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Energy project to pump cash into North Clare

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THE future of a multi-million euro energy development in North Clare will be decided early next month.

A meeting on the project, which could result in millions of euros for the local community, will be held in St John's Hall, Ballyvaughan on Tuesday, July 6. Cork-based Organic Power Limited unveiled its plans for a sea-water pumped hydroelectric energy storage scheme and visitor centre to be located at Gleninagh between Ballyvaughan and Fanore at a community meeting earlier this year. On July 6, members of the community and those with business interests or holiday homes in the Ballyvaughan/Fanore Electoral Area will have the opportunity to vote on the local position with regard to the project before further research is undertaken by Organic Power.

The project will only go ahead if the company receives the backing of the community according to Maurice McCarthy, director of Organic Power.

The proposed scheme would involve pumping seawater to a facility on Gleninagh Mountain using primarily excess wind power at off-peak times. At peak times, the water would be released from a reservoir on top of the mountain to the sea. The concept would involve buying the power to pump the water up the mountain at off-peak prices, then selling the energy generated by releasing the water at peak times. This project, if it goes ahead, would store excess wind power expected to be generated over the coming years.

Organic Power has committed to a compensation package for the area if the pumped hydroelectric energy storage (PHES) scheme goes ahead.

If the Gleninagh sea-water PHES is developed into a viable proposal, which is then built, the company will provide community-project funding every year for 50 years of €100,000 per year for the pre-commissioning phase. This will rise to a probable level of €600,000 per year during the operation phase and will be made available to a community projects committee made up of the operator of the scheme and community representatives.

If the company is given the green light to go ahead with research, permits could be sought at the end of next year and work could commence by mid-2013, for completion and commissioning in early 2016, the company estimates.

Organisations in the area, including the Ballyvaughan Community Development group, which has facilitated the information meetings to date, are remaining tight-lipped about their views on the proposed scheme. However, a number of individuals

from the area have expressed their opposition to the project.

At the preliminary meeting held at the end of April in Ballyvaughan, the concept was outlined by Mr McCarthy and a number of questions were raised by members of the community.

“Many of the questions raised at the discussion group are impossible to answer without detailed investigations of environmental conditions. This is precisely why we are asking for the development group’s support to undertake detailed evaluation of the concept,” Mr McCarthy stated in a letter to Ballyvaughan Community Development committee, seen by The Clare Champion.

Mr McCarthy sought a written approval of the principle that the concept is studied and evaluated over a period of one year from the date of the letter.

“The endorsement would be conditional on that Organic Power will present the proposal that would be developed, in full, to the community development group and fully take any recommendations on board from the group before submitting any planning applications for the proposal, other than any licences required for baseline studies,” Mr McCarthy added.

Mr McCarthy assured the community group that it “will not proceed any further with evaluating the concept if we do not get this endorsement”.

It is on this approval that the community will vote next month.

Speaking to The Clare Champion, Mr McCarthy said that he hoped the crunch meeting would be well attended to ensure a representative decision.

“This is a very important project, which could be located in Ballyvaughan but can only be located there with the co-operation of the community. At the moment, what we are looking for is a period of a year in which to do further research. We would urge people, regardless of how they plan to vote, to turn up because a low turnout is not representative of the community view,” he said.

Further information is available from the Ballyvaughan Community Development group.