The ISNA Story for Darwen and Rural Locality summarises some of the key published data about this part of Blackburn with Darwen. It also presents the “Local People’s Story”, from an engagement exercise with over 300 residents.

Darwen and Rural is not simply one place. Darwen itself is made up of several communities:

- Sunnyhurst
- Whitehall
- Belgrave
- Rosehill
- Sudell
- Earcroft

along with the villages which make up the rural part of the locality:

- Tockholes
- Hoddlesden
- Grimshaw
- Edgworth
- Entwistle
- Turton Bottoms
- Chapeltown
- Belmont

Local People’s Story

A comprehensive programme of engagement has been carried out in Sudell and Sunnyhurst wards, and the part of Lower Darwen falling within the Darwen and Rural locality. These were chosen to represent some of its more deprived areas. Over 300 people were asked how they felt about the areas in which they lived, and about the assets or deficits that influence their health and wellbeing. Rather than a survey, the research involved setting up stands and obtaining input from passers-by, holding events in a library, a community hall, the offices of Darwen Credit Union and at school parents’ evenings, and organising drawing sessions and other engagement activities designed to appeal to schoolchildren. This type of research is not necessarily statistically representative, but it makes up for that in the depth of feedback and insight gained.

Population

More than 34,000 people live in Darwen and Rural (34,315) in almost 15,000 households (14,954). The area has an older population than Blackburn with almost one in four people aged under 20 (24%), compared with 29% for the Borough and 24% nationally. It also has a lower proportion of people of younger working age (16-44), with 37.4% compared with 40.3% in the Borough and 39.4% nationally. This also means a larger part of the community is aged over 65 with almost one in six over pensionable age (15.4%), compared with 13% in Blackburn with Darwen and 16% nationally.
Ethnicity and religion – More than nineteen out of twenty residents are white British (95.5%), with the single largest minority ethnic group being Pakistani (1.6%) followed by Indian and Chinese (both 0.5%). The small number of South Asian residents is reflected in the religious make-up of the locality, with seven out of ten residents being Christian (65.8%), although one in five (20.7%) describe themselves as having no religion. Less than one in twenty residents (4.7%) was born outside the UK. These can be broken down into 2% born in the rest of the EU, 0.7% in Pakistan, 0.2% in India, and 1.7% elsewhere in the world.

Language – One in forty residents of Darwen and Rural do not speak English as their main language (2.4%), compared with 13% in the Borough. The most spoken main languages after English are Polish with 143 speakers, Punjabi with 141, Italian with 74 and Urdu with 69. In 440 households not all residents have English as their main language, and there are 192 households where nobody has English as their main language.

Household composition - With an older population, three out of ten households have dependent children (29.4%) compared with 35% in the Borough and 29% nationally. Conversely the proportion of single person households (31.5%) is a little higher than both the Borough (30.4%) and national (30.2%) level.

Starting Well

Child Development – Low birthweight in Darwen and Rural roughly matches the national level and is lower than across the Borough, with 7.6% of children weighing less than 2500g at birth (9.3% BwD, 7.4% England). Early child development is better than the Borough average with 45.6% of children achieving a good level of development compared with 41% across the Borough and 52% nationally. Levels of child development are slightly lower in the more rural areas

Learning - By the time children get to age 11, Key Stage 2 results for reading, writing and maths (79.9%) are better than the Borough and national rates (74.7% BwD, 75.3% England). At 16 the rate for achieving good grades at GCSE at 66.5% is the best of all four localities and greater than the Borough average of 59.8%, which itself is on a par with the national rate of 60.6%. There is some variation within Darwen and Rural, with the weakest areas being Sudell and Earcroft. School absences (5.0%) are lower than Borough (5.2%) or national figures, with Whitehall and Rosehill having the lowest levels, followed by the rural areas.

Obesity – The obesity rate for children in reception in Darwen and Rural (9.1%) is less than both the Borough (10%) and national (9.4%) average. There is variation across the locality with obesity rates in Earcroft approaching 12%, while in Whitehall and Rosehill the rate is as low as 5%. However by the time children reach the end of primary school, the obesity rate (19.7%) is higher than the Borough (18.5%) and national (19.1%) rate. In parts of Sudell it approaches one in four children (25%).

Child Poverty – More than one in five children in Darwen and Rural (21%) live in poverty. In Sudell the proportion is four in ten children, reaching nearly 50% in one LSOA.

Children and Young People’s Health – Parents of children aged 0-15 were marginally more likely to rate their child’s health as good (97.3%) than those in the borough (96.6%) or England (97.1%).

