

Cantoria: Against the Ropes

Cantoria mayor speaks about the El Fas town Planning Scandal
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Against the ropes

Cantoria mayor speaks about the El Fas town planning scandal

By Richard Torne

The mayor of Cantoria this week tried to salvage his council's tattered image in the aftermath of the revelations of a planning scandal by claiming he had been unaware of the situation for years.

Costa Almeria News revealed last week that the public prosecutor had asked for the demolition of 19 properties in the El Fas district, mostly belonging to experts, saying they had been built or constructed without building permits or first habitation certificates.

Experts living in El Fas were also asked to give evidence last month against developers Karim Smith and Julio Pineda.

In an exclusive interview with Costa Almeria News, Mayor Pedro Llamas Garcia, from the right-wing Partido Popular Party (PP), has opened for the first time about the scandal.

St Llamas rejected the suggestion that Cantoria council had allowed the construction of illegal properties and claimed the first time he knew about the illegal status of El Fas, which is located just a few kilometres from the main village, was when Suprema, the Guardia Civil's environmental protection branch, first intervened in 2005.

Asked why he had not acted earlier through the local police or the council, St Llamas said the council did not have any police officers at his disposal when the properties were being constructed.

St Llamas admitted he might be willing to prevent the demolitions from going ahead or to impose exorbitant compensation if the developers went bankrupt.

He also went on record to discredit Daniel Pedrosa, a member of the PP and partner of his son, who had voted to legalise El Fas if his

party were voted in at the last local elections. Mr Pedrosa stirred further controversy by claiming in expert he was the deputy mayor and a ruling councillor.

On the issue of illegal construction paid by developers so money had been paid in the form of taxes to build in Cantoria.

According to St Llamas, the council had started legal proceedings against developers of illegal builds two and a half years ago, amounting to between 50 and 60 properties.

However, he was unable to provide documentary evidence to this reporter that such action had taken place.

It has also come to light that both the mayor's son, Pedro María Llamas, and his brother, Pepe, are partners in a local construction company, Alfa Concepto Rural, which has also been linked to Ms Smith's now defunct real estate firm, Southern Spain Consultants.

Asked about his brother Pepe's involvement with no illegal development in La Real, St Llamas said the situation was "the same as the others", adding that no illegal constructions were being going ahead in Cantoria.

Despite St Llamas' assurance that he was working with the Junta to reach an agreement over the issue of illegal builds, there is little the mayor can do to stop the El Fas case going through the courts due to the fact that it is a criminal investigation.

Socialist party (PSOE) councillor in Cantoria, Manuel Pedrosa, rallied against the mayor, saying St Llamas should have included El Fas in the PSOE's plans years ago. "He had at least four years to sort this out."

He also criticised experts for "showing themselves to be hoodwinked by Mr. Pineda", adding that "everyone knew what he was claiming to be".

However, St Pedrosa stressed that he understood the plight of experts and hoped no properties would be demolished. "The developers should pay compensation in the last instance. Failing that, I think everyone including the council and the Junta should work towards legalising El Fas and contribute towards paying for the infrastructure."

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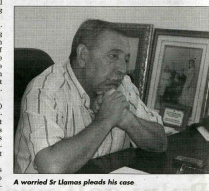
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A worried St Llamas pleads his case



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