# Legal battle over water rights and leases fuels bitter feud at Abbotsley Country Homes



An extensive and long-running legal dispute between former Women’s British Open champion and qualified solicitor Vivien Saunders OBE and the residents of Abbotsley Country Homes in St Neots, Cambridgeshire, has been heard by a High Court judge, shedding light on a seven-year conflict involving water rights, lease violations, and personal altercations. The dispute, which has reportedly cost around £1 million in legal fees, centres on land owned by Ms Saunders, 78, adjacent to her residence at Eynesbury Manor and a disused 200-acre golf course she intends to develop for residential use.

The conflict began in 2018 when Ms Saunders raised concerns about the water bills for 20 luxury log chalets on her land, each valued at approximately £250,000. She alleged the occupants had illegally connected to her personal water supply, a claim the residents contest. According to the legal submissions presented at the Cambridge County Court, Ms Saunders and her company, Abbotsley Ltd, claim the chalet owners trespassed by tapping into a water pipe that was improperly linked to her supply instead of the mains during construction. The defendants maintain they had a verbal agreement for water supply and were billed accordingly between 2011 and 2017 but encountered tariff disputes when Ms Saunders imposed a 10% management fee after 2018.

Beyond the water dispute, Ms Saunders has accused the residents of breaching lease conditions requiring them to occupy the chalets for no more than 11 months annually and to maintain a primary residence elsewhere. Additional allegations include the use of one chalet for commercial purposes, the installation of large sheds, unauthorized machinery usage such as borehole drilling, and improper insurance coverage. The leasehold itself, originally acquired by a management company in 2017 for £325,000 and subsequently sold to the chalet owners, spans 125 years.

This multifaceted dispute has been marked by high tension and acrimony. Ms Saunders has faced personal legal challenges related to her conduct, including a 2023 conviction for common assault after an incident involving lodge owner Jill Beresford-Ambridge, who was on crutches at the time. The court heard Ms Saunders nudged Ms Beresford-Ambridge with her vehicle in reaction to gardening complaints. Ms Saunders’ barrister, Kerry Bretherton KC, argued that Ms Saunders had been subjected to sustained anti-social behaviour and a campaign aimed at securing her prosecution, suggesting the legal battles extend beyond straightforward property issues.

Additionally, the dispute has had wider, tragic consequences. The court was informed that Ms Saunders was the unnamed neighbour involved in an inquest into the 2023 suicide of Neil Warren, 70, a retired businessman and resident. An injunction preventing filming around the lodges had significantly affected Mr Warren’s mental health, with the coroner noting the impact of the legal matters on his wellbeing. The inquest also revealed an assault by Ms Saunders against Mr Warren in 2020 involving spraying water.

The lodge owners and residents expressed fears over the potential outcome of the case. One unnamed resident told the Daily Mail the financial motives behind Ms Saunders' actions were incorrect, describing the legal challenges as an excuse to claim the lease for financial gain, a claim Ms Saunders vehemently denied. Other residents described the atmosphere as distressing, transforming what was once a peaceful community into an area marked by depression and neighbourly distrust.

Judge Karen Walden-Smith acknowledged the severity and emotional intensity of the dispute, urging all parties to exhibit restraint and understanding. She noted, “It is, of course, very sad this litigation had some impact upon Mr Warren that resulted in him taking his own life… With that in mind, I would ask everyone to stay calm and show a bit of sympathy and empathy.”

The court continues to hear the case amid ongoing divisions between Ms Saunders, her legal team, and the residents of Abbotsley Country Homes, with the outcome remaining uncertain. The dispute remains a rare intersection of sport, law, property development, and personal enmity, illustrating the complex challenges that can arise from land ownership and community relations.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1956822/vivian-saunders-golf-champion-convict> - This article reports on Vivien Saunders OBE's conviction for common assault after an incident involving neighbour Jill Beresford-Ambridge, corroborating the claim about Ms Saunders' personal legal challenges related to her conduct.
2. <https://clarity-project.co.uk/company/02063798> - This source provides information about Abbotsley Ltd, the company associated with Vivien Saunders, supporting the claim that the leasehold was acquired by a management company in 2017 for £325,000 and subsequently sold to the chalet owners.
3. <https://www.companydirectorcheck.com/vivien-inez-saunders> - This profile details Vivien Inez Saunders' directorships, including her role as a director of Abbotsley Ltd, aligning with the information that she is a director of Abbotsley Ltd.
4. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1956822/vivian-saunders-golf-champion-convict> - This article also mentions the ongoing legal disputes between Ms Saunders and the lodge owners, highlighting the high tension and acrimony in the dispute.
5. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1956822/vivian-saunders-golf-champion-convict> - The article discusses the tragic consequences of the dispute, including the inquest into the suicide of Neil Warren, a resident affected by the legal matters.
6. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1956822/vivian-saunders-golf-champion-convict> - The source also covers the residents' fears over the potential outcome of the case and the distressing atmosphere in the community, corroborating the claims about the residents' concerns.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14664667/Bitter-million-pound-legal-battle-luxury-lodge-residents-former-Womens-British-Open-champion-landowner.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data