

## Thought for the week by Chris Morris, Chair of 'The Farming Life Centre'

Just over a year ago on 24<sup>th</sup> March, a British broadsheet newspaper carried the headline 'The end of freedom'. The national lockdown had begun and there was widespread fear. Freedom is defined as: *the condition or right of being able or allowed to do, say, think, etc. whatever you want to without being controlled or limited.*

I do accept that people's perceptions and circumstances are different but in western countries, we have all had a massive amount of freedom since the Second World War. We have deserved it and it has, generally, been good for us. However, the world has been on a roller coaster and out of control for some time and now the brakes have been put on. We have all had to reassess. This is no bad thing and many good elements have come out of the restraints – a drop in pollution, new footpaths discovered and community spirit to the fore in our neighbourhoods and in the NHS. Suddenly and long overdue, farming and food became important again – remember the panic buying?

Throughout history the loss of freedom has often been used wisely. The apostle Paul used his time in prison to profusely write many of the New Testament books of the Bible. Nelson Mandela's incarceration on Robbin Island produced a man who, after his release, far from being bitter, inspired the move forward in South Africa and showed the world how to 'turn the other cheek' and to not inflame relations.

It's been exciting to see the start of fresh ventures in farming around Ashbourne – the direct retailing of milk and new farm shops. I am always heartened by the entrepreneurial skills of the rural community to add on value rather than accept an often poor price for their products (but it is not everyone's gift!). In one instance the 'seed' idea began at the start of the first lockdown when the local community was asking where they could get milk, cream and butter without travelling too far.



A farm shop that has opened up as a result of lockdown

As we face the uncertainty of lockdowns and further loss of 'freedom', are there ways that we can continue to reassess and take stock of our lives for good in readiness for when the restrictions end? We will surely recognize more fully the value of our countryside, of nature and of the true commitment of our farmers and growers?



Chris enjoys the freedom of the countryside near Youlgreave