Former Uniglaze site is bought for almost £1m

Thetford-based Warren Services is eyeing up major opportunities within the offshore industry after securing a near-£1m deal to buy the former Uniglaze factory in the town to expand the business.

The firm, based on the Fison Way Industrial Estate, has struck a deal with Uniglaze administrators KPMG to secure the 50,000sq ft site a couple of hundred metres from its current facility.

The purchase was made possible after it secured a loan for nearly £1m with HSBC.

Richard Bridgman, chairman of Warren Services, said the new factory would prove a positive addition to the business as it will enable the firm to bid for contracts in the burgeoning offshore sector.

As well as moving the equipment and services from two satellite factories, the firm will also move all of its finishing operations, wet paint, shot blasting and dispatch to allow it to expand its welding area.

“We are growing in Yarmouth and Lowestoft with renewables and everything to do with that, but what they do is big and this new factory will allow us to do the bigger stuff,” Mr Bridgman said.

“What we are going to do in there is have an assembly facility. The new factory will give us much-needed office and car-parking space, and it also has high eaves to enable us to carry out a lot bigger fabrications, while it is only 200 yards from our existing factory. It will also allow us to expand our new design department where we have just appointed a very experienced design manager and in the next month we are starting an experienced controls manager which means we can now offer complete and comprehensive package to our customers.”

Warren Services has a turnover of about £6m, but while conditions have been tough, Mr Bridgman, who also advises Norfolk County Council on apprenticeship issues, said he was convinced that the expansion was the right move because of the growth opportunities it would bring.

The company has already invested nearly £750,000 upgrading machinery in the last year, including five axis-milling machines.

And he hoped the factory could accommodate future plans to create an apprentices school to help youngsters acquire the trade skills needed in industries such as engineering, while he has also set up a meeting with skills minister Matthew Hancock to talk about his ideas to boost apprenticeships.

“I see this as key to our growth – why do we want to go anywhere else, when you have got so much growth going on in Great Yarmouth,” he said. “We are already working with major companies there. We will be exhibiting at EERGR’s southern North Sea conference in March. We haven’t had a great year – we came up with a £200,000 profit, which is nothing and a slight increase in turnover, but nothing like the growth we have been having in previous years.

“People are asking why we are doing this. But my gut feeling is that it’s the right thing to do. And compared to many others in the sector we have done well and are making a profit. “We are going to refurbish it up to the same standards as our other site and we want to move in by May 1, which is going to be quite a tall order.

“We currently employ 90 people and in five years time I hope to double that. We only purchased the factory last week and have already taken on two extra personnel, firstly to help with refurbishment.

“If we can get this right, I can also develop my apprentice school in that – that’s the dream. I want to be training 50 apprentices a year, not just for me but for other people.”

Uniglaze 2, which made and supplied toughened glass and double glazing, collapsed into administration in October, leaving about 270 staff out of work across its sites which also included its New Costessey site on the edge of Norwich, and, in many cases, out of pocket with wages unpaid.

In a further development, the administrators have organised an online auction of remaining assets, with bidding closing tomorrow.