

What are Surrey Climate Commission's Core Group's Views on Nuclear Power Generation in the UK?

Published 15.01.26

Introduction

A workshop was held on 11th December 2025 with members of the Surrey Climate Commission's Core Group. The aim was to investigate what participants' views are on nuclear power generation in the UK.

Following a short presentation outlining the current situation in the UK, participants were divided into two groups for a role play debate, with one group expressing pro- and the other anti-nuclear power arguments. Following this, each participant was asked to write their real opinion on post-its (or 'chat' for on-line participants). It is these views that were analysed to produce the following report¹.

Opinions Expressed by Workshop Participants

Participants expressed a range of views regarding nuclear power generation, primarily focusing on safety, long-term waste management, economic viability, and the role of renewable alternatives.

Safety and Risk Concerns

- There is uncertainty regarding whether the "as low as reasonably practicable" (ALARP) principle provides a high enough safety bar, particularly regarding health risks.
- The safety of modular reactors is not yet fully established and requires pilot programs for verification.
- While some argue the UK's nuclear safety record is strong, the potential scale of a nuclear accident is seen by some as an unacceptable risk, even if the probability is small.
- Nuclear facilities are viewed as potential targets for terrorist or military attacks in an unstable world.

Nuclear Waste Management

- The creation of hazardous waste that requires long-term management is a significant ethical concern for future generations.
- Some participants argued that modern reactor designs are significantly more efficient and would only add a small proportion to the existing waste stockpile.

¹ Gemini was used to aid the analysis.

Economics and Governance

- Nuclear power is described as an expensive energy source that is not commercially viable without heavy public subsidies.
- The industry is seen as overly centralized, benefiting large businesses and international investors rather than local communities.
- There is a perception that entrenched lobbyists influence government policy toward traditional nuclear options rather than innovative thinking.
- The long construction times for nuclear plants raise questions about how the UK will meet its power needs in the interim.

Renewables and Alternative Approaches

- Many participants believe funds should be diverted from nuclear to proven, cost-effective renewables such as wind, solar, wave, and tidal power.
- The UK is seen as having missed opportunities to lead in renewable technology despite its natural advantages as an island.
- There is a call to shift from a "predict and provide" energy model to one focused on energy demand reduction measures, such as home insulation, and sharing resources equally.
- Some suggest that if nuclear is used, it should be as a temporary complement to solar and wind to provide a resilient, balanced energy mix.

Ethical and Social Considerations

- The environmental and human impact, including health dangers to those mining nuclear fuel, must be a key consideration.
- The link between nuclear power technology and the potential development of nuclear weapons is a point of concern for some.
- The choice to pursue nuclear may affect the national psyche and the public's motivation to participate in reaching "net zero".

Conclusion

In conclusion, while some participants recognized nuclear power as a potential tool for addressing climate change and energy security, many highlighted its high costs, safety risks, environmental concerns, and long-term implications for future generations. Renewables were widely favoured as a more sustainable alternative, with calls for increased investment and community-driven energy solutions.

Angela Druckman 14.01.2026