (and earlier), the evidence of use as set out in the UEFs remains six months short of the full period of twenty years required by section 31 of the 1980 Act. The Council has not been able to interview any of those respondents who completed UEFs in 1985 although three respondents provided a statement to the Council in 2009 to clarify the evidence which they had given earlier.
- 22. Although one of the respondents stated that she had continued to use the path until 1988, her statement of 2009 also revealed that she had not used the full route and had not walked to the A157 beyond North Walk Farm. The two other

individuals who provided statements to the Council had also not walked to the A157. Furthermore, it is also uncertain as to whether those who completed UEFs had in fact walked to the A157 as, with one exception, none of the UEFs make reference to the path continuing beyond North Walk Farm. The evidence from the one form to describe the route as running between South Willingham and Hainton via North Walk Farm has been discounted as the majority of the questions posed by the form were unanswered.

- 23. Although use of part of the claimed path may have continued until 1988 what is required is evidence to demonstrate use of the whole of the claimed route. The additional evidence provided to the Council in 2009 does not, in my view, make good the deficiencies in the UEF evidence which was submitted in support of the application and which is of itself insufficient to demonstrate use of the whole of the claimed path throughout the relevant 20-year period under consideration.
- 24. Notwithstanding this conclusion, there are other aspects of the UEF evidence which give cause for concern. None of the UEFs submitted in 1986 were accompanied by a plan showing the route which the respondents had used. Consequently, it is uncertain whether the evidence from the UEFs relates to the route shown in Order B or to some other route in the vicinity. Ordnance Survey maps dating back to 1906 show the existence on the ground of an alternative route to that shown in the Order plan, and it remains a possibility that some of the respondents had used a cross-field path between Moors Lane and the A157 and not the headland route shown in the Order.
- 25. The concerns raised in paragraph 11 above regarding the UEFs submitted in relation to Order A are also applicable to those forms submitted in relation to Order B. In a number of cases, the start and end points of the path have been written on the form in a different hand from that which completed the remainder of the form. For the reasons given in paragraph 11 above, the credibility of the evidence set out in the UEFs is undermined by the way in which they have been completed.
- 26. In summary and for the reasons set out above, I conclude that the evidence of use adduced is insufficient to raise a presumption of dedication under section 31 of the 1980 Act.

Common law

- 27. As with the UEFs submitted in relation to Order A, those submitted in relation to Order B provided similarly vague responses to the question regarding the frequency of use. Only two respondents provided specific detail as to the frequency of use; one claimed to have walked the path 10 times per year and another claimed to have done so 19 times per year. As for the remaining fourteen UEFs, the responses were "hundreds of times", "several", "lots", "numerous", "a few", "about 15", "about 10" and "ten+". None of the respondents provided any clarification as to what was meant by those terms.
- 28. An analysis of the claimed use shows that the period with the highest number of users is between 1952 and 1960 when nine individuals claimed to have used the path throughout that period with two other respondents using it for part of that period. However, the limitations of the user evidence in relation to the statutory scheme are equally relevant at common law; it cannot be demonstrated with any degree of certainty that the user evidence relates to the

path described in the Order or that the whole of the route had been used. The frequency of use of the path which amounts to use once per month (and sometimes less) would have been insufficient for the landowner to have become aware of it. I conclude that the frequency and extent of use in this case is insufficient for an inference of dedication to be drawn at common law.

Conclusion - Order B

29. Having regard to these and all other matters raised in the written representations I conclude that Order B should not be confirmed.

Order C

Whether the claimed right of way was used by the public as of right and without interruption for a period of not less than 20 years ending on the date the public's right to do so was brought into question

