

A CALL TO ACTION TO DUNSFOLD RESIDENTS

12 April 2026

Dear Resident,

The issue

I write on behalf of the Gratton Chase Working Group to raise an important issue that arises from the sale of a 2.37-acre green field immediately north of Gratton Chase. The particulars of sale are enclosed: it is for sale on the open market at offers over £100,000.

The issue is that the seller is at liberty to sell it to anyone, and although he has made positive noises about selling to an appropriate person, we are troubled by the prospect of the land ultimately being used for unauthorised developments.

The Parish Council has confirmed it cannot intervene. We are told that two bids above asking price have already been received, with one being from a dubious source. The seller has invited bids from residents within the next week.

Why are we worried?

It's well publicised that unauthorised developments on purchased green-field sites are happening across the area. Last week in Alfold a green field was converted into an unauthorised 17-plot site with roads, fencing, caravans, and mobile homes in just four days. Two council stop notices were ignored. Similar incidents have occurred elsewhere in Surrey recently.

Here are two recent Daily Mail articles from the past few days, including another incident in Surrey.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15721855/Surrey-town-latest-victim-traveller-land-grab-Illegal-site-appears-middle-woodland-group-brought-machinery-hacked-trees-Easter-weekend.html>

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15723245/Easter-coup-council-travellers-land-grab.html>

We live round the corner from an existing site, and as it is understood that there is existing enforcement against at least one unit which remains outstanding.

Unauthorised development is a real and present risk in our area, not a hypothetical one.

Crucially, planning consent on this field has already been refused twice, most recently for just 9 dwellings. The site is outside the settlement boundary and within the Area of Great Landscape Value. This means it is unlikely to be developed through legitimate planning channels, which narrows the risk to exactly the kind of unauthorised use we are concerned about.

Why does this affect all of Dunsfold and not just Gratton Chase

We appreciate that Gratton Chase is most impacted by this. However, an unauthorised development on this site would not stop at Gratton Chase's

boundary: it would impact the whole village. Properties near unauthorised developments become harder to sell and values drop: a drop of 10%, 20%, 30% (more?) would knock tens of thousands and perhaps six figure sums off many properties in the village. That would likely impact retirement plans, perhaps put others in negative equity, or make re-mortgaging more expensive, never mind difficulties selling. It would also come with the associated anti-social behaviour. Successful enforcement action from the council if the worst happened is unlikely.

What are we proposing?

A group of Gratton Chase residents is exploring a collective purchase of the land to keep it out of the wrong hands. At present 16 houses on Gratton Chase have committed to contribute several thousand £ each.

The aim is straightforward: buy the field, prevent unwanted development, and protect the village. Once purchased, the land could be held through a company or trust, with options including onward sale with restrictive covenants/other restrictions or an acceptable buyer (e.g. a charity for allotments), subdivision to create ransom strips or other ways of making any onward sale more favourable to the village, or simply retaining it as protected green space.

What we are asking?

We are asking whether other residents of Dunsfold would be willing to contribute in return for an interest in the land.

The asking price is offers over £100,000. Even allowing for a premium above that, the more households contribute, the less everyone has to commit. Compare that to the tens of thousands, or six-figure sums, that villagers could lose in property value if the worst happened.

How can you help?

Please:

- Think about contributing. Even a modest amount of a few £ strengthens the bid and broadens community backing.
- Spread the word to neighbours who may not be aware of the situation.

The basic calculation

A few thousand £ now to secure the land, or risk paying far more in stress, anti-social behaviour, lost property value, mortgage issues, and damage to the village we all chose to live in. We don't want to be the next Daily Mail article.

Nobody wants to spend the money. We get that. But we can't have a situation where a few people put their hands in their pockets to protect the property values and quality of life that everyone in the village benefits from. Please think about contributing.

Interested, or want to know more? Please contact us at wg@grattonchase.co.uk

Time is very short. Please get in touch as soon as you can.

