**Speech by Cllr Matthew Hicks, Leader of Suffolk County Council at the opening of the Gull Wing bridge in Lowestoft on 7 September 2024.**
Good morning, my name is Matthew Hicks, and I am the Leader of Suffolk County Council. Thank you all for being here today on what is a momentous occasion for Lowestoft.

A new bridge such as this doesn’t just happen overnight, whilst its design may be modern, and its construction techniques and materials state of the art - this bridge's history and political genesis dates back decades, and in the moments before we allow the vehicles to cross, I want to pay tribute and thank all those who, over the years, have played their part in making today possible.

Earlier this week I was fortunate enough to speak to Clifford Smith, the first Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council, who before that role was also the County planner.  Clifford has described to me the efforts he went through to try and secure a third crossing in Lowestoft. 60 years ago, Thank you Clifford, for your vision back in 1964 which undoubtably laid the foundations of this bridge we are all standing on today.

Of course, it would be decades later before this project received the nod of approval from Central Government, so I must thank Peter Aldous for his role as former member of Parliament for Lowestoft. Thank you Peter for your tenacity and Herculean determination, that come what may, a third crossing in Lowestoft must happen.  I remember well when Peter invited the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to Lowestoft in April 2015, and the moment when the Prime Minister committed the Government in helping to fund a bridge in the town.  Of course, there were doubts it would happen, with many saying - "I will believe it when I see it" - well to all those who doubted Peter's determination and Lord Cameron's promise - you can now clearly see it - the Gull Wing truly is a promise made - and a promise delivered.  Thank you Peter for staying true to your word, and thank you Lord Cameron for giving it your enthusiastic backing.

I also want to thank my predecessors Mark Bee and Colin Noble, and all the various Cabinet Members of Suffolk County Council who grasped the opportunity offered by the government and enthusiastically gave this project their backing.

Then there was the decision on what route the new bridge should take. Bob Blizzard is no longer with us, but I want to pay tribute to him today because the very route it takes owes much to his lobbying and campaigning.

I want to thank Farrans for their work as our construction partner in this project. Even with the challenges of a global pandemic and foreign wars disrupting supply and energy chains - they, and their army of excellent sub-contractors have delivered this bridge for the people of Lowestoft.

I want to thank Bam Nuttall and Arup for producing such a stunning iconic design, you have not just designed a bridge - you've designed a new landmark for the county of Suffolk of which we are all proud.

I want to thank Oil gear, Eadon, Ardent, Victor Buyck, Javlin, Quinn, TJ Edwards Steel and Associate British Ports as the port authority.  I want to say a special thank you to local contractors LEC Marine and Sharp Contract and Surveying who are both from Lowestoft and DPL from Ipswich.  I know there will be some businesses who I have missed with the limited time I have, but I hope you are all proud of this new bridge for Lowestoft, a bridge that will serve the people of this town for decades to come.

Finally, I want to thank Simon Bretherton, Suffolk County Council's Gull Wing Project Director, and his team for leading this project and managing this bridge into reality. Building something of this scale, the largest of its kind in the world, was never going to be easy but you did it brilliantly - thank you.

I hope you will all return in November for the formal Civic opening of the Gull Wing.

I am very proud that we at Suffolk CC have delivered the Gull Wing for the town, This is a massive achievement and as I said earlier this is a promise made - and a promise delivered.

Can I ask you now to all join with me as we countdown to noon - and welcome the first public vehicles to cross the Gull Wing Bridge.