- 30. Twenty-eight UEFs were submitted in support of the application. However, four of these forms have to be discounted; one form provides generic evidence for all of the paths subject to the parish council's claims, one failed to provide any answers to the majority of the questions posed by the forms and two failed to provide any details as to the duration of use of the claimed path.
- 31. None of the remaining 24 UEFs were accompanied by a map showing the route which was claimed to have been used and the majority of the UEFs describe a route leading to South Walk Farm but not to High Street and the forms do not appear to provide evidence which supports the route shown in the Order as running east from the farm to the road. The description of the start and end points found on the forms also give cause for concern as on eight of the forms this information appears to have been added in a separate hand to that which completed other parts of the form.
- 32. Furthermore on a further four forms, the description of the route used has been altered. In two cases, the description of the route as being "Mayes Lane" has been altered to "Moors Lane" and that the path runs to South Walk Farm. The UEF as originally completed suggests that only Mayes (or Moors) Lane had been used, but the alteration to show South Walk Farm as a destination seeks to convey that the respondent had walked a substantially greater distance. In the other two cases, a description of the path as leading to North Walk Farm has been altered by another hand to read South Walk Farm.
- 33. The concerns regarding the reliability of the user evidence expressed above in relation to the UEFs submitted in support of Orders A and B are equally applicable in relation the UEFs submitted in support of Order C.
- 34. The UEFs were completed between April and November 1985 and provide evidence of use prior to the date when each form was completed. The period of claimed use ranges from 1915 to 1985. Taking October 1985 as the latest use evidenced by the forms, the evidence of use can at best demonstrate use up to a date which is six months prior to the date of bringing into question identified in paragraph 7 above.
- 35. Four individuals who had completed a UEF in 1985 provided the Council with an additional statement as to their use of the path. The Council also received additional information from one person who had not previously completed a UEF. Those respondents who subsequently provided the Council with a further

statement confirmed their continued use of the path up to and beyond the date of the application. The supplementary statements had a plan of the route walked attached; however, each of the plans submitted demonstrated a variation in the route which the respondents recalled using with one person being unable to recall the route beyond the end of Moors Lane. The routes shown in these plans differ from that shown in Order C.

- 36. In addition, the statements further demonstrate that the full route between Hainton Road and Caistor High Street was walked infrequently, if at all. One respondent stated that several days a week she would walk as far as point C on the map and would only walk to Caistor High Street around 5 times per year; a second could not recall the route taken beyond point C but had walked the whole route less than once per year; a third had infrequently walked as far as South Walk Farm and had principally only walked as far as point C or just beyond to the former sand pit; two others had walked the full route approximately six times per year.
- 37. None of the user evidence submitted demonstrates individual use of the claimed path throughout the relevant 20-year period and use by the public during the relevant 20-year period can only be demonstrated by combining the claimed use of various respondents. Although it is not a precondition of section 31 that each individual has to demonstrate use throughout the relevant period, the shortcomings in the user evidence prevents significant weight from being attached to the combined evidence of use throughout the relevant period. I am not satisfied that the user evidence is of sufficient reliability and cogency to raise a presumption of dedication under section 31 of the 1980 Act.

Common law

- 38. As with the UEFs submitted in relation to Orders A and B, those submitted in relation to Order C provided similarly vague responses to the question regarding the frequency of use. Five respondents provided precise figures as to their use which ranged in one case from "2 to 3 times per year" and in another "30 40 times per year". Those others who provided precise figures reported limited use of six or ten times per year. As to the remainder of the UEF evidence the responses were "several", "quite a lot", "on a nice sunny Saturday or Sunday", "lots", "scores" and "dozens". None of the respondents provided any clarification as to what was meant by those terms.
- 39. An analysis of the claimed use shows that the period with the highest number of users is between 1950 and 1960 when seven individuals claimed to have used the path throughout that period with two other respondents using it for part of that period. However, the limitations of the user evidence in relation to the statutory scheme are equally relevant at common law; it cannot be demonstrated with any degree of certainty that the user evidence relates to the path described in the Order or that the whole of the route has been used. The frequency of use of the path which amounts to use once per month (and sometimes less) would have been insufficient for the landowner to have become aware of it. I conclude that the frequency and extent of use in this case is insufficient for an inference of dedication to be drawn at common law for the whole of the Order route.
- 40. However there is a body of user evidence which demonstrates that Moors Lane has been extensively used by the public. Despite the reservations about the UEFs being amended by third parties to show that the user evidence referred to

a much longer route, it is clear that that even those users who only recorded their use of Moors Lane would have made their way between points A and B irrespective of where they walked subsequently. It can also be inferred that those who provided evidence in support of the path to North Walk Farm would also have had to walk that length of Moors Lane between points A and B and those who provided evidence in support of Order A would have used part of Moors Lane as part of a walk along the Order A route.

