

The Venue at Eskmills is born under new owner

An East Lothian events business is being given a new lease of life after a local entrepreneur bought it out of administration.

Oliver Stephen who owns the Eskmills business destination in Musselburgh, which is home to 100 businesses, employing 500 people in its dozen buildings is taking over the wedding and party venue which recently shut its doors.

As landlord he lost more than £150,000 when one of his tenants – food and events business Hickory – went into administration in late 2024, leaving The Venue at Eskmills in limbo.

Now Oliver, 37, is relaunching the party and wedding space and wants to improve the 400-seat event space with a further £150,000 of investment, to bring even greater value to the site and the wider community and opening it up to more events.

He said: “Hickory’s collapse was a shock – not just financially, but emotionally for everyone who had special plans tied to the space. I believe The Venue has even greater potential as part of Eskmills than it ever did as a standalone tenant.

“For 15 years, Hickory – which had become one of Scotland’s largest independent catering, events and venue operators – was a jewel in the crown of Eskmills. We’re taking the best bits of what worked before, like the team’s experience and the fantastic service they delivered, but with a new concept and a stronger foundation.

“We’re building a totally new, sustainable, inclusive venue business that will host more than just weddings, from business conferences to community celebrations. We’re aiming to make it thrive, not just as a commercial venture, but as a trusted and valued part of the local community.”

Since Oliver acquired the Eskmills site in 2016, it has become a vibrant business destination with a community of more than 100 businesses, including the Fearless gym and PT studio, Crolla’s Italian Kitchen bistro and The Eskmills Café by the award-winning Company Bakery.

It is the largest business destination in East Lothian combining cutting-edge sustainability, an EPC A rating, with a great work lifestyle, all in a beautiful, former Victorian mill site complex.

The Venue is one of the highest profile, and best-known elements of the Eskmills site. Under the Hickory banner, Eskmills Venue (as it was then) was primarily used for weddings, while its impressive kitchen provided a central hub for the catering firm to supply multiple venues across the Lothians.

However, when the company went into administration – with Eskmills as one of the biggest creditors left out of pocket – Oliver saw an opportunity. Months of negotiations with the Administrators saw him secure the venue and other assets.

He has also headhunted three core team members from the 50 employed by Hickory, who he believes hold the key to replicating the most successful elements of the business, while carefully avoiding the pitfalls which eventually sunk Hickory.

He revealed how one of the first jobs he undertook after securing the business was to write to the 80 people whose weddings and other events were dashed because of the crash.

He added: "I can't imagine how it must have felt to lose a wedding or a big celebration. But I do know what it's like to be left in the lurch. That makes me all the more determined to build something that is financially sound, reliable and worthy of people's trust."

The Venue will be teaming up with a selection of exciting new catering partners to provide an extensive selection of hospitality options, suitable for all kinds of budgets and events.

After leaving school in Edinburgh to study at Oxford University, Oliver graduated in 2010 into a job with a major mergers and acquisitions specialist in London. Later he moved to Brazil, where his wife was born, and worked in the development of major elder care providers. His return to Scotland saw him join his family's property development firm, before he bought the Eskmills site in 2016, which he has since transformed.

While delivering major growth at Eskmills, Oliver and his team have closely studied customers' desire for a great work lifestyle, environmental sustainability and inspiring surroundings. The result is that Eskmills has evolved into a vibrant commercial hub, supporting a wide range of innovative and creative industries and businesses from start-ups to major firms.

The relaunch of its flagship event space is being seen as the final piece of the puzzle – a space that can unite the local community and offer a flexible, high-quality location for all kinds of gatherings.

Find out more about The Venue here: <https://eskmillsvenue.com/>

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