ACRA officers have looked at the dossier presented by Canterbury City Council in support of its claim to have fulfilled the duty to co-operate. We are unconvinced that it does this. Yes, in its first section it provides a long list of routine meetings with other authorities. We would have expected that this would be the case. The Council did not need to pile Pelion on Ossa to do this. But this is not evidence, as we said in 2014, of the wider purposive strategic cooperation on planning which is required. None of these references indicate that there has been a clearly thought out approach to cooperation, with clear targets, audit trails and motivations. Interestingly hardly any minutes of these meetings appear in the second part of the dossier. In other words, the first section gives us the bones of a cooperation strategy but we needed to see the brain behind it. And this omission continues in the rest of the dossier.

In fact the second section is heavily reliant on Transport and, again, we would never deny that the Council worked collaboratively with KCC and others through the established channels. However, there is no equivalent documentation involving other sectors and other authorities. Instead we are given the papers for the two stakeholder meetings in 2012-13 and the IPSOS Mori report. We can in no way accept these as convincing evidence for collaboration. We note that, although invited, most district councils did not attend the second one. In any case, as we have already made clear we have never accepted that these were genuine consultation exercizes. They were manufactured meetings designed to extract legitimation for decisions already set in stone and not means of letting people have a voice in the original decision making.

 Residents' associations were amongst those who took part though only because some of us invited ourselves because we did not figure on the list because we were not considered meaningful stakeholders. Moreover, many of us then refused to respond to over determined questions. We also convened a meeting with Council representatives. In any case, the two stakeholder meetings were post facto affairs and provide no evidence of an ab initio strategy on cooperation. And we should also point out again that we have always contested the interpretations placed by the Council on the IPSOS-MORI poll.

In fact the only real discussion of a cooperation strategy appears to be in the context of the East Kent Regeneration Board. And this dates from October 2014 and clearly looks ahead. Nothing similar is provided for 2011-13 when it was really needed. In other words, nowhere in the 392 pages submitted to you, is there a single clear statement, dating from the early days of the plan process, where the Council specifies its desire for and strategy for cooperation. The fact that there is no such statement reinforces our impression that the Council has never purposefully engaged with the duty to cooperate and what it means. It has assumed that something like it happens by osmosis in routine gatherings.

Finally, we would stress that the list does not mention any meaningful discussions with the several parish councils which will be so much affected by the plans. Cooperation, like charity, surely ought to start at home. We cannot accept Mr Brown’s assertion that they have been consulted. Attendance at the staged attempts to manufacture support does not count as consultation. In any case his claim has been denied by several Parishes in open session. Overall they feel that they have been allowed no input into the Plan. And they should know. And the fact that they have not been involved is a further testimony of the limits to the Council’s general interest, or lack of it, in cooperation.. Moreover, his assertion conflicts with his advice to Corinthian not to consult with locals because they were opposed in principle. So, for all these reasons, we do not consider the case has been made.

C HC & SL for ACRA