AGENDA 12, Enc xvi) COUNCIL WORKS YARD – RECOMMENDATION REPORT

1. Purpose of report

To seek approval to convert an uncultivatable allotment plot at Woodhorn Road Allotment Site into a secure council works yard, and to allocate up to **£3,500** from the 2026/27 underspend for one storage container and associated works. The yard would give Ashington Town Council its own space for storage, recycling, composting and practical work, reducing reliance on rented storage and on Northumberland County Council (NCC) for waste disposal.

2. Background

The Council's practical services have grown faster than the space available to support them. The current pressures are:

- **Rented storage** – the Council currently pays for storage at Jubilee (£120/month).
- **Lack of workspace** – the recent seats had to be built inside the unit with very little room. Our bus shelter provider asked for somewhere to store and assemble shelters and this could not be offered.
- **Waste disposal** – the Council relies heavily on NCC to take waste, clearances and neighbourhood services work. We have no skip and no space to sort recyclables.
- **Bulk buying** – without storage we cannot buy materials in bulk with reduces capacity and response times.

The proposed plot cannot be cultivated. It has a history of problems with buried waste and standing water, so it has not been successfully let and is not expected to be. It has good vehicle access, ample room for turning, and sits around 50 feet from Asset Watch, the Council's CCTV provider.

Relationship to the Council unit. The Council's goal of having its own unit, as previously agreed, remains unchanged. This proposal is separate from it and does not replace it. The unit provides an indoor base for staff welfare, secure tool storage and vehicles. The works yard is an outdoor space for materials, waste, reclaimed items and assembly work that are not suited to a building.

3. Proposal

The plot would be cut back, levelled, drained and surfaced by our operatives with volunteer support, then secured and fitted initially with one 20ft storage container, with space kept for a second. There are buildings on site that can be looked at in time. Core uses would be:

Use	**What it enables**
Container storage	Bring stock back from Jubilee; store events kit, bus shelter parts, bins and signage in one place
Reclaimed materials store	Keep paving, kerbs, setts, bollards, bench timbers and street furniture recovered from Council works for reuse on future projects, rather than skipping them and buying new

Recycling and waste sorting bay	Separate clearance waste into recyclable streams before disposal
Council skip	Hire our own skip from a licensed operator rather than relying on NCC collections
Bark chipping from our own removals	Chip branches and arisings from Council tree and shrub removals into bark mulch for beds, planters and paths, instead of paying to dispose of them and relying on others for chippings
Compost heap	Compost green waste from Council grounds work for use in planters and allotment sites
Concrete and mortar mixing	Store bulk sand and cement (cement kept dry in the container) and mix with our own mixer, instead of buying pre-mixed bags such as easy mix, for bin pads, bench bases and repairs
Open work area	Assemble benches and seating; refurbish street furniture; give contractors a place to stage work
Bulk materials bays	Buy planings, Type 1, sand, bark and compost by the load at lower unit cost

4. Further opportunities

Once established, the yard could also support:

1. **Woodchip for allotment paths** – extending chipping to allotment prunings for path surfacing, and buying a chipper outright if hire costs justify it.
2. **Allotment site repairs** – planings and hardcore stockpiled for track and car park repairs across Council allotment sites.
3. **Leaf mould** – autumn leaf clearance bagged and stored to produce free soil improver.
4. **Winter resilience** – a store for grit bags, sandbags and flood kit, ready for quick deployment if Council becomes part of efforts.
5. **Events logistics** – a loading point.
6. **Salvage as standard** – lifting items carefully during removals and asking contractors and partners to offer reusable materials to the Council, so the reclaimed store keeps growing.
7. **Contractor laydown** – a safe space to offer suppliers such as our bus shelter provider, which can be a bargaining point in procurement.

5. Budget

The recommended budget for one container and its hardcore base is **£3,500 (ex VAT)**. This is the estimated cost of £3,250, including a 15% contingency, rounded up. A second container can be added later as a separate decision, once the first is in use. Groundwork labour is provided by the workforce and volunteers, so costs are materials, plant and delivery only.

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Specification assumed

- One 20ft second-hand (wind and watertight) steel container, doors facing the turning area, with room left alongside for a second container in future.
- Hardcore pad approx. 4m x 8.5m (35m²), allowing a 2m apron in front of the doors.
- 150mm compacted MOT Type 1 on a geotextile membrane, with a land drain along the low edge given the site's history of standing water.
- Security and padlock.
- Plant Hire.
- Fencing and Posts.

Item	**Estimate Cost (£)**
20ft second-hand storage container, delivered	1,500
Multi-lock	150
MOT Type 1, loose tipped	300
Geotextile membrane	100
Land drain pipe, gravel and fittings	300
Plant hire: mini digger and roller/plate compactor (3 days)	400
Fencing and posts	225
Subtotal	**2,975**
Contingency (15%)	525
Total	**3,500**

Notes on costs

- Container prices are based on local second-hand availability at up to £1,500, including delivery. The container should be inspected before purchase for holes, floor condition and door seals.
- Type 1 is typically £20–£40 per tonne loose tipped, with delivery often free above 10 tonnes.
- Plant hire and drainage figures are estimates. Quotes will be obtained in line with Financial Regulations.
- VAT is recoverable and excluded.

6. Perimeter Fencing and Gates

Perimeter fencing, gates and any lighting to secure the site. These should be quoted once the layout is fixed. The site's proximity to Asset Watch may allow CCTV coverage to be extended at modest cost.

7. Benefits, savings and risks

The yard is a one-off capital investment that builds lasting Council capacity and should recover its cost over time.

Benefits

- Ends the Jubilee storage charge (£120/month), giving a payback in just over a year for the container alone.
- Lower unit costs from buying materials in bulk, bark mulch produced free from our own tree and shrub removals, and concrete mixed on site from bulk sand and cement rather than pre-mixed bags.
- Less reliance on NCC for waste.
- Space to assemble and repair street.
- Brings an unusable plot back into productive use, improving the appearance and security of the allotment site.
- Containers are a resaleable asset if needs change and will be added to the Asset Register.

8. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Approves in principle the use of the plot at Woodhorn Road Allotment site, plot as a Council works yard, that this is classed as a temporary use as allotment plots are protected in law. This is separate from, and does not replace, the previously agreed goal of a Council unit.
2. Allocates up to £3,500 (ex VAT) from the 2026/27 underspend to purchase one 20ft storage container and lay a hardcore base, to be transferred to an earmarked reserve if not spent by year end.
3. Delegates procurement to the EO/RFO in line with Financial Regulations.
4. Notes that groundworks will be delivered by our workforce with the help of volunteers.
5. Notes that a further report may be required on securing the site (fencing, gates and CCTV) and on the wider uses in section 3.

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