

Informative Meeting at the Town Hall in Alcaucín.

On Thursday September 16, the Mayor invited the local people to a meeting where he would impart information about the economic situation in the municipality. The mayor was accompanied by all members of the ruling party. The opposition members of the Council were not present. The Council Chambers were filled by members of the public. This was not to be a Council Meeting, but an opportunity to impart information and it was divided into three sections.

1. The Municipal Economy.

The Mayor reminded those present that in March 2009, when he took office, there were only 300,000 euros in the municipal account but that all of this sum had already been allocated. Consequently the Local Authority had neither money nor debts at that time.

In January 2010 the Central Government made a cut of 20% in the money granted to local authorities and in June it raised VAT by 2%. With outgoings of 136,000 euros per month and an income of 126,000 euros per month, the monthly deficit is 10,000 euros. The Mayor added that 95% of the municipalities in Spain are in a worse situation than Alcaucín.

The shortage of money limits the options available. To help alleviate this situation the Council is looking into a possible solution. There are grants available for some local government projects. Once these grants have been awarded the work begins but the money only arrives after completion. Hence the Town Hall, as well as contributing its share of the cost (20%) must also finance the other 80% in the short term. They are investigating the possibility of obtaining bank loans or credits to cover the shortfall while the projects are being completed.

2. Employment

There are 400 unemployed people in Alcaucín. This is a serious situation but the Town Hall is doing what it can to help. The unemployed are each being given 3 months of work by the Town Hall. Since March 2009, 135 unemployed people have benefited from this arrangement. Nobody, the Mayor stressed, has participated more than three months in this scheme and nobody will repeat until everyone has had their turn. The Mayor went on to say that the Council is not an employment agency and that the long term solution is dependent on an improvement in the economic climate. A member of the public expressed the opinion that the Town Hall should borrow money to finance job creation. The Mayor replied that in the long term this would be a disaster, and the public seemed to be of a similar opinion.

The Mayor provided figures demonstrating that since he had assumed office, the Town Hall had reduced costs considerably. For example, the reduction by 30% of the Mayor's wages and a cut of 40% in travel and subsistence allowances.

There was some discussion about the municipal child care facilities to be built in Puente Don Manuel, the need for a paediatrician at the village health centre, school transport problems and the new multi-purpose facility to be built in Venta Baja.

3. Town planning and development.

The Mayor confirmed that 95% of the dwellings built in the last 10 years are illegal. He added that the world economic crisis also shares responsibility for the cessation of building works. For future economic development it will be necessary to look elsewhere, such as to tourism and the creation of an industrial estate.

The Mayor stressed that (Translator's comment: "contrary to what has been stated in a local English language newspaper") no building licences had nor would nor could be issued for building on rustic land. The only licences that can be issued are for house improvements or alterations provided that the size of the building is not increased. Efforts are being made to resolve the problem of the houses in limbo but this is principally the responsibility of the Andalusian Autonomous Government, the *Junta*.

VPO (Social Housing). The planned construction of social housing in Puente De Don Manuel can not go ahead, as the permitted density of housing there has already been reached. The Council has taken up a proposal first made by the Greens of Alcaucín: that an attempt should be made to make use of the unfinished buildings that are near the Daniel Ramirez Bayo Sports Centre for the creation of social housing. This would depend on the cooperation of the developer and the *Junta* and the resolution of the legal status of the development, which has surpassed the permitted number of buildings for that area.