

Plowman & Forester Towers Oxford



Client Oxford City Council
Cost £3–4mm
Services High Rise

Working in a consortium of consultants led by EC Harris, BM3 Architecture was selected through a competitive tender process to work on the refurbishment of Oxford City Council's stock of high rise flats.

Forester Tower was built in the 1960s and is situated on Wood Farm Road. Plowman Tower was built in the late 1960s. It was the first of Oxford's tower blocks, and is named after Harry Plowman, CBE, MA, Town Clerk of Oxford 1940–1965. Each block has 85 flats split over 15 floors, with 6 flats per floor on the upper floors and one flat and residents stores on the ground floor.

The cladding proposal seeks to give each pair of blocks its own identity. Whilst the landscape proposals are individually designed to respond to the needs of each particular block.

Traditionally high rise buildings can elementally be split into three elements: the base, which grounds the building; the trunk which defines its character and the top which crowns the building. The same principle is applied here and it is proposed to clad the ground and first storeys (the plinth) in dark brick slips, clad the middle of the tower in rainscreen cladding and insulated render. The windows are grouped in diminishing numbers to play on the perspective and further increase the blocks perceived height. Cladding the plinth in brick slips provides a robust and durable finish at

ground level and gives the block a human scale at entrance level.

All the blocks suffer with problems related to pigeons. To help combat this problem the existing balconies are to be turned winter gardens. This also allows residents to use the space throughout the year, with the glazing system folding fully back in the summer to allow a full balcony and to enable the glazing to be cleaned from the balcony.

The tower refurbishment works are to be undertaken with resident's in-situ who have been extensively consulted throughout the project on the new design of their homes. Design reviews with CABI have also been part of the design process.