Local People’s Story – From the children’s perspective, significant community and health assets included the Children’s Centre, Darwen Leisure Centre, Sunnyhurst Woods and the local allotments (as well as the vegetables grown on them). Healthy eating, water, sleep, exercise, medicines, vaccinations and a warm house were all identified as crucial to good health. Emotional wellbeing was also seen as important, along with its contributory factors such as friendship, learning and freedom from bullying. Parents were noted as the most significant individuals who kept children safe, followed by shopkeepers and friends.
The children enjoyed playing football, but would like to see more activities available for under-16s, including cycling sessions similar to those in Witton Park. Their concerns extended beyond their own age-group, as they wanted the cycling sessions to be open to all, and appreciated the important social role of Café Hub.

### Living Well

**Learning and skills** – Adult skill levels as indicated by qualification levels are the highest of the four localities, with one in four residents (25.4%) having a level 4 qualification or better (degree level), although this is below the national level of three in ten (30%). More than one in six (17.6%) of working-age adults in Darwen and Rural have no qualifications at all; this is the lowest in the Borough (average 22.6%), but higher than the national rate (15%).

**Deprivation** – Levels of deprivation in Darwen and Rural are relatively low with an overall deprivation score of 27.7 compared with 35.2 for Blackburn with Darwen and 21.5 for England. The overall score hides significant variation across the locality. Darwen and Rural includes much of the more affluent part of the Borough, with much of the rural part of the locality having a deprivation score that is lower than the England average of 21.5. At the same time, Sudell includes four neighbourhoods which are amongst the 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in England, one of which is in the most disadvantaged 5% nationally. Fuel Poverty is also lower overall in Darwen and Rural (10.8%) than for the Borough (14%), and about the same level as England (10.4%), with above-average fuel costs taking more than one in ten households below the poverty line. The highest rates are in central Darwen, where fuel poverty approaches 20%.

**Work and Jobs** – Residents in Darwen and Rural are less likely to be economically inactive (i.e. neither working nor looking for work) than in any of the three other localities. Economic inactivity rates at the time of the 2011 Census stood at almost one in four (23.4% aged 16-64), compared with the Borough (30%) and nationally (23%). Economic inactivity in Darwen and Rural is higher among women (27.1%) than men (19.7%). Women are less likely to be looking after home or family in Darwen and Rural (6.7%) than in the Borough as a whole (13.5%).

The Job Seekers Allowance claimant rate for Darwen and Rural (2.4%) is lower than the borough average (3.1%) and the lowest of the four localities, but is variable, with the rate in Sudell at 5%. The claimant rate for all out-of-work benefits (12.7%) is lower than the Borough average (15.6%) and the lowest of all four localities, but also varies across the locality. In Sudell the claimant rate for out-of-work benefits is more than one in five.

Almost 18% of working residents are employed in manufacturing, which is greater than the Borough average (16%) and considerably higher than nationally (9%), forming the single largest employment sector. The next largest employment sector is wholesale and retail, which employs almost one in six working residents (14.9%) compared with 18% in Blackburn with Darwen and 16% nationally.

**Housing** – Housing is predominantly privately owned with almost seven out of ten of households owning their own home (69.5%), greater than the Borough and national averages. Between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, the percentage of households buying their home with a mortgage fell from 44% to 38%, while private renting more than doubled from 7.6% to 16.5%. Darwen and Rural has the highest proportion of pre-1919 housing of all four localities, with the highest concentrations in central Darwen. The locality overall has no great problem with overcrowded households (too few rooms for the number of residents), with 4.4% compared with 7% for the Borough. There are, however, a few small neighbourhoods where more than 20% of households could be described as overcrowded. Half of all properties (51.9%) are in Council Band A, compared with 59% across the Borough and 25% nationally.

**Health** - People in the younger working age groups (16-49) in Darwen and Rural were about as likely to feel they were in good health (87%) as those across the borough (86%), although a little less than nationally (90%). People in older working age groups (50-64) were more likely to rate their health as good (70%) than those across the Borough (62%), but less likely than nationally (73%). This pattern was mirrored when
people were asked about long-term activity-limiting illness. Rates for 16-49 year-olds were similar to the Borough and national averages, while for 50-64 year-olds, the 28% of Darwen and Rural residents with a long-term activity-limiting illness was better than the Borough average (34%), but higher than the national average of 23%.

**Lifestyles** – Adults aged 16+ in Darwen and Rural were marginally more likely to be obese (25.5%) than those across the borough (24.6%) or nationally (24.1%). Residents are more likely to be involved in binge drinking (25.3%) than in other localities (18.9% BwD, 20% England). All neighbourhoods in the locality have a binge drinking rate higher than the national average of 20%, and in the Belgrave area and parts of central Darwen the rate is estimated as 26.7%.

**Cancer** – The system of cancer registration means that it is one of the few diseases where we can study the number of new cases (incidence). This varies between the four localities, with links to a range of risk factors. It is expressed as a ratio above or below 100, where 100 represents the national average. For all cancers combined, Darwen and Rural has an incidence ratio of 104.6, just higher than the Borough (100.9) and England. For colorectal cancer, the Borough has a relatively low incidence ratio of 90.0, and Darwen and Rural (81.5) has the lowest incidence ratio of the four localities. For breast cancer, however, Darwen and Rural’s incidence ratio of 113.7 is the highest out of the four localities, with Central Darwen, Belgrave and Sudell having the highest rates. For lung cancer, Darwen with Rural’s incidence of 116 is better than the Borough average (123.6), but again Central Darwen, Belgrave and Sudell have higher rates.

