

## *Saving an oak grove in Las Rozas*

Last Sunday, February 19, was held in the municipality of Las Rozas a symbolic protest organized by the Assembly 15M Las Rozas- Las Matas in complaint of the recent amendment of the General Urban Plan (PGOU) , which seeks to reclassify as buildable the oak grove located on the "Business Park", and allows the construction of about 1,000 new homes.

Such modification was carried out during the past Christmas holidays under certain secrecy with the excuse of legalizing the status of the public lands illegally ( and privately) occupied by the Spanish Football Federation since 2003. The mayor, José Ignacio Fernández Rubio, defended that it was the only way of ensuring its stay in the municipality: "I think we all agree that our town can not afford to lose the "Soccer City" ; which has given us so much joy over the years and all the neighbors are very proud of " he said.

This readjustment has only been supported by the PP (ruling party), while it has enjoyed the strong rejection of the PSOE, IU-GREEN and UPyD. As a example of that negative response, the UPyD spokesman said that " it is hard to understand why to solve a problem we need to enrich some private developers and suppress partially an oak that we all agree to defend and protect." There are also numerous web pages, blogs and forums that share the discontent and unbelief of the people.

The event, attended by less than a hundred people, was opened with the display of a banner where it was written "STOP DESTRUCTION", followed by a series of interventions that explained the reason for the protest. On the one hand, it is the indiscriminate felling of an oak grove with high ecological value, considered by the Community of Madrid as "protected land", where we can find over 40 varieties of plant species, among which, besides the oaks for its antiquity, we must stand out the *piruetanos* for being a protected species. In addition to environmental damage, there is no urban justification for these new 1,000 homes, as the city has more than 8,000 empty homes, 5,000 unbuilt but approved in the General Plan 1994 and another 10,000 that the municipality wants to add in the new General Plan in process.

The act ended with a walk through the oaks accompanied by a naturalist who was identifying the different species of plants. After that, they read poem "Ode to a Tree" by Gabriela Mistral, and another dedicated to the oaks read by the author herself. Finally, the group split up to hug trees, so they can measure their trunks and reveal their age.

However, the fight for the cancellation of the plan has not come to an end. On Saturday March 3 it will be held another protest at the City Hall with the presentation of claims against the plan.