- 41. Furthermore, the documentary evidence adduced by the Council as part of its investigation demonstrates that Moors Lane has been a physically identifiable feature in the landscape since it was set out under the South Willingham Inclosure Award of 1770. Although Moors Lane was set out as a 30 feet wide private road to facilitate access to both allotted land and to other old inclosures, that would not preclude public rights from subsequently being acquired.
- 42. From a study of the maps produced after the inclosure award, it is apparent that Moors Lane has remained a feature of the post-inclosure landscape at a width which is consistent with the width specified by the inclosure commissioners. Although the maps published during the nineteenth century show the continued existence of Moors Lane, they do not shed any light upon its status or perceived status.
- 43. The first document which suggests that Moors Lane may be a public route is the 1910 Finance Act plan. On this plan, Moors Lane and the track between points B and C on the Order map is shown excluded from adjacent privately owned land and is annotated "parish road". The exclusion of a route which runs between separate land parcels has been held by the courts to provide good evidence that the Inland Revenue valuer considered the route to be public.
- 44. The full length of the enclosed section of the claimed route is shown on the underlying base map used to produce the map of publicly maintainable roads for which the rural district council were responsible prior to the transfer of those responsibilities to the County Council under the provisions of the Local Government Act 1929. Only that part of Moors Lane between points A and B is recorded as being part of the publicly maintainable highway network. On the handover map this part of the route is recorded as being an "unmetalled district road".
- 45. That part of the order route between points A and B is shown on the Council's current List of Streets maintainable at public expense. Moors Lane is recorded in the list as "Moors Lane Track off Hainton Road" and the length maintainable is described as "Hainton Road to end"; the plan which accompanies the written list shows that A to B of the Order route is maintainable at public expense. This corresponds with the section of Moors Lane which had been handed over to the County Council as a publicly maintainable highway in 1929.
- 46. I noted from my site visit that at points A and B are street name signs which carry the legend "Moors Lane" and are placed to reflect the extent of the publicly maintainable highway. The documentary evidence demonstrates, on a balance of probabilities that the section A B of the order route has been considered to be a public highway since at least the early part of the twentieth century. Use of this part of Moors Lane by members of the public as demonstrated by the user evidence adduced in support of all three applications

is therefore likely to have been by reference to the existing public status of Moors Lane.

- 47. There is therefore a body of evidence which suggests that part of the Order route subsists as a public way by virtue of it being maintainable at public expense and which has been used by the public. I consider that although the user evidence is insufficient to demonstrate that a public right of way subsists over the whole of the route described in Order C the documentary evidence adduced demonstrates on a balance of probabilities that public rights subsist over that part of the Order route between points A and B such that it should be recorded as a public footpath.
- 48. The council submits that there is an error in the Order plan in that it shows point A to be 5 metres to the west of the junction with Hainton Road and requests the modification of the Order by amending the grid reference for point A to TF 19252 83659 and to amend the length of the section A B to be recorded as 1088 metres. As I propose to confirm the Order in respect of A B of the Order route I will also modify part I and part II of the Schedule in the manner requested by the Council.
- 49. I noted during my site visit that the remainder of the route from point B to point H on Caistor High Street is currently available to the public to use as a permissive path under the provisions of a Stewardship agreement. Although the evidence adduced in this case is insufficient to demonstrate that a public right of way subsists over the remainder of the Order route the recording of a public footpath between points A and B will not result in the public footpath so recorded being a cul-de-sac in practice for the duration of the Stewardship agreement. The evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that public rights subsist over Moors Lane; those rights should be recorded irrespective of the existence of the Stewardship agreement.

Conclusion - Order C

50. Having regard to these and all other matters raised in the written representations I conclude that the order should be confirmed subject to modifications.