**Use of Health Services** – Across the borough, emergency admissions to hospital for all causes, standardised for the age of the population, are more than a third higher (137.3) compared with nationally (100). In Darwen and Rural this reduces to 120.6, although the rate in Sudell is more than 50% higher than nationally. Emergency admissions for stroke are 10% higher than nationally, with the highest rate (of one and a half times the national figure) to be found in Sudell. Emergency admissions for COPD are over 70% higher than nationally with central Darwen, Belgrave, Sudell and Earcroft all more than twice the national rate. Emergency Admissions for hip fractures among those aged 65+ are close to the national average, although there is quite a sharp divide within Darwen and Rural, with the highest rates in Whitehall and Rosehill. This pattern is mirrored in planned admissions for hip replacement.

**Local People’s Story** – The Health Centre, Darwen Tower, the Leisure Centre, Café Hub, the Children’s Centre, Darwen Library Theatre, Sunnyhurst Woods and Bold Venture Park were all identified as valuable community or health-supporting assets. The Wellbeing Walks were described as ‘brilliant’, and people enjoyed walks along the canal. They appreciated the beeZ card, and the contribution of health trainers, although they would like to see family activity and fun days in the park, and longer opening hours at the leisure centres. Groups such as the ‘Darwen Dashers’ running group were seen as making an important contribution, and respondents were keen to see a ‘Couch to 5k’ programme set up in Darwen, similar to the one in Blackburn.

Residents had generally very positive attitudes to the service they received from their GP, and from the 111 service, although only 50% described access to a GP as ‘very good’. They saw local pubs as important in maintaining social contact, and suggested that neighbourhood street parties would help bring communities together. However, it was also felt that the area would benefit from a greater police presence.

**Ageing Well**

There are more than 5,250 people aged 65+ in Darwen and Rural, almost one in six residents (15.4%), compared with 12.9% across the Borough and 16.3% nationally. One in ten households (11.4%) are people aged 65+ living alone, compared with 12.4% nationally; while 7.5% of households in Darwen and Rural comprise two or more people aged 65+, greater than borough wide (6.4%) but not as high as nationally (8.4%).

**Health** – People aged 65+ in Darwen and Rural are more likely (47.6%) to rate themselves as being in good health than comparable groups across the Borough (BwD 41.6%, England 49.4%). They are less likely to
identify that they have an illness that limits their activity a lot (30.1%) compared with those aged 65+ across the Borough (BwD 34.4%, England 26.9%).

**Life Expectancy** – Life expectancy for Darwen and Rural is 77.3 years for men, greater than the Borough average of 75.9, though 1.6 years under the national average of 78.9 years. Women can expect to live 81.6 years in Darwen and Rural, longer than the Borough (80.4), and 1.2 years less than across England. Both male and female life expectancy are lowest in Earcroft.

**Mortality rates** - By expressing death rates as a ‘Standardised Mortality Ratio’ (SMR), we can compare them with the national average (100) while taking account of the local age profile. Darwen and Rural has an SMR of 114.6 for *deaths from all causes (all ages)*, and 118.8 for *deaths from all causes (under 75)*. Both of these are lower than the Borough average and the lowest of the four localities. Darwen and Rural’s rate for *deaths from cancer* (110) is the same as the Borough average, and higher than the national average. The rate of *deaths from circulatory disease* (127.8) is slightly better than the Blackburn with Darwen average of 133.1, but in Earcroft the rate is almost 50% higher than the national average. Darwen and Rural’s SMR for *deaths from coronary heart disease* (CHD) is 149.2, well above the national average and comparable with the average for the Borough (156). Darwen and Rural has the second highest SMR for *deaths from stroke* of all the four localities, at 127.0, similar to the Blackburn with Darwen average of 128. Whitehall has the highest stroke mortality rates in the locality, with an SMR of more than 150.

**Local People’s Story** – Older people were also enthusiastic users of Darwen Leisure Centre, and appreciated the social as well as the health benefits of its exercise facilities and classes. They also valued the proximity of the countryside, and found walking groups to be important in terms of health, recreation and social contact. There was a proposal to develop ‘Community Champions’, who would improve social cohesion.

Groups and organisations such as Friends for Life were valued for providing opportunities to make friends and partake in worthwhile activities. Darwen Lunch Club was similarly useful as a place to meet other people, thus ameliorating loneliness and isolation. Transport connections were regarded as good, although the condition of roads and pavements was a concern, and some people struggled with the steep hills, especially in winter.