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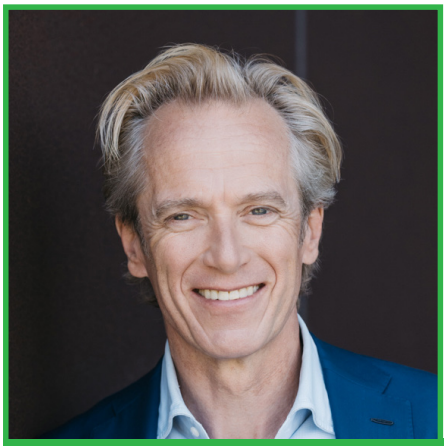

Walter Bien is CFO and member of the Executive Board at Alliander. As a senior executive with financial and management experience in international environments, he has a successful track record of delivering value and achieving results through building relationships with stakeholders aimed at company growth, optimising financial and operational performance. Bien is an authentic leader who empowers people to drive performance and strong environmental awareness. Next to being CFO at Alliander, he is a Board member/treasurer at Natuurmonumenten. Before joining Alliander, Bien was CFO at Boskalis Dredging & Inland Infra.

Walter Bien | CFO Alliander

“How uncertain the times may be, we always keep our eyes on the ball”

According to the results of the CFO Spring Survey 2026, organic growth and cost reduction remain key priorities for Dutch CFOs in the period ahead. For Alliander, organic growth largely means one thing: delivering as many new grid connections as possible—at pace—while operating within clear physical and societal limits. CFO Walter Bien explains how the company is navigating this tension in a world where uncertainty has become a constant.

“It is a direct consequence of our mandate: keeping the energy system affordable, reliable and accessible. The dilemma is clear: demand for grid connections is accelerating, while the physical expansion of the grid has real limits.” Those limits are already tangible in waiting lists for upgrades and new connections, with direct consequences for businesses, housing, and economic growth.

“For us, growth isn’t an end in itself. It is a direct consequence of our mandate: keeping the energy system affordable, reliable and accessible.”

Delivering: double digits are not enough

That is why Alliander is scaling up along two main tracks. The first is delivery: expanding the physical infrastructure by adding cables in the ground, substations, and local transformer kiosks. Execution has been running at full throttle for years. “Our delivery capacity is growing in double digits,” Bien says, “but demand for transport capacity is rising even faster. Every euro invested in steel, copper and sub stations can only be spent once. That reality forces us to look beyond physical expansion alone.”

Scarcity of space, lengthy permitting processes and nitrogen restrictions mean

that this tension is structural. Consumers and businesses need upgrades and connections now, while physical expansion might take years.

"Our delivery capacity is growing in double digits, but demand for transport capacity is rising even faster. That is why there is a second main track as well: flexibility—spreading and steering energy use more intelligently."

Flexibility becomes the new normal

"That is why there is a second main track as well: flexibility—spreading and steering energy use more intelligently," Bien explains. Grid load predictably peaks mainly between 5 PM and 9 PM when households return home, switch on heat pumps and charge electric vehicles. Supply can peak on a sunny or windy day, when solar and wind generation exceed what the grid can absorb. Depending on the time of day, energy may also flow back into the grid.

That requires active steering, better forecasting and, above all, different user behaviour. Incentives matter. "For households, we are working towards a time-based capacity tariff. The idea is simple: the system helps you choose. Don't charge the car now- wait until later, when it's cheaper." For businesses, contractual arrangements can render a similar effect. Companies that reduce offtake during peak moments can often still upgrade their connection or be connected sooner. The introduction of time-based capacity tariffs is planned for 2028—2029, following extensive alignment with, for example, lawmakers and the market.

From grid operator to grid developer

Alongside these day-to-day realities, a second structural shift is under way, and it is just as significant. Alliander is no longer only operating the grid; it is increasingly developing it. The focus is extending beyond electricity alone to include heat networks and sustainable gases. The optimal energy carrier differs by region and by industry. Making those choices requires what Bien calls 'energy spatial planning': deliberate, evidence-based decisions on which energy carrier works best where, and on what timeline.

The role of the CFO

This transition lands directly on Finance's desk. Over the past five years, Alliander's annual investment programme has grown substantially to over 2 billion euro annually. That capital must not only be secured but also deployed into the market in a controlled and effective way. At the same time, affordability remains a non-negotiable boundary condition. "That means deploying resources efficiently and putting clear KPIs in place to support and explain trade-offs. Finance—and the CFO—plays a central role in creating transparency." Another dimension to the role of the CFO is funding the energy transition itself: raising sufficient capital on acceptable terms. "And then there is security of supply," Bien adds. "Materials increasingly set the pace of construction. That leads to a continuous question: how much inventory do we hold, what buffers are prudent, and what is the true cost of downtime?"

"We're no longer only operating the grid; we are increasingly developing it."

AI and talent

Scaling up also requires the right talent. Alliander must continue to expand its delivery capacity, while hiring more project managers and grid developers, or 'grid architects' as Bien calls them. At the same time, the shift towards flexibility leads to more work in data, forecasting and active steering. AI plays a crucial role in this transition, enabling more accurate estimates of grid load and earlier identification of bottlenecks. "In other words, tomorrow's grid operator will not only manage a vast portfolio of physical assets; it will partly be a digital business. That digital step-change is not a luxury; it is a necessity."

Supply chain: a balancing act

Grid expansion also depends on the availability of materials. The geopolitical developments

following the Covid 19 period made supply chain vulnerabilities painfully visible. Since then, Alliander has conducted risk assessment for each critical material. “Where needed, we hold larger inventories, put long-term contracts in place, and broaden our supplier base. Rather than relying on one or two parties, we diversify to reduce dependency on any single country or manufacturer.”

That approach always comes down to a constant balancing act between efficiency, effectiveness and resilience. Not every component needs to come from the same region. For certain components, sourcing from China makes economic sense—otherwise the system becomes unnecessarily expensive. For critical components, stricter requirements apply. The same logic holds for inventory management. Holding a large buffer costs money, but downtime is often more expensive, so the business case is straightforward. That is why the analysis remains dynamic and is continuously updated.

Uncertainty as a constant

In a world where disruptions escalate faster, scenario planning and ‘what if’ analyses help expose vulnerabilities. What is the cost of an outage? What alternatives exist? Which measure increases resilience most effectively? Resilience extends beyond engineering alone. Extreme weather, cyber threats and even deliberate physical disruption increasingly demand attention.

“Uncertainty has become a constant,” Bien concludes. “But however uncertain the times may be, we won’t be led by the news cycle. Our direction is set. We expand where we can, flex where we must, keep resilience firmly in view, and get the enabling conditions in order. However uncertain the times may be, we keep our eyes on the ball.”

“Our direction is set. We expand where we can, flex where we must, keep resilience firmly in view, and get the enabling conditions in order.”

Summary

Alliander is scaling up to keep the energy system affordable, reliable, and accessible amid rapidly rising demand for grid connections. Physical expansion alone cannot keep pace because of space constraints, permitting delays, and supply chain pressures. Therefore, the company is pursuing a second track: flexibility, using smarter forecasting, and contracts to steer energy use and reduce peak loads. This transition requires the right talent (e.g., project managers and grid architects) and AI. This shift also transforms Alliander from grid operator to grid developer. Finance plays a central role in funding, prioritising investments, and balancing resilience, efficiency, and affordability, while keeping their eyes on the ball in an increasingly uncertain environment.