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Olympian gives praise to new sports initiative

Ally McGilvray

ally.mcgilvray@archant.co.uk

An Olympic gymnast has praised a new initiative to identify and develop the sports stars of the future.

North Norfolk District Council has teamed up with Gresham's School in Holt to create a Sporting Centre for Excellence to help children aged 11 to 14 go on to achieve their goals.

The project aims to bring together the best young athletes and give them access to specialist coaching, with the focus in the first year on cricket, hockey, netball and running.

Speaking at the launch this week, Olympic gymnast and Commonwealth gold medal winner Craig Heap, who has represented England more than 100 times, said: "The council deserves praise for this initiative.

"People should believe in their dreams and not let anything stand in their way; this scheme will really help young people go as far as their talent will take them. It's a fantastic project."

The project will provide top-class coaching over the academic year with sessions held at Gresham's School in Holt.

The district council is providing £20,000 in funding and supporting the project through the council's sports and leisure team.

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Craig Heap

Pupils were invited to take part in a selection day for the four sports through their schools and the aim is to recruit up to 16 young people per sport and provide 24 weeks of coaching each year.

Councillor Tom FitzPatrick, Leader of North Norfolk District Council, said: "It's about competing and taking part in sport that's so important – and it is an inspirational project.

"I would like to thank everyone at the council, councillor Judy Oliver and councillor Becky Palmer especially for helping to bring this scheme forward."

Gresham's can count rugby internationals Tom and Ben Youngs among its recent former pupils.

And now it is hoped more can follow in their footsteps by representing their country in their chosen sport.

Gresham's sports development director, Steve Adams, added: "The athletes could well be medal winners of the future."