

Public Questions for Cabinet – 10 September 2024

Question from Martin Saberton

Preamble: Prior to its closure, QE leisure centre offered the only roped indoor climbing in the local area. Unless I'm mistaken, the only other publicly accessible roped climbing facility in the entirety of Dorset is in Bridport, and the next nearest roped climbing is Parthian in Southampton.

The relevance and value of the wall stretches far beyond the local Wimborne area as, prior to QE's closure, people travelled from across the county to use the facility.

Roped climbing should not be confused with bouldering, which is available at a great facility in Poole. The lack of a rope in bouldering changes the risk profile and is a very different experience which I would be happy to explain in more detail.

For those that may not be aware, climbing is a very popular sport in Dorset, with outdoor climbing (in the warmer months) available from Swanage all the way to Portland (people travel from all over the world to climb here). When the weather turns, climbers head indoors, and with the loss of QE, many local climbers will be lost for somewhere to climb or face a long drive to Bridport or Hampshire.

Indoor climbing also suits new climbers, those less able or in rehabilitation, and, critically, kids clubs who not only need to learn the basics before heading outdoors, but have lots of fun and learn new found confidence and bravery through the sport. This is in addition to the numerous mental and physical health benefits presented in a way not found with other sports.

The climbing wall at QE has been enjoyed by kids clubs and adult climbers for many years, is a unique asset that is currently lost and the prospect for the winter months is bleak.

These points were all raised in individual responses to the original public consultation on the closure of QE and again more recently with local councillors. I have had some limited engagement from Initio learning trust about possibilities and am pursuing those, but I haven't had any commitment from Dorset council to look at what is possible at QE or elsewhere.

Climbing is a rapidly growing sport, and the Team GB gold medal at the Olympics shows that it is now in the mainstream. I'm confident that there is commercial viability for a well-run roped climbing facility, and as I see it this isn't a QE specific issue. It is a question of maintaining provision of roped climbing in the local area.

Q: With this in mind, is the council open to engaging on the matter of ensuring public and club access to roped climbing for the local area is not lost for good?