Formal decisions

Order A

51. The Order is not confirmed.

Order B

52. The Order is not confirmed.

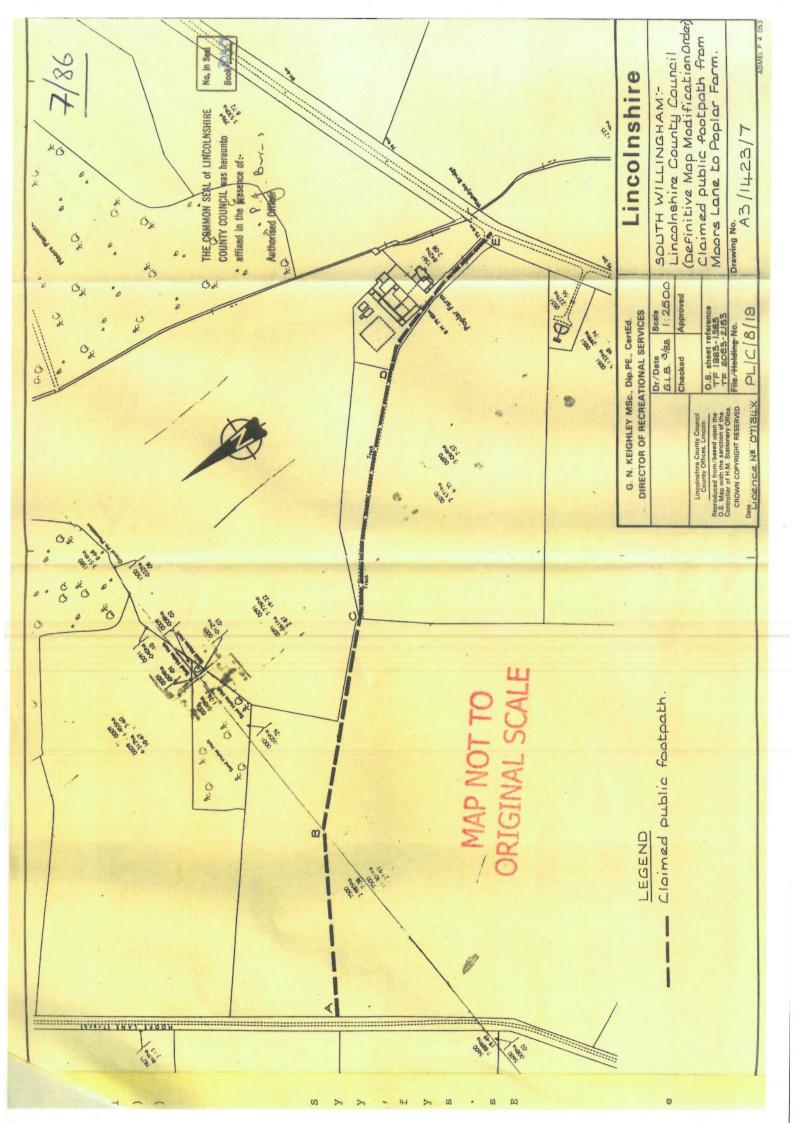
Order C

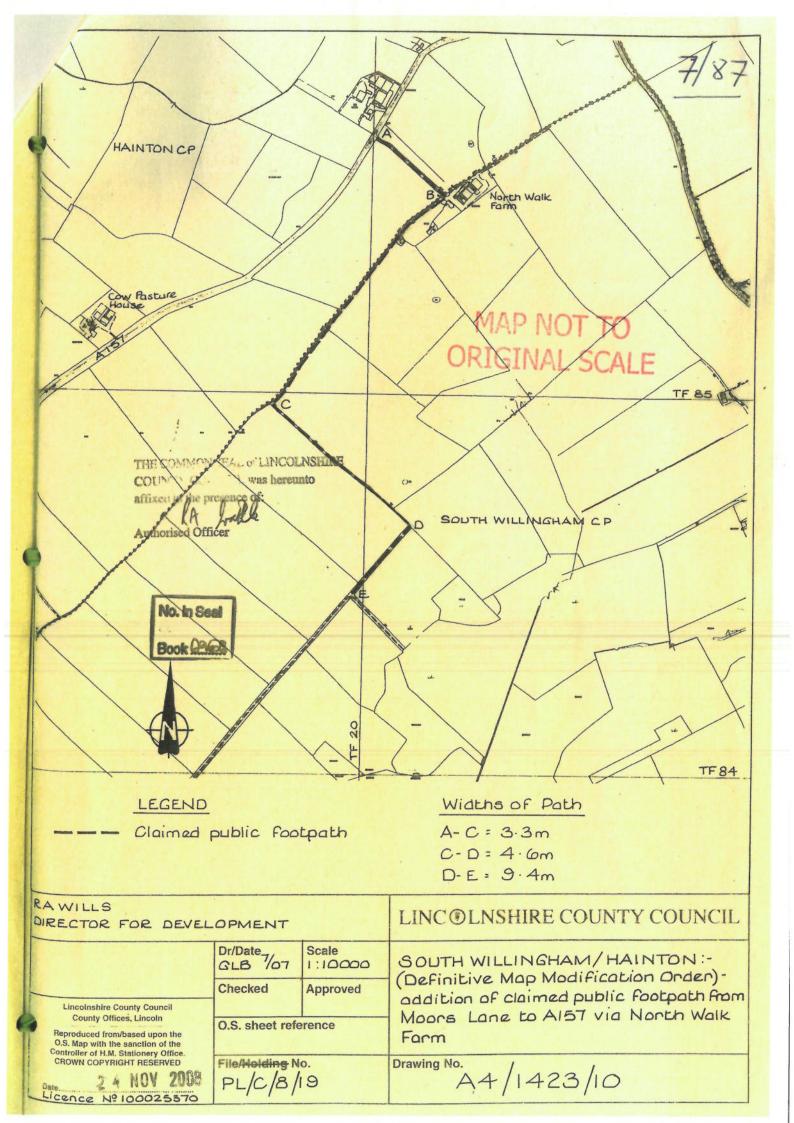
- 53. The Order is proposed for confirmation subject to the following modifications;
 - (a) modify the Schedule Part I to read "a public footpath 12 metres wide running from the public highway at OS Grid Reference TF 19252 83659 in a generally north easterly direction through OS field No 4085 for a distance of approximately 1088 metres to OS Grid Reference TF 19965 84465. The total length of the path to be approximately 1088 metres as shown on annexed plan No A10/1423/9 (Sheet 1)";

