

Holiday homes under threat

Angry Brits took to the streets in Spain yesterday in protest over their dream homes being threatened with demolition.

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Earlier this month, the home of pensioners Len and Helen Prior on the south coast of Spain was demolished in front of them due to the regional Andalusian government claiming 10 houses in the area had been built illegally. At least four of the homes under threat in the village of Vera belong to Britons.

An estimated 100,000 homes have been built on protected land during a 10-year housing boom along Spain's 1,000-mile Mediterranean coastline.

Thousands of Britons bought homes in Spain only to discover they had been illegally granted planning permission by town halls.

Now a senior prosecutor has demanded that all those built illegally must be demolished.

Protest

Organised for locals, by locals, reports say that between 800 and 1000 participated in the Vera protest of the demolition of Len and Helen Prior's home on January 9th. Several local Spanish organisations pulled together to put pressure on the regional government to stop the demolitions.

The next victims?

One Briton, whose home has been deemed illegal, fears his £450,000 home will be next. John Bull, 66, a retired engineer, and his wife Christine, 64, bought a three-bedroom villa 600 yards from the Priors' house six years ago.

He said: "Watching poor Len and Helen's house being demolished has brought home the realisation that we could be next." The couple moved to Vera after selling their home in Worthing, West Sussex, in search of a dream life in the sunshine. "We love the house and everything was perfect for the first three years. Then we had a phone call saying it had been deemed illegal and was going to be knocked down. We challenged that decision in the courts but lost. If they knock it down we will have nowhere to go."

Antonio Vercher, the chief state prosecutor in charge of protecting Spain's environment, ordered prosecutors throughout the country to be relentless in pursuing demolition orders. Thousands of expats were duped into buying homes that should never have been built.

Most bought in good faith using reliable solicitors and established developers and estate agents. Bribes, corruption and backhanders between developers and town planners have been commonplace. But Mr Vercher has said he is in favour of demolishing houses and leaving homeowners to seek compensation from builders in the civil courts.

The story so far...

In October, 2006, Spain launched a specialist police force to investigate corruption in urban planning

Some 30,000 homes have been built illegally in Marbella, on the Costa del Sol, where a £2billion corruption scandal has resulted in the arrests of the mayor, head of planning and 50 other officials

In Catral, near Alicante, on the Costa Blanca, 1,270 homes owned by Britons and worth an average of £200,000 have been threatened with demolition.

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