

Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan 2027-2031

Consultation Response from Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council

Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on Leicestershire County Council's Draft Strategic Plan 2027-2031.

The Parish Council supports the broad aims of the Plan. We recognise the pressures facing Leicestershire County Council, including increased demand for services, financial pressures, population growth and possible local government reorganisation. We also support the intention to improve outcomes for residents, protect the environment, support local communities and strengthen the county's economy.

However, from our perspective, the Plan needs to say more about the everyday issues affecting rural villages such as Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe and Acresford. These are not minor issues for our residents. Problems such as speeding, poor drainage, flooding, limited local transport and pressure on community facilities have a real impact on daily life.

1. Recognition of Parish and Town Councils

Parish and town councils are the tier of local government closest to residents. We are often the first point of contact when residents are concerned about highways, drainage, planning, open spaces, community facilities or local services. Parish councils also manage local assets, support volunteers and community groups, and provide a direct link between residents and principal authorities.

Although the Draft Strategic Plan refers to partnership working, it does not clearly recognise the contribution made by parish and town councils. ODA Parish Council believes this should be made explicit. If the County Council wants services and decisions to reflect local need, then parish councils need to be treated as key partners, especially during any future local government reorganisation.

2. Rural Transport and Access to Services

The Parish Council welcomes the emphasis on infrastructure and connectivity, but rural transport remains a real concern for our villages.

Residents in Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe and Acresford cannot always easily access work, healthcare, education, leisure facilities or other services without a car. This particularly affects older residents, younger people, those who cannot drive and households with limited access to transport.

The Council would welcome a stronger commitment to:

- Improving rural public transport.
- Supporting community transport initiatives.

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- Improving walking and cycling connections between communities where appropriate.
- Ensuring rural residents can access essential services and opportunities.

For rural communities, transport is not just about convenience. It affects access to services, employment, education, health appointments and social opportunities. The Plan should recognise that rural residents need practical and realistic transport options if they are to benefit from the county's wider ambitions.

3. Highways, Drainage, Flooding and Road Safety

Highway maintenance, drainage, flooding and road safety are among the issues most regularly raised with ODA Parish Council by residents.

The A444 continues to be a major concern locally. Residents regularly raise issues about speeding, noise and road safety, particularly where vehicles leave the A444 and enter Acresford at speed. There are also concerns about the speed of vehicles travelling from Measham along Burton Road, across Acresford Crossroads, where there have been repeated accidents and near misses, and into the 30 mph zone. This is not a new problem and it continues to affect how safe residents feel in and around the village.

Acresford Crossroads is also a long-standing local concern. There have been repeated accidents and near misses at this location, and the Parish Council considers that it needs further investigation and stronger road safety measures before there is a more serious incident.

Hill Street in Donisthorpe is another location where residents have raised concerns about the speed of vehicles through the village. In Oakthorpe, Measham Road carries a very heavy volume of traffic for a rural village road, adding to concerns about safety, noise and the day-to-day impact on residents.

Flooding is another regular issue. School Street in Oakthorpe and Chapel Street in Donisthorpe have both experienced repeat surface water flooding. Residents report drains becoming blocked, drainage systems failing or collapsing, and water simply not draining away after heavy rain. These problems cause disruption for residents and show why maintaining existing drainage infrastructure is just as important as providing new infrastructure.

The Draft Strategic Plan refers to infrastructure and resilient communities, but ODA Parish Council would like to see a clearer commitment to dealing with known local problems, not just future growth. Existing roads, drains and rural infrastructure need proper maintenance if villages are expected to remain safe, accessible and resilient.

The Parish Council would welcome commitments to:

- Improved road safety measures along the A444.
- Targeted traffic calming and enforcement on Hill Street, Donisthorpe; Measham Road, Oakthorpe; and Burton Road into Acresford.

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- Further investigation of accident hotspots, including Acresford Crossroads.
- Greater monitoring and enforcement of speeding in rural communities.
- Proactive maintenance of highway drainage systems.
- Faster intervention where drains have collapsed or become blocked.
- Investment in flood prevention and climate resilience measures.
- Ensuring future growth is supported by appropriate transport and drainage infrastructure.

For residents, safe roads and working drainage are basic services. They need to be given proper priority in the final Plan, particularly in rural areas where problems can be slower to resolve and where the impact on residents can be significant.

4. Protection of Village Identity, Heritage and the Natural Environment

The Parish Council strongly supports the Plan's commitment to protecting Leicestershire's heritage and natural environment.

For villages such as Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe and Acresford, local heritage, countryside, green spaces and the separation between settlements are very important. They help define the identity of each village and contribute to residents' wellbeing and sense of place.

The Parish Council would welcome stronger recognition of the need to:

- Protect the character and identity of villages.
- Safeguard valued green spaces and countryside.
- Protect heritage assets and local distinctiveness.
- Enhance biodiversity and the natural environment.
- Ensure growth is accompanied by appropriate infrastructure and does not erode rural character.

The Parish Council supports sustainable growth, but development must be planned carefully so that it does not erode the individual character of our villages or place further pressure on roads, drainage and local services that are already under strain.

5. Community Facilities and Local Resilience

The Parish Council supports the Plan's aim of bringing people together, supporting volunteering and promoting healthier communities.

In our parish, local facilities and open spaces are central to community life. They support meetings, events, sport, recreation, volunteering and informal support between residents. These facilities are not optional extras; they are part of the infrastructure that helps villages remain active and connected.

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These facilities help to:

- Reduce loneliness and social isolation.
- Support physical and mental wellbeing.
- Encourage volunteering and community involvement.
- Provide opportunities for recreation and healthy lifestyles.
- Strengthen community resilience during times of difficulty.

ODA Parish Council therefore believes that community facilities, parks, open spaces and local meeting places should be recognised as essential to community resilience and wellbeing, particularly in rural areas where there may be fewer alternative services nearby.

6. Engagement with Local Communities

The Draft Strategic Plan states that services should be shaped by resident feedback and meaningful engagement. The Parish Council strongly supports this commitment.

The Council would encourage the County Council to continue engaging with parish councils and local communities at an early stage, rather than after decisions have largely been shaped. Local knowledge can help identify practical issues that may not be obvious at county level, such as recurring flooding locations, speeding concerns, accident hotspots and gaps in local services.

Conclusion

Oakthorpe, Donisthorpe & Acresford Parish Council supports the overall direction of the Draft Strategic Plan and welcomes the ambition to improve outcomes for residents, communities and the local economy.

However, the Council believes the final Plan should provide a stronger commitment to the issues affecting rural communities, particularly:

- Recognition of parish and town councils as key partners.
- Rural transport and access to services.
- Road safety improvements on the A444, Hill Street, Donisthorpe; Measham Road, Oakthorpe; and Burton Road into Acresford.
- Investigation of accident issues at Acresford Crossroads.
- Highway drainage, flood prevention and maintenance of existing infrastructure.
- Protection of village identity, heritage and the rural environment.
- Support for community facilities and local resilience.

In ODA Parish Council's view, strengthening these areas would make the Strategic Plan more relevant to villages like ours and would help ensure that rural communities are not overlooked when countywide priorities are delivered.