

Meeting	Parks & Open Spaces Committee
Date	6 th January 2026
Report Title	Francomes Play Area
Agenda Reference	13b
Author	Laura Cutter, Deputy Clerk/RFO, HR & Services Manager

Background

As per previous discussions at Full Council, advice was sought from the Council's insurance company. As a duty of care, the Council can close the play area and cease maintenance, but no equipment can be removed without permission as could cause legal issues with trespassing. The Council has agreement from Swindon Borough Council assets tea, that this is the best action to protect residents, but equally cannot give authorisation for full closure due to not being within its remit. There has been backing from SBC Ward Councillors who are championing this at Borough-level.

A padlock and signage have been placed at the site.

Further updates will come if the Landowner responds to the letter as detailed at the end of this report.

Photographs of the Site





Signage

THIS PLAY AREA IS CLOSED

Francomes play area is currently unsafe due to damaged surfacing and equipment. Water is pooling, creating slippery and hazardous conditions.

Haydon Wick Parish Council and Swindon Borough Council do not own or lease this land and major repairs cannot be undertaken without confirmation from the landowner.

As a duty of care, the Parish Council has closed the site for your safety with support from Swindon Borough Council.

PLEASE DO NOT ENTER.

Updates will be provided once we receive a response from the landowner.

Social Media Post

🚫 FRANCOMES PLAY AREA CLOSED FOR SAFETY REASONS 🚫

We want to update our residents about why the Francomes Play Area has been temporarily closed.

Recent inspections found uneven and lifting surfaces, water pooling, and damaged equipment—all of which pose real safety risks. For everyone's wellbeing, we've had to close the site until further notice.

You may be surprised to hear this, but Haydon Wick Parish Council does not own or lease this land. Swindon Borough Council doesn't either. Both parties are currently awaiting confirmation from the landowner.

Without ownership or a lease, we cannot justify spending public funds on major repairs—early estimates are over £75,000—on privately owned land.

- 👉 We've closed the play area for your safety.
- 👉 Please avoid the site for now.
- 👉 We'll share updates as soon as we receive a response from the landowner.

Thank you for your understanding and patience.

In the meantime, you can enjoy Brookfield Play Area which is close by.

Scan the QR Code to see all of the Council's Play Areas.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Temporary Closure of Francomes Play Area Due to Safety Concerns and Unresolved Land Ownership

Haydon Wick Parish Council has taken the decision to close Francomes Play Area following the identification of several significant safety concerns.

The play surface has become uneven and is lifting in multiple locations, resulting in water pooling, and creating slippery conditions. In addition, some items of play equipment show signs of damage. Together, these issues present a clear risk to anyone using the site.

During our review of the site's history and associated responsibilities, it became evident that neither Haydon Wick Parish Council nor Swindon Borough Council owns or leases the land. Both parties have not yet received formal confirmation of its position despite attempts to contact the landowners.

As neither council is the landowner or leaseholder, it is not possible to justify the substantial investment required to make the necessary repairs. Initial estimates indicate that remedial works would exceed £75,000. Committing public funds to repair facilities on privately owned land would pose significant financial risks to the parish and to residents.

Considering these circumstances, all maintenance has been paused, and the play area has been closed until further notice. We strongly advise residents to avoid the site for their own safety.

The Parish Council will provide updates as soon as we receive clarification from the landowner and are able to determine appropriate next steps.

In the meantime, there are 22 other play areas and six multi use games area nearby, that are maintained regularly by the Parish Council for you to enjoy, please visit our website page for further details and locations.

Letter to Landowner

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Cc: clerk@haydonwick.gov.uk

12th December 2025

To the Registered Landowners of the Francomes Play Area Site,

Francomes Play Park, Elsham Way, SN25 (What3Words: ///scowls.lifeboats.physical)

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Urgent Request for Clarification of Land Ownership and Agreement on Future Arrangements – Francomes Play Area

Haydon Wick Parish Council is writing to seek your urgent clarification and cooperation regarding the land on which Francomes Play Area is situated. Recent investigations into the condition of the site, coupled with an extended lack of confirmation of ownership, have placed the Parish Council in a difficult position requiring immediate resolution.

Following a routine inspection, several significant safety concerns have been identified at Francomes Play Area. The play surface has become uneven and is lifting in multiple locations, causing water to pool and creating slippery, hazardous conditions. In addition, several play equipment items have deteriorated and show signs of damage. Together, these issues present a clear and unacceptable safety risk to any users of the site.

As part of our assessment, we reviewed the site's management history and associated responsibilities. It has become apparent that neither Haydon Wick Parish Council nor Swindon Borough Council owns or leases the land, and neither authority has received formal confirmation of your position or intentions.

Given that the land is privately owned, it is not legally or financially viable for the Parish Council to commit public funds to undertake substantial repairs and resurfacing works. Initial estimates indicate that the required remedial works would exceed £75,000.00 representing a significant and unjustifiable financial risk to the council and residents in the absence of a clear landholding agreement.

It is the Parish Council's understanding that there are covenants on the land in regard to the drainage situated just outside the fenceline.

For these reasons, as a duty of care to parish residents, and—due to the risks posed—the play area has been temporarily closed until further notice. We strongly advise that the site not be used in its current condition.

To determine a sustainable solution, we respectfully request your written response on one of the following options:

1. **Undertake and fund the required repair works** as the landowner, enabling the safe reopening of the play area.
2. **Enter negotiations to formally close and decommission the play area** as a facility on your land.
3. **Transfer ownership or long-term lease of the land** to Swindon Borough Council or Haydon Wick Parish Council for adoption, accompanied by appropriate transitional funding to bring the site up to an acceptable standard before it enters public ownership.
4. **Propose an alternative arrangement**, should you wish to discuss other viable options.

Haydon Wick Parish Council remains committed to supporting accessible, safe play provision for local families. However, without clarification from the landowners, we are unable to progress or invest in the Francomes site. Once your position is confirmed, we will be able to determine next steps and communicate these to residents.

We kindly request a written response within **28 days** of the date of this letter so that we may avoid prolonged closure and uncertainty.

If you wish to discuss this matter directly, please contact **Georgina Morgan-Denn, Chief Officer/ Clerk to Council and RFO** via email clerk@haydonwick.gov.uk or telephone 01793 722446.

We appreciate your prompt attention and look forward to your cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Georgina Morgan-Denn

Georgina Morgan-Denn BA Hons, FSLCC
Chief Officer/Clerk to Council and Responsible Financial Officer