

LONDON ASSEMBLY



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Bassam Mahfouz

Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

Sir Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London
(Sent by email)

10 September 2026

cc:

Lyn Garner, Chair, London Stadium LLP

Karim Virani, Interim Chief Executive Officer, West Ham United Football Club

Dear Sadiq,

The Economy, Culture and Skills Committee held a meeting on 20 July 2026 to discuss the future of the London Stadium, particularly in light of current financial challenges and London's bid to host the 2029 world athletics championships. In this letter I would like to set out some of the Committee's conclusions from this discussion.¹

Firstly, it was poignant that, when asked, the Chair of London Stadium LLP stated she would not recommend the current contract to her board, were it to be put before her as a new proposal now.² It is also a contract that West Ham United Football Club (West Ham) could walk away from at any point should they choose to do so, or of course, if they went into administration.³

¹ Assembly Members Georgiou and Lord Bailey wish to record their disagreement with this letter and do not endorse it as members of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

² [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 2

³ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 11

Despite these points, the London Stadium is an iconic part of the legacy of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The stadium is an asset for our city and given the recent context of West Ham's relegation potentially causing what was already a significant public subsidy increase, we want to see the best use made of it for major events, without causing a drain on public resources. As Lyn Garner, Chair of London Stadium LLP, told us:

*"...what we have here is a tremendous asset for London. If we just put the revenue losses to one side for a moment, this is probably one of, if not the most successful multiuse venue following an Olympic Games in the whole of the world and certainly in modern times, with Premier League football, Major League Baseball, concerts through the summer, and other events."*⁴

Lyn Garner pointed out that major events hosted at the stadium can bring huge benefits for the London economy. She told us that hosting Major League Baseball games at the London Stadium over a weekend generated £50 million for London and the surrounding area, while the World Athletics Championships in 2017 generated £100 million for the UK.⁵

London Stadium finances

We must acknowledge, however, that the stadium currently operates at a significant financial loss. For 2025-26, the operating loss will be around £19 million, a figure not dissimilar to that of previous years.⁶ The main reason for this is that the financial agreement with the stadium's anchor tenant, West Ham, does not provide a high enough rent to cover the costs of running the stadium, while also restricting the number of other events that can be held at the stadium.

The Committee invited Karim Virani, West Ham's Interim Chief Executive Officer, to attend our meeting. Unfortunately, neither Mr Virani nor any other club representative attended. I also suggested that the club could attend a meeting on an alternative date, but this offer was not taken up. The club did, however, provide a written submission.

The finances of the stadium have been a long-term concern for the GLA. The Committee decided to hold a meeting on the topic this month because financial problems are about to be exacerbated by West Ham's relegation from the Premier League. According to the terms of the contract agreed under the previous Mayor in 2013, West Ham's rent will approximately be halved.⁷ The club will also play a higher number of league fixtures in the Championship, the second tier of English men's football, which would generate further operating losses.

Lyn Garner estimated that West Ham's relegation will cost the stadium around £1.8 million next year.⁸ This estimate is not as high as first feared, but still represents a significant financial burden for London taxpayers. This is money that might otherwise have been spent on public services or boosting London's economy.

⁴ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 3

⁵ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 3

⁶ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 1

⁷ BBC News, [West Ham stadium deal costs taxpayers £19m a year](#), 25 July 2026

⁸ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 1

While we all hope for success for one of London's great football clubs and the many thousands of Londoners who support West Ham, we should not underestimate the risk that the financial impact may be prolonged. West Ham's previous relegations have both resulted in Premier League returns within two years, but it is common for clubs of similar stature to West Ham to spend longer periods outside the Premier League. Since the formation of the Premier League in 1992, around 70 per cent of clubs relegated to the second tier of English men's football have been further relegated to the third tier or lower.⁹

Generating income

There are opportunities for the London Stadium to generate more income, however, each proposal must be signed off with agreement from West Ham. Lyn Garner told us that more could be made from hosting concerts, if these could run into September rather than just in the Summer:

*"We need flexibility on concert windows... Tottenham [Hotspur Stadium] is running concerts in September, as is Wembley [Stadium], but we cannot do that because it is right in the middle of the football season. Is there a way in which we can work with the club so that we could put concerts on during September when it is still really nice weather and we could make a bit of a return on our investment?"*¹⁰

