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Hydroelectric energy scheme proposal for the Burren

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DETAILS of a proposed pumped hydroelectric energy storage (PHES) scheme and visitor centre in the Burren were outlined at a public meeting in Ballyvaughan on Wednesday night.

The meeting, facilitated by the Ballyvaughan Development Group, was attended by Maurice McCarthy from Cork-based Organic Power Limited, the company behind the proposal.

The concept involves pumping seawater to a facility on Gleninagh Mountain between Ballyvaughan and Fanore, using primarily excess wind power at off-peak times.

The stored energy, according to Organic Power, will be returned to the grid through turbines for use at peak times in the morning and evening or during generation emergencies.

The proposal for the scheme is in the very early stages and the meeting followed the publication of a brochure by Organic Power on the planned scheme.

According to the company, Gleninagh was chosen as the location for the proposal “because of its almost unique qualities as a high, large, flat-topped mountain beside the sea, composed of stable rock”.

Among the benefits of the PHES scheme, the firm says, is that it can accept large quantities of unpredictable energy from windfarms and ocean energy projects and transform it into predictable green energy by storing it for use when needed.

It adds that the PHES scheme would reduce the need for imported fossil fuels and could potentially provide large amounts of green electricity.

A further benefit it claims is that it “will be able to accept up to one half of the projected surplus night-time wind power that will be produced in Ireland when the national target of 5,000MW of wind turbines is achieved under Government policy by 2010”.

“The project will also be a tourist attraction to the area with an onsite visitor centre to provide access to the stunning panoramic views,” it claimed.

The Organic Power proposal includes a number of product specifications and safety measures.

The company also acknowledges that “a very small amount of peat will need to be removed from the top of Gleninagh mountain during the construction of the upper reservoir”.

However, it claimed this would be placed in a stable storage area where it would be used “to recreate heath habitat for flora and fauna”.