

Indexing a local planning inquiry: the experience of Belvoir

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Compilation of the several indexes was the work of one indexer with a part-time clerical assistant, so they were mutually compatible. Indexing terms were prepared in advance, because the indexes were required for day-to-day use during the inquiry, and had to be up to date. The transcript index was the most important and the most used, and details of its compilation are described. Technical evidence did not present the difficulties expected, but unexpected difficulties arose from certain special aspects of spoken English, including intonation, pauses, and transitions from one subject to the next. Used throughout the inquiry without cross-references, the index was completed by their addition and other refinements for the use of the inspector and assessors. Numbering and indexing the IDs and proofs of evidence presented their own problems, the approach to which and solutions obtained are outlined. The report had to be indexed as it was written, although the chapters were not ordered until the end. Guidelines for future inquiry indexing are offered in the light of the experience built up at Belvoir.

Introduction

Under section 35 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, applications for planning permission may be called in by the Secretary of State for the Environment for his own decision. An inquiry will be held by an inspector, and a report containing his recommendations sent to the Secretary of State who makes the final decision. Most such inquiries will be short, but where the project has wide-ranging national implications it may last many months. The Belvoir (pronounced beaver) inquiry was the third major inquiry with which the library of the Departments of the Environment and Transport has been involved. At Windscale it was called in at the end of the inquiry to sort out and list the documents and to index the report. For the Heathrow and Belvoir inquiries the library arranged for the listing and indexing of documents and the indexing of the daily transcripts (a job that had fallen to the Department of Energy library at Windscale) and of the report.

For Heathrow this was done by a commercial firm

under contract to the library, but for Belvoir I was sent on detached duty from the cataloguing section. Unlike the indexers at Heathrow who largely worked at home, I worked on-site as an integral part of the secretariat, helping with other duties as necessary.

Belvoir inquiry: size and scope

In August 1978 the National Coal Board (NCB) submitted applications for planning permission to Melton Borough Council seeking full permission for underground development and outline permission for certain surface developments at three sites in North East Leicestershire (one of which was in the Vale of Belvoir so giving the inquiry its popular name), and to Rushcliffe Borough Council and South Kesteven District Council seeking full permission for underground workings. The applications were forwarded to the County Councils (Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire) because applications for mineral workings are a county responsibility, and were 'called in' by the then Secretary of State, Peter Shore, in January 1979. A secretariat was set up to ensure that all statutory obligations were met and to support the independent inspector, Michael Mann QC, and the two assessors appointed to hear the inquiry.

The preliminary meeting was held in May 1979 to identify matters for discussion, decide procedure and programme, to find areas of agreement, and to find gaps in the information available to parties. Following this the inspector produced a list of issues that he considered should be discussed at the inquiry. The 20 issues were lettered A to T. The inquiry opened on 30 October 1979 at Stoke Rochford Hall, near Grantham, and sat four days a week with recesses at Christmas and Easter until it closed on 2 May 1980, a total of 84 days. During that time more than 500 Inquiry Documents (IDs) were submitted in support of evidence. There were 173 proofs of evidence. The appendices to the proofs of evidence formed a separate sequence of more than 600 documents. During the inquiry the secretariat numbered 11, assisted by a team of shorthand writers, and was headed by an inquiry secretary who was the link between the inspector and everyone else.

Preparing the indexes

Indexing work began soon after the preliminary meeting, initially being done by a contractor. I took over in August but was not engaged full-time until about a month before the inquiry started. During this time a list of index terms was compiled, which was the basis of all the indexing. The key documents (the report of the NCB's consultants, the report on subsidence, and the green paper 'Energy policy' (Cmnd 7101, 1978)), the 'list of issues', and the objectors' letters were used to compile it, and it was discussed with the inquiry secretary in order to gain some idea of how the indexes would be used. It was decided that, to keep them manageable, only places on or adjacent to the coalfield or of great importance to the proposals would be indexed. This proved sufficient. The list of index terms was tested before the inquiry started by using it to index the objectors' letters and the IDs and proofs already submitted.

It was anticipated that the indexes would be in use from the start of the inquiry, so it was important that they should always be up to date. This made the advance preparation of the list of index terms particularly important. Of all the indexes it was the transcript index that was most used. It was up-dated daily, which meant indexing a transcript a day—a considerable task, as they averaged 80 A4 pages of typescript. The indexes were completed at the same time as the inquiry, so were available for intensive use in report writing. Continual use of the indexes helped me tailor them to the inspector's needs.

Transcript index

As the inquiry progressed, the list of index terms had to be amended to give the transcript index greater specificity. Pressure of work made it rarely possible to expand even a single term in one session. Instead, I would decide how to expand the term so that while I was indexing I could make the appropriate notes in brackets after each entry. When I had time I would go back and make notes for the earlier entries. I had a part-time clerical assistant who sorted them out and copied them on new cards. The system was not ideal, but it worked. The main drawback was that the cards looked very messy until I had completed the expansion. For some subjects the evidence of one witness alone needed more detailed indexing, and I added the descriptive notes for those entries. They were for the inspector's benefit, and were removed before the index was microfilmed with the transcripts.

