



Gresham's School sixth form plans depend on getting permission to build 150 homes on its land at Holt

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11.21 AM

An historic north Norfolk private school has lodged plans for a new £4.25m sixth form centre.

Gresham's School at Holt also aims to add a boarding house next door in a £6.5m scheme.

But the £10m projects depend on the school getting planning permission to build up to 150 homes on three pieces of "spare" school land, which will fund the venture.

The school, dating back to 1555, currently has its sixth formers - who make up nearly half of its 500-strong school population - scattered around the campus.

It is keen to provide a separate centre, and has earmarked a site near its well-known Theatre in the Woods open air auditorium in the grounds.

It includes seminar rooms, study spaces, and a 130-seater lecture hall, which can also be expanded into a 250 seater area for the whole sixth form by opening doors into a cafe area next door. The complex also has a careers library and fitness suite in a design which combines red brick gables with wooden cladding to blend in with the surrounding school buildings and trees.

School head Philip John says, in the plans submitted to North Norfolk District Council, the sixth form is "an essential step forward in the marketing of the school in an increasingly competitive sector and will inspire and motivate the students.

"The building will be an exciting conclusion to their education at Gresham's and a stepping stone to university."

Business and finance director James Stronach said a separate building was important - both for new students keen to come to Gresham's just for their sixth form studies, but also to provide a fresh, aspirational environment for those who had been through the rest of the school.

It would not make the sixth form massively bigger, just better, he added.

The school had looked at nine sites, which were whittled down to four. Three - at the service yard, headmasters house, and next to the Cromer Road - had been ruled out in favour of the one near the woods which had a better setting.

The aim was to follow up with planning applications in October for homes on three sites - one off the bypass which was previously refused, along with other smaller ones on a football pitch off the Cromer Road and behind the library.

It would be "very difficult" to do the sixth form scheme however if the housing plans did not get permission, said Mr Stronach.

The hope was to start building the sixth form centre in 2014 to have it open the following year.

Plans for Old School House in the Market Place - where there have been previous ideas for commercial development - were "on the back burner" for discussions and not likely to happen for two to four years, as it involved relocating the pre-prep school.