

Press release: 3 June 2021

Johnson's Willow will live on

The fifth incarnation of an historic tree at Stowe Pool in Lichfield will be planted later this year.

Lichfield District Council and the Johnson Society have been working together to make sure a significant tree in Lichfield, called Johnson's Willow, is regrown as the current tree reaches the end of its life.

The tree grows to the side of Stowe Pool and is famous for having been Dr Samuel Johnson's favourite tree, when he lived in, and later revisited, Lichfield in the 18th century. For this reason it is now called Johnson's Willow, although in his time it was known as the Lichfield Willow.

A survey of all Lichfield District Council's trees revealed Johnson's Willow needs to be felled due to extensive decay.

The tree has already been regrown three times over the years using cuttings from each version of Johnson's Willow. In preparation for the felling, the council's community gardeners have been growing cuttings taken in 2018.

Councillor Iain Eadie, Cabinet Member responsible for Parks, said: "Although it's sad to see this remarkable tree come down, we're really pleased to be planting a new tree later in the year.

"Our community gardeners have been tending cuttings taken from the current tree, and will choose the strongest one to be planted in the autumn. This will become the fifth incarnation of Johnson's Willow so future generations will be able to enjoy this historic tree for years to come."

Both Lichfield District Council and the Johnson Society will be involved in a ceremony to celebrate the replanting of Johnson's Willow. It will include the reading of a new poem about the tree following an open poetry competition run by the Johnson Society.

John Winterton, Heritage Liaison Officer for the Johnson Society, said: "The felling of the current Johnson's Willow will be a very sad event, but is unavoidable in the circumstances. The good news is that the future of the tree will be secured by the planting of the fifth willow only some three months later – the shortest interval in the tree's history."

Johnson's Willow is expected to be felled in mid-August and a cutting will be planted in the same location in November when the site has been cleared. This will be protected with a tall metal cage until the young tree establishes itself.

To find out more about Stowe Pool visit www.lichfieldhistoricparks.co.uk.

Ends

Media enquiries

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Johnson’s Willow timeline

c. 1700	First willow planted
1810	Many of the willow’s branches lost in a storm
1815	Nearly half of the remaining tree falls to the ground
1825	Boys start a fire in the willow’s hollow trunk
1829	First willow blown down
1830	Second willow planted
1881	Second willow destroyed in a storm
1898	Third willow planted
1956	Third willow found to be unsafe and felled
1959	Fourth willow planted
2014	Fall of a limb – some pollarding and other works
2016	Further pollarding to meet tree maintenance standards
2018	More pollarding and cuttings taken
2021	Forth willow to be felled due to decay and fifth willow to be planted