



FOREIGN RESIDENTS TAKE ON THE DEVELOPERS

by elsunnews

OVER 100 EXPATRIATE RESIDENTS OF RONDA ARE MEETING ANDALUCIA PRESIDENT MANUEL CHAVES OVER VARIOUS PROJECTS PLANNED ON VIRGIN, UNESCO-PROTECTED WOODLAND

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By John Clarke

The powerful protest group - which includes writers, scientists and businessmen from over a dozen nationalities - has been set up to oppose the Los Merinos scheme of two golf courses, 800 houses and three luxury hotels

They claim that the project does not have water and will drastically alter the character of the celebrated mountain town

They believe it, and many other such schemes, based on the disastrous Costa del Sol development model, are eroding the unique countryside of inland Andalusia

In an open letter to the Junta de Andalusia, the group expresses its concerns over the environmental consequences of the scheme, alongside many others in the unspoilt countryside of the Serrania de Ronda.

The group insists that the recent water board ruling that there is NOT enough water in the area should be respected. They argue that with reservoirs in Andalusia currently well under 30 per cent full, such schemes are anything but sustainable.

As well as the immediate environmental impact, it is estimated that over 10,000 local residents of the area may lose their water supply.

This environmental vandalism is happening in a place publicly noted by the Andalusian authorities as the finest example of holm oak woodland still in existence. Not for long, it seems.

So far more than 1,300 valuable and protected 'centenario' oak trees have been cut down, for which a 266,000-euro fine remains unpaid.

Thousands more are destined to be felled this summer and the main surveying work is complete.

Thousands more trees are due to disappear with a bizarre new road scheme which will serve developers Criber S.A. and neighbouring golf course scheme Parchite Golf, but will be of little use to the citizens of Arriate whose town it is supposed to bypass.

How can such enormous projects be considered in the Unesco-protected Biosphere of the Sierra Nieves? Permission has already been given for a 4km race track for Formula 1 race cars in the area.

Now work will next door on the high-security, Los Merinos gated community of 'mountain villages' despite not getting final permission.

Developers have now fenced off the land and even illegally blocked the centuries-old European-wide GR-7 footpath, which goes from Tarifa to Athens in Greece.

In the words of Andalusia environment chief Ignacio Trillo the work may already have had



irrevocably damage to the area's local flora. He added that it would be 'a barbarity' if they were to continue work before the water issue and other major shortcomings of the project have been resolved.

So how come the work is continuing?

WHILE THE EUROPEAN UNION HAS RECENTLY BEGUN TO INVESTIGATE, IT MAY SOON BE TOO LATE!

The Ronda town hall, which is led by the lawyers Antonio Marin Lara and Jose Herrera, has already signed deals with the developers, who claim the main project will begin in months, even weeks.

Millions of euros are to be paid to Ronda town hall. But how can we be sure that all will go into the council coffers?

With over 50 developers and councillors currently under arrest under Operation Malaya in Marbella - and with numerous mayors in Malaga province also under investigation or in prison for bribery and corruption - the group believes there needs to be a much closer investigation of the Los Merinos scheme.

Enough is enough!

Ronda is known throughout the world for its breathtaking scenery. Celebrated for its natural, mountainous surroundings and wildlife, it has been a draw for writers, artists and nature lovers for centuries. Ernest Hemingway wrote that it was the best place in the world for romance, while Orson Welles insisted on having his ashes scattered here. German poet Rainier Maria Rilke called it the 'city of dreams' while David Bomberg and Francisco Goya painted here.

Ultimately the group wants to demonstrate that while the Ronda town hall claims the majority of local residents are in favour of the golf course, the majority of foreign residents who live there are against it.

One resident, writer Alastair Boyd (Lord Kilmarnock), who has lived in the area for decades said: 'The high demand for scarce water in a period of increasing drought will inevitably degrade the environment.'

The writer, who is married to novelist Martin Amis's mother Hilary, continued: 'The plague of buildings on green and protected land is threatening the long term interest of the region, which has become popular for green tourism.'

He added: 'There is a naïve assumption that golfers are high spenders who throw money into the local community and create jobs. There will obviously be some job creation in construction but the rest will just be casual and low paid labour with no job security. The scheme is completely unsustainable.'

Green Party MEP David Hammerstein, who is involved in the EU investigation, said: 'Andalucia has become the Wild West of Europe and is slowly going to have to learn that the EU is more than just a handout for schools and social centres. It is also the enforcer of legal obligations to protect nature.'

Organiser Petra Wiegink said: 'We are prepared to take this all the way to the European courts. The EU is now investigating but we want something done before the beautiful area is ruined by development. We are sure that both Ronda town hall and the Andalucian authorities will come to share our views. We must not allow developers and politicians to ruin this unique landscape for the sake of a quick profit. The Ronda mountains are very special and they should be preserved for future generations.'

Please contact the group on 627454458 or 696843704