

# Lights out for expats

Mains electricity set for rural districts in Albox....but not for illegal properties

4th July 2008, Richard Torne, Costa Almeria News

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A project by county council, Diputación, to provide mains electricity to 36 households in the rural districts of Las Labores, La Cuerda and Los Gonzales, through 4.8 kilometres of medium tension lines will exclude new builds, Costa Almeria News can reveal.

Although the project was completed in June, at least nine expat households have seen the completed pylons standing idle for months, just metres away from their properties - with no sign they will ever be hooked up to the grid.

The properties are all on rural land and have no first habitation certificates - a prerequisite for establishing their legality.

Socialist mayor of Albox, Jose Garcia Navarro, made it plain last week that new properties in the area which did not fulfil certain criteria would not be getting mains electricity. "We are handing out certificates of antiquity for those buildings which are deemed historical. Any British resident who has bought one of these properties will have access to electricity. Those built recently won't," he said.

"If they're irregular properties they will not have access to mains electricity. That much is clear," he concluded.

Expatriate Fred Sheriff bought a plot of land on which to build his house in 2002 amid promises by councillors to provide mains electricity for anyone in the area who requested it.

Mr Sheriff's property was completed in 2005 at a cost of 150,000 euros, with an additional 4,500 euros to register the villa with the cadastre and another 4,500 euros to ensure the electrical installation met legal standards.

But electricity company, Endesa, says it will not connect any property unless owners can provide a first habitation certificate, and the council has refused to issue these as they are illegal.

Hopes that an alternative certificate, based on the age of the home, would provide a solution have been dashed as this only applies to farm warehouses - *naves agrícolas* - or disused *cortijos*.

Mr Sheriff, whose property is on generator power, said he felt duped. "We've held many meetings with the council to make sure the properties were included in the plan - and ours was on the plan," he remarked.

An aide Mr Sheriff questioned the council's motives. He said: "Whenever they request British residents to pay money to them, such as the

refuse charge or other taxes, there is never any problem with the documents we have, but when we require a service from them, we always seem to have just that one piece of paper missing."

An issue which has rattled local residents is the fact that disused *cortijos* have also been included in the plan.

However, the spokesman for Diputación, Marcelo López, confirmed that abandoned *cortijos* were eligible for mains electricity if the owners had previously requested it. He said: "The properties appear in the cadastre and they have the necessary paperwork to show they are old structures."

The spokesman for the La

Cuerda area, Francisco Fernández Berbel, voiced the same opinion, adding that new builds without a first habitation certificate would be excluded.

He said: "It's the political will. Those expats who bought old *cortijos* have nothing to worry about; all they have to provide is a photo of the house and a copy of their deed or local taxes."

St Berbel pointed out that the rule also applied to Spaniards, three of whom would also not be receiving mains electricity.

La Cuerda is not the only case in Albox. In La Horticueta, expats paid thousands of euros to pay for the electrical installation to be fitted when the builder died

before completing the development.

It appears councils are following the regional government's strict planning guidelines and are unwilling to rock the boat by doing anything which could be interpreted as an attempt to legalise 'illegal' properties. In Albox, the number could be as high as 6,000 homes.

Legal experts and an expert association fighting town planning abuses, AIJAN, agree that home owners worried about the legal status of their properties only have to work out if they are connected to the main sewerage system - if they are, it is highly likely their properties are legal.

*rtorne@canews.es*



So near, yet so far: one of the pylons just metres from an expat's property