

In 1894, the graveyard around Fen Ditton parish church was closed, owing to lack of space for any new graves, and the cemetery on Church Street opened shortly afterwards. The Church has maintained the closed churchyard since then, with financial contribution from the Parish Council from time to time, but it has now formally asked the Parish Council to take on more responsibility for the upkeep. Under the law, parish councils must either agree to such a request, or they can pass it on to the District Council (who could then pass the charge back to the Fen Ditton taxpayers). At their meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January the Fen Ditton Parish Council voted unanimously to take on the responsibility itself rather than pass it outside the village.

When the Parish Council takes on the upkeep, it will need to cover the costs in its annual budget – currently maintenance of the churchyard amounts to roughly £700 each year. However, parts of the south wall are in poor condition and, because expensive capital works to remedy this may be required in the future, the Council is proposing to put aside a similar amount each year into a ‘sinking fund’ to be available when the need arises. The extra funds will be raised by increasing the precept, which is a small proportion of the council tax that each household pays each year, starting from next year.

To raise the amounts described above would add £2.50 per year for houses with the lowest council tax, £4.50 per year for the ‘average’ (Band D) house and £9 per year for houses with the highest council tax. Looked at another way, this increases the precept by 7% and the council tax bill by roughly 0.25%

The increase described above would keep things as they are now, which is a basic minimum standard. However, the Parish Council is keen to gauge whether there are strong views in favour of improving the standard (for example by more frequent grass cutting, and maybe more planting), or by help from volunteers (as happens with the Cemetery), or in favour of growing the sinking fund more quickly so problems with the wall can be dealt with earlier.

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Questionnaires were delivered to all households – 12 were returned. The following are the replies:

Question	Yes	No	No response
I am happy with the current standard of maintenance and see no need for things to change	6	3	3
I would be happy to see standards improved by increasing the precept a little more	3	5	4
I would be in favour of increasing the precept a little more to deal with necessary capital works which may arise	8	3	1
I would be happy to volunteer to help raise the standard of maintenance	2	3	7

1. Other comments include on questionnaire
2. It may be the law but we are emphatically against this proposal
3. More planting and maintenance of existing trees
4. The cutting of the grass is fine, the maintenance of the growth on the street side of the wall needs constant attention, the maintenance of the wall does need constant monitoring as it is a beautiful listed part of our village. It is difficult to see what maintenance volunteers could help with as, presumably, grass cutting would be out-sourced and wall work would be highly specialised.
5. A good idea – the church is one of the focal points of the village
6. Not all OAPs are rich, look some where else to make money we pay enough