

Cllr's AI project among local initiatives funded

By **EOIN MAC RAGHNAILL**

Five Wicklow community groups have received a quick cash injection to invest in new technology via the RISE Community Fund, including one local councillor's AI-driven organic farm project.

Established by Granahan McCourt and NBI Chairman David McCourt, RISE is providing monthly grants across the country for rural community organisations seeking to boost their digital ecosystems, with the fund further supported by corporate sponsors including KN Circet, KPMG, Test Triangle, DreamDev Technologies, and TLI Group.

Among those receiving grants of €1,000 under the fund was Arklow Councillor Sylvester Bourke and his company 'Sylvester Bourke Farming Unlimited', which is harnessing AI technologies to analyse data captured through drone surveys across the farm.

Shuttle Knit CLG, which is expanding its online shopping capabilities to reach a broader community of customers, also received a grant, along with Wicklow Men's Shed, who have plans to provide computing equipment for its members.

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland (Wicklow regional office) has received funding to increase its ability to move physiotherapy programmes online to maximise their accessibility, while Kilmacanogue NS have been supported in investing in coding and computational thinking activities for the school's children.

Speaking after his funding award, Cllr Bourke commented: "We operate a tillage and poultry farm and have a real focus on sustainable food production, which nowadays requires farms to embrace innovation and technologies.

"For us, this has meant using drones for aerial scouting and

using AI and machine learning to boost organic farming methods.

"With support from the RISE Community Fund, we're delighted to have the opportunity to increase our investment in technologies and scale the impact of our work."

David McCourt, founder of RISE and Chairman of Granahan McCourt and NBI, commented: "The RISE Community Fund looks for community groups, charities, small businesses and social enterprises in rural areas who are exploring how technology can scale the impact of their work.

"I'm delighted to say that since opening applications in County Wicklow, the response has been incredible, and now we're excited to be awarding grants to our successful applicants. We've seen some incredible projects embracing exciting new technological innovations, including artificial intelligence."

Peter Hendrick, CEO of NBI, added: "At NBI, we're on a mission to connect over 1.1 million people in rural Ireland who don't have access to high-speed broadband to a world-class, superfast network.

"Whilst connectivity is a vital utility and a critical first step, it alone can't solve all of the challenges for businesses, community groups and social enterprises trying to expand the positive impact they're able to have - both to the local community and to the wider economy.

"That's why we're incredibly excited to engage local communities with the RISE Community Fund and celebrate innovative uses of technology in Wicklow."

NBI is reminding Wicklow residents to also visit their website at nbi.ie to check whether their home, farm or business is included in the National Broadband Plan and to sign up for Eircode-specific updates on the rollout.



Wicklow recipients of the RISE Community Fund Councillor Sylvester Bourke (Sylvester Bourke Farming Unlimited), Caitriona Hughes of The Multiple Sclerosis Society of Ireland - Wicklow Regional Office, Joseph Corkish of Wicklow Men's Sheds, Orla O'Malley from RISE Community Fund, Lucy Hyland of NBI, James Maxwell, Wicklow Men's Shed, Pattie Shields, Shane Walsh and Ellen O'Connor of Shuttle Knit and Catherine Quiney, Kilmacanogue NS. PHOTO: NICK BRADSHAW