

Auditors called in to Albox Commission fees obtained for illegal villas "missing", admits Mayor

By Richard Tome, writing in the Costa Almeria News, edition 3-9 August 2007. 2007

An independent audit on Albox council investigating why the local authority is 10 million euros in the red, will also probe into the whereabouts of commission fees for building licences that were never granted, the mayor has revealed.

José Garcia Navarro, who made the announcement live on the Spanish radio station, SER, said the measures had been adopted unanimously following a plenary meeting earlier this week. The former mayor, Francisco Granero, who is currently on holiday, was not present during the council meeting.

Sr Navarro, who won the May local elections for the Socialist PSOE party, admitted the council was in dire straits and that councillors had agreed to hire a private firm of auditors to determine the local authority's true financial situation.

More worryingly, councillors also admitted that they were in the dark as to the whereabouts of commission fees, amounting to three per cent on every building application, paid by developers to the Town Hall for licences that were never granted, all of which are currently illegal as they were built on rural land.

Speaking to this newspaper, Sr Navarro declined to say if criminal proceedings against former councillors would follow. He said: "Our aim is to find out how much money was paid to us and what revenue is available to the town hall".

The revelation comes in the wake of the recent raids on council offices by officers of Seprona, the Guardia Civil branch dedicated to stamping out urban development abuse.

Costa Almeria News can also reveal that there are currently around 2,000 properties which are now subject to criminal proceedings by Seprona and the regional government's police.

A legal source involved in the case said that owners, most of whom are expats, could be called to give evidence as witnesses, but also warned they could be charged as defendants, "particularly if their names appear in documents as the developers", he said.