Another long-running issue for the stadium is naming rights. We heard from Lyn Garner that there had been several opportunities to sell these rights and generate new income. In the most recent cases, London Stadium LLP had reached agreement on the cost of the rights with the prospective partner, *"but the ask increased when the football club came to the table and it was just too much for the partner."*¹¹ The submission from West Ham expressed a positive outlook about future opportunities:

*"There are numerous shared opportunities for West Ham United and the stadium, where I believe there are "win-win" outcomes, such as the naming rights position. Both the stadium and West Ham are missing out on revenue that could be generated from naming rights. I have initiated constructive dialogue on that and other key topics since I joined the Club two months ago and I hope that positive trajectory can continue."*¹²

However, given that 13 years have already passed since the signing of this agreement, little headway has been made in reducing the annual subsidy of almost £20 million and while there is a change in ownership at the club, we need to ensure this marks new impetus on all sides to seriously reduce this public subsidy.

⁹ For instance, Crystal Palace (8 years), Leeds United (16 years), Middlesbrough (7 years), Norwich City (9 years), Nottingham Forest (22 years), Sunderland (8 years), and Wolverhampton Wanderers (6 years) all spent relatively long periods outside the Premier League following relegation. This does not include the clubs that have been relegated without yet returning, of which there are 13, out of 51 clubs that have played in the Premier League. Information derived from <https://footballrates.com> (accessed 21 July 2026), with data analysis by the London Assembly.

¹⁰ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 7

¹¹ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 5

¹² Letter from Karim Virani to Bassam Mahfouz AM, 17 July 2026

We believe that as Mayor you have could influence these decisions in a positive way. Where there are major commercial opportunities to generate income for the stadium, you could help bring partners together, in order to help all partners reach agreement.

London 2029

We were concerned at the meeting to hear that there appeared to be reluctance with regards to West Ham agreeing to supporting the potential use of the London Stadium for the World Athletics Championships in 2029. Karim Virani stated in his letter to me that the club's position was based on *"the overriding priority to stage our competitive home fixtures at the Stadium"*, adding, *"Contractually, our home matches prevail over all other uses of the Stadium"*, while also referring to the barriers of needing agreement with football governing bodies.¹³ He concluded that that the club considered initial proposals *"were not workable and could not be supported."*¹⁴

We understand that athletics events at the stadium, while an important part of London's sporting offer and the legacy of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, are not as financially beneficial as other events. As Lyn Garner told us:

*"I would like to think that if [West Ham] owned the stadium, it would still be a multiuse venue and not just football because it was built for that purpose. If it owned the stadium, we would certainly encourage that, but I could not be drawn on whether it would be willing to host the athletics. Unlike NFL, it would not bring a financial return."*¹⁵

We were pleased to hear from Lyn Garner at the meeting, however, that there has been a more constructive dialogue between, London Stadium LLP and West Ham in recent months, following the change in the club's leadership.¹⁶

We discussed what the incentives may be for the club to support the championships, hearing from Lyn Garner that, *"It might be that the conversation is more around, if it were to go ahead, what improvements could be brought forward to help the fans accept that they might play a game or two away from the stadium."*¹⁷ An idea considered at our meeting was that, *"There could be some improvements in terms of how the thing looks and feels inside. For example, one of the things we have considered inside the bowl is turning all the seats claret, West Ham coloured."*¹⁸

I know it is a priority for you to attract major sporting events to London, and you are supporting this bid. While we understand that there are challenges for the club in agreeing to vacate the stadium for the period of the championships, we believe that a compromise is possible and would be of great benefit to London. This may be based for instance on altering the planned date of the event, or West Ham playing away games while the event is ongoing.

¹³ Letter from Karim Virani to Bassam Mahfouz AM, 17 July 2026

¹⁴ Letter from Karim Virani to Bassam Mahfouz AM, 17 July 2026

¹⁵ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 10

¹⁶ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 5

¹⁷ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 10

¹⁸ [Transcript of Economy, Culture and Skills Committee meeting](#), 20 July 2026, item 7, page 10

It was therefore very welcome that the club has now changed its stance and agrees that the London Stadium should be put forward as the host venue in London's bid for the championships, as announced on 6 August.¹⁹ As a Committee we would like to request that further details be released on the agreement with West Ham on this. This would be an important step in increasing transparency around West Ham's tenancy, which has previously been lacking.

I would appreciate your response to this letter, addressing the point about the new agreement with West Ham, by the end of October 2026.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bassam', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bassam Mahfouz AM
Chair of the Economy, Culture and Skills Committee

¹⁹ West Ham United Football Club, [West Ham United statement](#), 6 August 2026