

My BE Career: Matthew Robertson

By BE News Team



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Name: Matthew Robertson

Job title: Founder & CFO, Valouran

What I do: Valouran is pioneering property developer and placemaker with an unrivalled knowledge of the residential market. As co-founder and CFO of the business, my role is principally focused on working with our equity partners and lenders to optimise the capital structures we put in place to fund each of our developments. In the early stages of a project, the focus will be on working with our development team to analyse and write the business plan for the deal and then presenting that to our funders. Closing the deal typically involves a really intense period in the run up to completion working with the lawyers to document the transaction. During the development phase itself, my role switches to one of reporting to and liaison with our funding partners. I get to see every part of the development from beginning to end, something I really enjoy.

Why I got into the property industry: I'm a chartered accountant by training and whilst clearly always being a 'numbers guy', I wanted to be involved in a business that delivered a tangible end lasting end product of which I could be proud. High-end residential certainly ticks that box.

How I did it: I was working for a corporate finance advisory boutique and we were mandated to raise further capital for a commercial property and strategic land developer. As is typical during such engagement, I spent a significant amount of time with the management of the company getting to know the business intimately, such that I would be in the best position to present the firm to potential investors. The growth in the business that this fundraising afforded meant that an opportunity was created for someone to come in a head of up the finance side. Having got to know the CEO very well, when he asked if I would be interested, I jumped at the chance.

My first proper job: I think any job is a proper job, but in terms of the one that lead me to what I do today, it would have been with Deloitte on the graduate programme which I joined in 1999.

My first big break: At a firm as large as Deloitte, there's always a risk of getting lost in the crowd. Thankfully, I'd been able to work closely with one of the senior partners and have the chance to impress him. Soon after he left to start his own firm and, at the age of 26, I was one of two colleagues he asked to go with him and co-found the new business.

My inspiration(s): People and product. The passion, energy and drove of the people within our business and the various design and engineering consultancies with whom we work are incredibly inspiring. That comes not just from their talent, but also their shared passionate in delivering a best in class end product of which we can all be rightly proud.

The biggest challenge I've encountered to date: Like many people, I found dealing with the pandemic the hardest thing. It was an incredibly unsettling period for us all. I was so impressed, however, with the pragmatism and adaptability shown by my colleagues. From never having used Zoom or Teams before, within a matter of days, we were seamlessly managing the delivering of £1bn developments whilst all sat at home many miles away from site.

My greatest achievement/proudest moment to date: I'm immensely proud of the achievements we've made in our first year at Valouran. Lots of my friends had raised eyebrows when I announced we were launching a new property development business at a time when the UK was teetering on going into recession, interest rates had soared and construction cost inflation was rampant. Against that backdrop within 12 months we're now working on multiple developments with a gross development value totalling in excess of £500m.

The biggest misconception people have about the property industry: That property development is an easy way to make money and that prices always go up. Ours has always been a cyclical industry, but the last few years have seen increased levels of volatility making patience and the ability to stick with projects over the long term ever more valuable commodities.

My biggest bugbear about the industry/the one thing I would change about the industry: Successive governments have stated that planning reform is one of their major priorities, yet limited progress has been made. Rather than target wholesale reform, I would encourage central government to increase public spending on planning that has consistently fallen since austerity measures were introduced post the great financial crisis.

Why I'm so passionate about DE&I: I went to school in Birmingham and now live and work in London and I firmly believe that the cultural diversity you find in those two cities is one the key things that makes them so great. At Valouran we welcome diversity of thought and opinion, and strive to have a culture where all members of our team have the confidence to know that their voice will be heard.

Why I'm so passionate about ESG: The property development industry undoubtedly plays a key role in initiatives to reduce carbon emissions. On our journey toward net zero carbon developments, we are already delivering schemes to the exacting BREEAM Excellent standard. I think it's vital that the buildings we develop improve the lives of those who live in and around them.

Where I'd like to be in five years' time career-wise: We're just over a year into our journey as Valouran and as a business, there's much we'd like to achieve. One of the marks of success for me in five years would be to see the great team we've assembled grow and flourish, and for the next generation of leaders within our firm to have identified themselves.

Who I'd invite, living or dead, to a dinner party: I'm currently engrossed by a podcast about the life (and death) of John F Kennedy. The experiences he had had and amount he had achieved by the time of his tragic demise (at the same age as me) is quite staggering.

What I do in my downtime: I have three young children and a very energetic Labrador and thus most of my downtime is spent trying to tire them out, often unsuccessfully! I'm a keen summer golfer, and really enjoy skiing in the winter.

The job I'd be doing if I was not doing this: I would love to have had the talent to be an architect.

My advice for someone just starting out: To my mind a successful career is fundamentally about forging great relationships with people. All the most positive moments on my journey to date have been created thus. You can only do that by getting out there and meeting and working with as many people as possible. You might be able to tell that I'm not a huge fan of working from home.

My motto/mantra: Never give up. Developing property successfully is incredibly difficult, particularly to the exacting standards demanded by the prime market. I find it so rewarding to work with such a talented team to overcome all the challenges across the life of a development project and deliver an exceptional end product.