The indexes were for the use of the inspector, assessors, and secretariat, and their existence was not publicized. Nevertheless they became known, and I supplied references from them to the smaller parties on request. The major parties kept their own rough indexes based

on the 'list of issues', which were apparently kept by junior counsel. The smaller parties did not have the resources to do any indexing. It has been suggested that a more widely available transcript index would be useful to all parties, particularly the smaller ones, involved at an inquiry. Any wider availability would have to be carefully thought out, but a charge could be made to cover the additional costs, with a disclaimer as to accuracy. It would be a feasible service, and valuable.

How to index transcripts

Not least of the problems of indexing transcripts was the mechanics of it. I had not been able to discuss the indexing with any of those who had indexed earlier inquiries, so tried several methods, and finally settled on using a part-time clerical assistant. As I read a transcript I noted in the margins the headings and page references needed. Many passages need more than one entry, so I would read through, noting the opening and closing page references for one heading, then go back and re-read it for the other entries. This called for a great deal of flicking back and forth, but was not too inconvenient when bookmarks were used. It was also useful as a check that I had included everything.

Once I had completed a transcript I gave it to the CA who copied the entries onto the cards. I found this system quicker than the only practical alternative, which was to index directly on cards, the method used at Heathrow, where the indexer had no assistance. I found that method inconvenient: extracting and refiling cards was distracting; there were often a number of cards out, which increased the risk of mislaying some; it was less easy to find my place after a break; and it was less easy to check the indexing.

Problems with technical evidence

Of the technical evidence, only that on mining technology caused me any difficulty. I knew little about mining to start with, and had had little preparation time. I managed to sort out most of the problems myself, but the mining assessor was always willing to explain things. It has been suggested to me that the indexer should be selected for knowledge of the subject of the inquiry, but, as the issues at a major inquiry are wide-ranging, I do not agree. At Belvoir the subject of the inquiry was mining, but there was very little evidence on mining technology: energy needs, land reclamation, visual and other impacts were given much greater emphasis. Adequate preparation time and assessors willing to explain should be enough to enable any indexer to do a good job.

Problems with spoken English

It had not occurred to me before I started that one of the problems was going to be indexing spoken English. The transcript writers put in punctuation to make sense

of what was said. It remained obviously spoken English and, at times, very difficult to follow because of the loss of intonation and pauses. I was fortunate in that the language was not very 'legal' despite the many barristers who spoke, but I found that some of the questions asked were incomprehensible in print. Again, the pauses between one line of cross-examination and another did not appear in the transcript, making it sometimes difficult to tell when the subject had been changed.

Problems of time

The transcript was produced by a team of shorthand writers who took turns in the inquiry hall to record the proceedings for 15 minutes, and then went away to type their notes. The transcribing was completed and the transcript assembled in the evening, ready for copying and distributing the following day. I, together with a few other select people, received my copy about 9.30am. It would have been difficult to complete the indexing in the day if I had received it much later. Even at the end of the inquiry I could not index more than one transcript a day. At the beginning the indexing took longer than the speaking because I was unfamiliar with the subject, the index terms, and the place names, and was experimenting with the indexing mechanics.

Completing the index

At the end of the inquiry I had to get the index ready for typing. This entailed finishing the few remaining expansions, adding cross-references, and checking the filing, punctuation, etc. It had been successfully used throughout the inquiry without any cross-references, but it was the better for them. Since it was urgently needed I set myself a deadline for this work. As a result, some of the smaller things never got done. This deadline was necessary so that the index could be used by the people it was principally intended for, the inspector and assessors. The typed transcript index ran to 172 pages.

Inquiry Document numbering

The IDs were numbered in one sequence, a departure from the system used at Windscale and Heathrow where each party's documents were numbered separately and distinguished by an acronym of the party's name. The long alphanumeric strings that resulted made this a clumsy system, left plenty of room for errors in numbering, filing, and citing documents, and was difficult for the parties to understand. A simple numerical system is usual at inquiries.

Inquiry Document list

The list of IDs was up-dated daily. The bibliographical detail given was that allowed by the most basic catalogue entry according to *Anglo American cataloguing rules* (2nd ed), i.e. title, author, edition, publishing details, pagination and ISBN. I did not use AACR punctuation and made use of the abbreviations

used in the report. I also avoided duplication of information in the entry. The reason for this was that the inspector wanted the ID list to take up as little space as possible in the report, but it led to a cramped layout. The majority of the IDs were unpublished.

Checking the bibliographical details of the semi-published and published documents was troublesome because I had no facilities for doing it. The parties were very helpful in letting me see the complete document when only an extract had been submitted, but otherwise I had to send them to the libraries of the Department of the Environment/Department of Transport, Department of Energy, and the Royal School of Mines. I am grateful for all the assistance they gave me. Extracts from collected works, structure plans, and documents from the European Community were particularly difficult. I should like to see guidelines on the bibliographical information to be provided with documents drawn up for future inquiries.

