

Annual Report: County Councillor for Chalgrove & Thame West

Cllr Judith Edwards – April 2026

Introduction

This has been my first year as County Councillor for the Chalgrove & Thame West Division. It has been a challenging but rewarding year, focused on understanding County Council processes, representing parish priorities, and ensuring rural and market-town communities are properly reflected in county-wide decision-making.

As you will be aware, I was diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer in December 2025 and have had to step back from council duties to focus on treatment. This report therefore reflects work undertaken prior to that point. I am pleased to say I am nearing the end of my treatment and hope to return to work in early May. I am very grateful for the support and kindness shown by parish councils across the division.

Representation and Council Work

I attended **Full Council**, scrutiny committees, locality meetings and extensive member training during the year. I serve on the **Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee** and the **People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**, focusing on NHS services, public health, adult social care and safeguarding.

In September, I made my **maiden speech at Full Council**, speaking in support of Family Centres and highlighting the work of the **Chalgrove & Watlington First Steps Family Hub**. I also volunteered as **Chair of the Henley & Thame Locality Committee**, reflecting my interest in neighbourhood governance and strengthening links with parishes.

Working with Parishes and Communities

I attended parish and town council meetings across the division, including Berrick and Roke, Brightwell Baldwin, Chalgrove, the Haseleys, Great Milton, Little Milton, Newington, Stadhampton, Tetsworth, Tiddington and Thame Town Council. Where attendance was not possible, I encouraged direct contact and follow-up.

I also represented the County Council at a range of community and civic events, the flag raising ceremony for Armed Forces Week, including **Thame Pride**, village family events and the **Chalgrove Horticultural Show (60th anniversary)**, which highlighted the vital role of volunteers and community groups.

Highways, Flooding and Infrastructure

Highways and flooding were among the most significant issues raised by parish councils.

I worked closely with parishes and officers on repeated flooding issues in **Tiddington, Little Milton, Great Haseley and Newington**, pushing for both immediate mitigation and longer-term solutions. The move to **annual gully clearance**, supported by additional county funding, has already made a difference in some areas, although legacy issues remain.

I also followed up on potholes, drainage failures, road safety concerns and structural issues such as the weight-restricted bridges over the River Thame near Tiddington.

Planning and Strategic Issues

The proposed development at **Chalgrove Airfield** has been a major issue. Homes England's exhibition indicated a forthcoming planning application, and from a county perspective, **traffic and highway capacity** remain key concerns. I met with county officers, district councillors, our MP and **Martin-Baker Ltd.**, who have stated the proposals are incompatible with their operations. This remains an ongoing concern, and I remain concerned about whether we are being listened to. The recent case where a refusal of planning permission for further housing development on the edge of Chalgrove was overturned at appeal is a concerning precedent.

In response to the planning permission for **Great Haseley Industrial Estate**, where there was a proposal to use the site for a depot for waste disposal trucks, I focused on highways impacts linked to HGV traffic through surrounding villages. I was pleased that planning permission ultimately included conditions to reduce local traffic impacts.

Local Government Reorganisation, Health and Other County Matters

Local government reorganisation has been a major theme, with three unitary options submitted to government. I raised concerns about the "**Greater Oxford**" proposal and favour an option that keeps Oxfordshire coherent, is simpler and least disruptive to services. We expect to hear from the Secretary of State about the decision for Oxfordshire in June 2026. Elections for a shadow authority are likely to take place in May 2027.

Through my scrutiny roles, I focused on NHS provision, adult social care, safeguarding and preventative approaches such as the "**Age Well**" programme. It was encouraging later in the year to see **Ofsted and the CQC report effective progress on SEND services** in Oxfordshire.

Other county-wide issues included the introduction of the **Oxford Temporary Congestion Charge** and the **Fire and Rescue Service Review**, where I encouraged parish input to ensure rural needs were recognised. In the latter case, I'm pleased to report that revised proposals are now being discussed that avoid fire station closures or the reduction of fire engines in Thame from 2 to 1.

Supporting Communities and Looking Ahead

I promoted support available to residents, including the **Resident Support Scheme** and **Home Upgrade Grants**. My **Councillor Priority Fund** was allocated to **Cosy Homes Thame**, **Thame Pride** and the **Chalgrove & Watlington First Steps Family Hub**. These three causes tie in very closely to my driving principles of community inclusion, tackling climate change and supporting families.

I look forward to resuming work and continuing to support all parish and town councils across the division from early May.