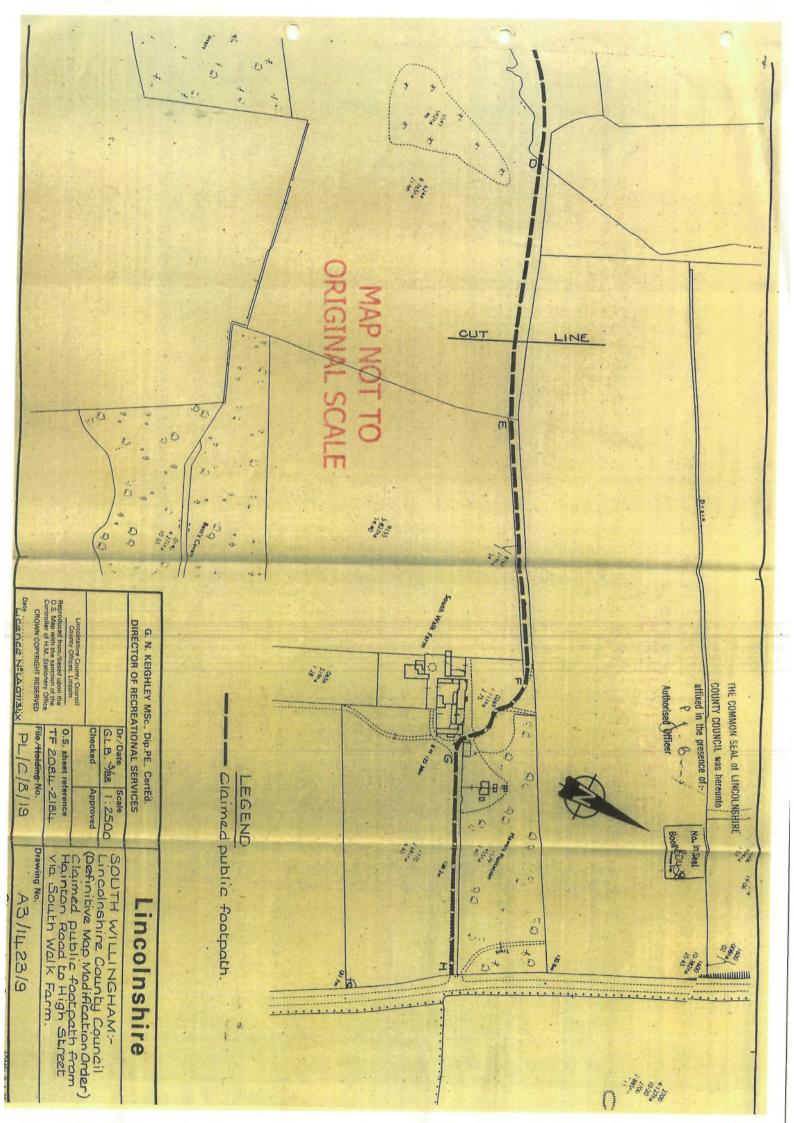
- (b) modify the Schedule Part II to read "A public footpath running from Hainton Road at OS Grid Reference TF 19252 83659 along Moors Lane to OS Grid Reference TF 19965 84465. The total length of the path is 1088 metres. The width of the path is 12 metres wide.";
- (c) in the Order plans delete the footpath south and east of point B.
- 54. Since the Order as proposed to be confirmed would affect land not affected by the Order as submitted and would not show a way shown in the Order as submitted I am required by virtue of Paragraph 8(2) of Schedule 15 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to give notice of the proposal to modify the Order and to give an opportunity for objections and representations to be made to the proposed modifications. A letter will be sent to interested persons about the advertisement procedure.

Alan Beckett

Inspector







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MAP NOT TO ORIGINAL SCALE

PLAN NOT TO SCALE

7/88