My list was prepared solely for the report. A working list was kept by the clerical officer and circulated to the parties daily. It contained minimal information: ID number, title, and submitting party, but was enough for people to distinguish IDs.

Inquiry Document indexes

There were two indexes to the IDs: an author-title index (up-dated daily) and a subject index (up-dated weekly). The subject index used the original index terms with hardly any amendments. Entries in this index contained the ID number and short title and, for the larger documents, a page, paragraph, or section reference. Weekly up-dating of the index was sufficient because it was not much used. It was fairly easy to remember which documents were concerned with which subjects.

The author-title index had to be up-dated daily because it was used to check each new document to see whether it had already been submitted. It was also useful when documents were referred to only by title. I used it to check cross-references in the ID list, e.g. linking the various extracts from one document, and removing the extracts from the ID list that were superseded by the submission of the complete document. In general it proved a useful index despite the initial scepticism of my colleagues on the secretariat.

Proofs of evidence

Proofs of evidence of technical witnesses had to be submitted two weeks in advance of the witness's expected appearance at the inquiry, to allow all the parties time to prepare their cross-examination. The NCB's witnesses were almost the only ones who read their proofs as they were written. The later witnesses tended to have long asides and amendments, so that indexing the proofs in advance was little advantage. I had started the inquiry by indexing the proofs before-

hand because it allowed me to sort out any problems in advance and saved me time in indexing the transcripts when I had only to convert the paragraph numbers to page references. I lost this time advantage when proofs were amended while being read. I had also sorted out most of the problems by the time the later witnesses appeared.

Appendices to the proofs were supposed to contain technical explanations of material in the proofs, but as the inquiry progressed it became apparent that they also contained a great deal of illustrative material that should have been submitted as IDs. It was decided that since it was too late to renumber them as IDs they would have to be made a second sequence of documents with numbers based on the proof numbers. The appendices to proofs at both Windscale and Heathrow had numbers based on the already complex ID numbers of the proofs. We had not given the proofs ID numbers because they appear in a more up-to-date form in the transcripts. I used the same grade of description when listing the appendices to proofs as I did for the ID list. The list of appendices contained a higher proportion of unpublished material. I cross-referenced between the two lists; where there was duplication of material the full entry appeared in the ID list, so when the item was referred to we could use the simpler number.

Report index

Index terms I used for the report were those of the transcript index, but included the amendments I had not had time to make in the transcript index. The report had to go to Her Majesty's Stationery Office when it was finished so that it could be published as soon as the Secretary of State made the decision. The index had to be ready at the same time; consequently, as far as possible, I had to index the report as it was written. The difficulty was that although the inspector knew what chapters he wanted, the final order of chapters was not decided until the end. As the paragraph numbers depended on this I could not add any entries to the index until the order was decided. I overcame this by taking each section when it was complete, except for the paragraph numbers, and noting beside each paragraph all the index entries it needed. I also made sure that I had prepared cards for all the terms I used and had entered all the necessary cross-references. Once the report was put together, all I had to do was to add the paragraph numbers to the appropriate cards.

Lessons

Of the indexes kept at Belvoir the most important was the transcript index; this was the most used, and took more of my time than all the rest of my work. I cannot foresee any way in which it may become less time-consuming; automation is a pipe-dream in the present economic climate. A name index to the witnesses and

counsel at the inquiry could usefully supplement the main transcript index. At Belvoir a name index taken from the contents page of each transcript was kept by the CA, but this was not detailed enough to be very useful. The additional detail should be picked up by the indexer and added to the cards at the same time as the CA transcribes the subject entries. The other useful addition to the indexes would be the transcript references to IDs, both as an aid to the listing and indexing of the documents and for information retrieval. Again, these could be noted in the margins by the indexer.

Among the document lists and indexes the only problem is the subject index to IDs. It is the index that suffers when the indexer is under pressure, but with more than 1200 documents it is needed to supplement the numerical and author-title lists. My colleagues on the secretariat would not like to see it go, but thought must be given to reconciling the needs of the user and the capacity of the indexer. It is not a full-time job and does not warrant a second indexer. Possibly basic indexing supplemented by the short title in each entry and better use of clerical support for all the indexing will suffice.

We have proved that one indexer can, with clerical support, do all the indexing, although the ID index tends to suffer when the indexer is under pressure. With only one person compiling the index terms and doing the indexing, the indexes are more compatible, and thus easier to use, than if two people had been engaged. The amount of clerical help available needs to be decided in advance, so that the indexing can be properly planned.

Finally, by working so closely with the secretariat we now have a greater understanding of each others' problems, and this should be useful when arranging the indexing of future inquiries, whether it is done in-house or not.

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Hateful indexing?

'Indexing is the most hateful of tasks. It demands unremitting concentration, while yielding none of the creative pleasures which compensate for intellectual labour.'

—Daunting words from Paul Johnson in *The Listener* (20 May 1982), reviewing *The trouble of an Index: Byron's letters and journals, vol. XII*, edited by Leslie Marchand (and reviewed in this journal—see page 135). But is it true? What joy or solace do we find in our work? Send to the editor your answers to Johnson's charge.