

Mark warns against threat to radio communications during controversial debate

Mark Lancaster has hailed Milton Keynes the home of radio communication as he sought to defend the essential spectrum from the threat posed by new technology.

The city MP brought the controversial issue of power line telecommunications devices (PLTs) to the House of Commons during his adjournment debate yesterday.

He highlighted the life-saving work of Bletchley Park, Hanslope Park, and other local listening stations "all of which rely on radio" before going on to argue that this form of communication is endangered by PLTs.

PLTs use mains wiring to transmit broadband and TV around the home. However, an unwanted by-product is created: interference.

Mr Lancaster dubbed this 'a very 21st Century type of pollution', likening previous centuries' battle for clean air to this "the battle for clean airwaves."

He raised the concerns of bodies from the Civil Aviation Authority to the BBC, GCHQ and even NATO, that such devices could pose a risk to their vital work.

Shortwave radio is also used by the emergency services and as backup after terrorist attacks and natural disasters. It is essential to the operation of mobile phones, the internet, and television.

Official tests have shown that PLTs do not meet the current standards set out for electronic equipment.

In his response, Minister Mark Prisk argued that PLTs do not have to conform to such standards.

After the debate Mr Lancaster, who was alerted to the problem by constituents, said: "This is a very complicated issue. However, every single one of us relies on radio, and therefore this debate is relevant to us all. I want to make sure that the Government starts to employ a proactive approach, so that we don't sleepwalk into a situation where essential, often life-saving, communications are irreversibly scuppered."