



Debbie Stenner
Head of Fundraising
and Communications

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...Personally, I have much greater confidence in my ability to lead at all levels within GWT as a result of our collaboration... ”

“Gwent Wildlife Trust is the leading conservation charity in Gwent, dedicated to protecting wildlife and wild places for people now and in the future.

Gwent Wildlife Trust is one of 5 Wildlife Trusts in Wales and one of 46 in the UK.

Our work with Caplor Horizons began in autumn 2017, when I approached them about supporting us with the development of our first organisational funding strategy. After decades of financial uncertainty (that would be familiar to anyone close to a small local charity), and major recent reductions in traditional statutory income sources, Gwent Wildlife Trust had been left a transformational £2million legacy and designated approximately a quarter of this for investment in income generation of one kind or another.

After the initial euphoria came the heavy sense of the weight of responsibility. I had been a fundraiser in international development and conservation sectors for over fifteen years but never faced such a situation. I was very aware that this was a once-in-a-lifetime, no excuses, no going back opportunity to achieve financial stability for Gwent Wildlife Trust and funding for our vital work over the longer term.

As a result, part of the brief to Caplor Horizons: *it is very important that as a consequence of the transformational legacy and large investment short to medium term, the organisation is more resilient longer term, not less.*

Their approach to developing the initial brief for our collaboration gave me increasing confidence in my own leadership role. They supported me in establishing the organisational need for a five-year funding strategy, which included clear goals and a roadmap for successful major investment in income generation.

They also opened-up important perspectives and implications that we hadn't immediately considered and helped me ensure that everyone was engaged and supportive.



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We devised a programme of collaboration, which involved a series of all staff, fundraising team and staff and trustee workshops interspersed with mentoring discussion and support with Ian (Williams) and Lorna (Pearcey) for myself and our then-CEO Ian Rappel.

Ian, Lorna and Matthew (Lake) all contributed to the delivery of group sessions. They all brought tremendous empathy and understanding of the realities of our funding environment within the wider context for our work, whilst encouraging us to look to new, more ambitious horizons.

As with any team, there's a very broad range of personalities and working preferences at GWT, including people happiest working outdoors in remote woodland who would rather do anything than attend a facilitated all staff meeting!

But from the outset, the sense of fun, empathy and above all unifying purpose engendered by Caplor Horizons encouraged everyone to contribute in a highly positive way.

Some of the feedback I received from colleagues (including some who'd fit in the category described above) were:

- *"Caplor Horizons delivered fun, relaxed sessions where discussing and debating sometimes serious issues could be done in a comfortable way. Would definitely attend another workshop run by Caplor."*
- *"That was the best staff meeting I've ever been to and I've been here 6 years."*
- *"I think that your approach towards the Funding Strategy has dragged us up by the scruff! Very much looking forward to the next session."*
- *"The sessions led by Caplor were really energising. I was surprised by how much we all agreed"*

In developing our funding strategy, consensus was made on how we could go about renewing our organisational strategy and also take some time to strengthen our internal communications.

Lorna and Matthew led sessions on these, with the SMT and whole staff body respectively. All the practical outputs of our brief were achieved, including: an agreed funding strategy on a page, roadmap for development of this and terms of reference and a working group for internal communications.

The SMT also agreed on an organisational strategic framework 'on a page' in a later session with Matthew and Lorna.



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I felt the impacts of our collaboration with Caplor almost immediately, with greater team cohesion, more meaningful discussion, a broader shared understanding of the respective roles and interplay of strategy, culture and leadership and an improved sense of how and why we could work together more effectively to succeed. I think we now come together as a team with a greater sense of positivity and fun.

However, for me, it's the capacity building that was so striking. We were given the language to better understand how we work together to develop and deliver a strategy, including through using the Caplor House model. This has got into our organisational lexicon and I feel has created a subtle cultural shift, characterised by a better understanding of and empathy for people's behaviour, "he's just standing in the observatory while I'm trying to get everyone in the kitchen!" I feel like we've been liberated from some deep-rooted and often ineffective ways of working by learning and trying out more progressive, innovative and creative ways of thinking or communicating.

Personally, I have much greater confidence in my ability to lead at all levels within GWT as a result of our collaboration. My community is so much broader as I feel part of a highly energising and supportive network of people working towards the same ultimate purpose.

The mentoring support I have received has enabled me to approach large or contentious challenges feeling better prepared and with my eyes more widely open. This network of people, along with the useful and fascinating shared insights (newsletters, book and 'ripple papers' shared by Caplor Horizons) and the energising Community events I've attended represent tremendous added value to our collaboration. They have brought a sense that I'm also contributing to the community, which is empowering too.

Reflecting back on all of this in May 2022, I would summarise the most significant changes or lasting differences as follows....

The work we did on our values, bringing the whole team together around something we hadn't discussed or explored as a group before, at least during the 5 years I'd been at the charity. We explored and agreed 3 core values which were embedded in our organisational strategy. This has provided a compass through a long period of change, in terms of leadership and strategic direction.

The focus on our funding and strategic fundraising as a team also enabled the development of a 5-year, top level plan.

As well as this practical output, we also explored our leadership preferences through the Caplor House lens. This gave me and other senior staff confidence in our leadership in this area, which enabled us to tackle difficult decisions and as they have been arising and better understand how we can work more effectively together."