

Exciting times ahead in agriculture for those willing to embrace change



While post-referendum is an uncertain time for farmers, Hugh Townsend says it is also an exciting time for those ready to take advantage of new opportunities

It is difficult to comment on the land market, entitlement market or anything else without referring to Brexit.

Personally the referendum became a frustratingly boring debate with extreme claims made by either side trying to scare the electorate, or sell a vision of something better.

Now however it could become one of the most momentous moments in the United Kingdom's modern history that will affect everyone and everything. It now has our full attention! Having voted remain, on hearing the news of the referendum, I was shocked along with most people. However I also had a quiet sense of pride on the morning of June 24 as I tried to assimilate what this all would mean.

My feeling was that perhaps

HUGH TOWNSEND



this now put the UK in the vanguard of a Europe-wide political shift requiring some fundamental economic and social changes. Maybe it placed the UK in pole position to influence and lead the rest of in Europe? Surely whatever arrangements the UK eventually negotiates with the EU, many other EU countries would also be after, and it was clear the EU in any event needed to carry out their own fundamental reforms, especially economic, to survive.

My feeling at that moment was that either the UK would not actually leave the EU, as it

would reform itself quickly enough to suit us, or the UK would leave but then re-join a reconstituted EU. Otherwise I could not see how, with so much else in common, an acrimonious UK/EU divorce was going to benefit anyone, and I was convinced that the politicians would eventually apply some common sense.

My post-referendum outlook appeared not to be immediately shared by many commentators, although I was encouraged to hear exactly the same theory, unprompted, from a BBC broadcaster in private, and then a retired head of the Civil Service.

However it was Donald Trump winning the US Presidency that confirmed the UK vote was not representing only a European political shift, but a democratic cap-

italist western world phenomenon, in part at least due to protest votes from those who feel they have lost out in the last ten years since the financial crisis in 2008. (See my article from November 16 on our website).

My first reaction may now appear wishful thinking as events have unfolded so far. However whilst maybe wishful, my instinct still remains that Brexit may not be as straightforward as a purely "in or out" outcome, and the Chancellor's comments of the December 13 have reinforced my original feelings. His suggestion was for a "transitional arrangement" which could remain in place well after the two year negotiation period set out in Article 50. This may help reduce disruption and the risk of financial instabil-

ity, which is as much a threat to the rest of the EU as it is to the UK.

As a result I still believe common sense will prevail and my optimism remains the same as it was in early August for UK agriculture in 2017. (See my interview for the BBC on our website) Change is not always a bad thing and with any change comes new opportunities, and when some doors close, others open.

Worrying times admittedly, but also an exciting time for those open to change and ready to take advantage of new opportunities. I still have that quiet sense of pride.

Hugh Townsend, FRICS, FAAV, FCI Arb, is the land agent/surveyor expert of the WMIN Farming supplement and he may be contacted on 01392 823935 or htownsend@townsendcharteredurveyors.co.uk.