The Gratton Chase Working Group

Please see overleaf for frequently asked questions.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

“This is Gratton Chase’s problem, not the whole village’s.”

The immediate impact would be felt most by adjacent residents, but the consequences extend across Dunsfold.

“The council will just enforce against any unauthorised development.”

In theory, yes. In practice, enforcement is slow, under-resourced, and often ineffective once a site is established, and can even end up being permitted development. Alfold received two stop notices last week, both were ignored, and the development was completed in four days. The council is now pursuing legal action, but the site is built and occupied. The legal system simply does not move fast enough to prevent the damage.

“Planning has been refused, so surely no one can build on it?”

Planning consent has been refused twice (for 21 dwellings (refused at appeal) and most recently for 9 dwellings). The site is outside the settlement boundary and within the Area of Great Landscape Value. This means a legitimate developer is unlikely to get permission. But that’s precisely the point: the risk is not from someone going through the planning system. It’s from a buyer who ignores it entirely, as happened in Alfold. A planning refusal does not prevent anyone from purchasing the land.

“Why should I pay to stop something that might not happen?”

It might not. But a field is for sale on the open market with no restrictions on who can buy it, there is an existing site nearby, and exactly this scenario has just played out in the village next door. The question is whether the risk justifies the cost. Compare a relatively modest contribution versus the damage done to a 10–30% (or more) drop in your property value.

“I can’t afford to contribute.”

Contributions do not have to be equal. Any structure could reflect different circumstances. Even a modest amount helps strengthen the collective position and demonstrates the breadth of community support, which matters when making a credible offer.

We understand that people have different circumstances but there are different options to consider: savings, pension drawdowns, credit cards, remortgaging, deferring a holiday. We would not dare to tell anyone what to do with their money, but we highlight that there are ways which allow a contribution in most cases if the will is there.

“What happens to the land if you buy it?”

The primary purpose is to prevent unwanted use. Beyond that, there are options: holding it as community green space, selling interests between participants, finding an onward buyer with restrictive covenants to control future use, or subdividing to create ransom strips that make development impractical or giving legal redress if it falls in the wrong hands later down the line. Ownership gives the community control and options. Without it, we have neither.

“How would ownership work?”

Most likely through a company or trust. Each contributor would hold a share proportional to their contribution. The governing documents would set rules on sale, transfer, land use, and decision-making. These are well-established legal structure that keeps the land under a single title and gives everyone a clear, tradeable stake.

“What about the overage clause?”

The sale particulars include an overage provision: if planning consent is obtained within 10 years, the seller is entitled to a payment of £60 per square foot of gross internal floorspace. For a community purchase aimed at preventing development, this is largely irrelevant, if we don't seek planning permission, it never triggers. It does, however, make the land less attractive to speculative developers, because any profit they make would be reduced by the overage payment. That actually works in our favour when bidding.

“What stops someone selling their share to a developer later?”

Pre-emption rights in the company or trust articles would give existing members first refusal on any transfer. Restrictive covenants on the land title itself could limit future use. Between the two, you have far stronger protections than relying on the planning system after the fact. Nothing is set in stone. These are just considerations.

“How much would it actually cost me?”

The asking price is offers over £100,000. Even allowing for a competitive offer above that, the numbers are manageable with broad participation. Across, say, 40 households that's roughly, say, £3,000–£4,000 each depending on the final price. Contributions don't have to be equal. Compare any of those figures to a 10-30% (or more) fall in your property value.

“Why the rush?”

The land is on the market now, bids are already in, and the seller has indicated a short window for a community offer. Once it's sold, there is no mechanism to undo the sale. As Alfold showed, an unauthorised development can be fully established in days.

“Isn't this just scaremongering?”

Alfold happened last week. Two other Surrey cases have been widely reported. There is an existing site near Dunsfold with enforcement issues. Planning has been refused twice on this field, meaning the only buyer likely to pay above asking price is one who doesn't intend to seek permission. These are facts. The opportunity to prevent the risk is available right now. Once the window closes, it does not reopen.