

Caroline Hill

Head of ESG for Blackstone Real Estate in Europe, championing sustainability for over 20 years, meet our new Master in Real Estate.

“ Why real estate?

Honestly, I fell into it. Earlier on in my career, I worked as a sustainability consultant supporting clients from different sectors, including real estate. Over time I found myself becoming more and more interested in experiencing what it was like on the other side of the fence – so, not just advising an organisation on the actions they could take to improve their sustainability but working within an organisation and taking those changes through from start to finish. Landsec was my first in-house sustainability role. I found it incredibly rewarding to work in a sector that was so tangible and I haven't looked back.

If not real estate, what industry would you work in and why?

It would have been financial services. I find the interplay between energy transition and financial services fascinating. The IEA have said it will take more than \$3.5 trillion in capital investment every year to reach net-zero emissions by 2050. Companies' commitment to net-zero cannot be achieved without the right financial structures in place to generate the sheer scale of investment that is required. Financing is critical to supporting the transition to a lower carbon world. I'm lucky that at Blackstone I get to combine my interests in finance and real estate. I work on driving value for our

investors through decarbonising tangible real estate assets, whilst also seeing my colleagues investing in energy transition solutions like solar and EV charging.

What has been most rewarding/exciting about joining Blackstone?

Blackstone is the biggest owner of commercial real estate in the world. Our scale means there is a real opportunity to make a difference to European real estate. Whether we are working with our portfolio company, The Office Group (TOG), to build the tallest timber office building in London, assessing how we can install LED lighting or solar panels at our logistics sites owned by Mileway, or supporting the pilot of a carbon negative home through St. Modwen Homes, we are constantly learning how to make our assets more valuable through decarbonisation. It is incredibly rewarding to work on varied, tangible real estate assets and to be able to affect change by sharing that learning with other companies in our portfolio.

What are some of the biggest ESG related changes you have seen within the real estate sector recently?

The biggest change I have seen is the shift in how ESG is seen. It is now firmly on the map and factored into how real estate assets are managed. Gone are the days of it being a silo, instead it is properly on the agenda as a material/risk consideration. Alongside, or may be due to this change, we've also seen



the professionalisation of the field. The breath of the topics focused on is expanding. If I think back to even five years ago, much of the focus was on the E – environment /sustainability, but we are now seeing the S coming through in DEI and community engagement.

What is most exciting about the future?

The emergence of new technologies and new processes is very exciting. TOG's innovative Black & White building is creating a more sustainable, great place to work, and they are also providing a case study in how it can be done, which others can learn from and adopt.

What are you most proud of in your career?

I am incredibly proud that whilst at Landsec, I was able to lead the organisation to become the first property company in the world to set an approved science-based carbon reduction target back in December 2016; and that before I left the company it had achieved the target – 11 years ahead of schedule.

What do you value most about your work?

I enjoy working with colleagues in Blackstone and in our portfolio companies, to help decarbonise assets and ultimately make them more valuable. One example of this is Tripolis in Amsterdam, which is one of the most sustainable offices in the Netherlands. Working with the Tripolis team on the development of the building has been incredibly rewarding.

How do you maintain a good work/life balance?

Work/life balance is very

WORDS OF WISDOM

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I would say - have a plan but be prepared to take a risk and go on a different tangent if the opportunity arises.

I originally trained as an economist and started out at the Bank of England in their analyst programme. Not long after joining I realised that I wanted to do something different. At the time it felt like a massive decision, but in hindsight I now know that things nearly always fall into place. Changing jobs and even career path is totally normal. The most important thing is to enjoy what you do. Don't be afraid to pivot, make a change and do something else. You never know where it could take you.

What advice would you give to those looking to build a career in the real estate ESG market?

I'd tell anyone looking at a career in ESG to go for it! There has never been a better time to be involved. Many organisations are growing their teams and the sector is continually changing, for example, attracting people from different backgrounds for the first time. In real estate, we are seeing people moving into ESG roles, from their traditional real estate background. This is fantastic as it means we have, and will continue to have, a great mix of sustainability professionals in the field in coming years.

important to me. It is an incredibly personal thing, and the truth is no one is going to manage it for you, so I would encourage people to find a way to make it work for them, including setting your own boundaries. In my case, I try to always leave the office in time to have dinner with my family, but then jump on calls later in the evening if needed.

Who has been your best mentor over the years?

Miles Webber, to whom I reported at Landsec, was and still is an invaluable mentor. From the start we developed a very human relationship. What immediately stood out to me was that he helped me look at worklife in the round – not just work and my career, but family and my other interests. It allowed me to develop a career that really worked around my young and growing family. I strongly believe mentoring is important and some of the most valuable relationships I have are with mentees and mentors. Now at Blackstone, I mentor some of the analysts in the asset management team. What I enjoy most, is that I'm helping them but also learning from them.

If you could have dinner with anyone from the past, who would it be and why?

Emmeline Pankhurst – leader of the UK suffragette movement. She woke up the nation to the cause of women's suffrage through "Deeds not words". I admire her courage and determination. A lot of her activity took place around Hampstead where I live – so I often feel inspired by these brave powerful women when I am out and about.

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