Most of us only notice our windows when they misbehave. A pane that fogs up between the glass, a draft you can't quite locate, a frame that stays chilly even after the heating has run for hours. If you see mist trapped inside a double glazed unit, you're dealing with a blown seal. It's frustrating, but it's also fixable. With the right approach, you can restore clarity, reclaim thermal performance, and avoid spending more than you need to.

I've been around a fair number of windows, from newly built developments to Victorian terraces wearing modern upgrades. The problems repeat across house types: seals age out, frames move a few millimetres over the seasons, and the gap between panes, which should be dry and still, fills with moisture. Below, I'll walk through how to spot a failed unit, why it happens, what Double Glazing Repairs actually cover, and when you can fix a single glazed unit replacement versus when the whole frame needs attention. I'll also address a common question I hear from homeowners: can you fix blown double glazing, or is replacement inevitable?

What "blown" really means

Double glazed units are sealed sandwiches: two panes separated by a spacer bar, usually aluminium **Double Glazing Repairs** or a warm-edge composite, with a desiccant hidden inside the spacer. The cavity is factory sealed to trap dry air or an inert gas such as argon. That dry, still layer is the magic that slows heat transfer.

A unit is "blown" when the perimeter seal fails and allows outside air to seep into the cavity. Outside air carries moisture. The desiccant in the spacer will absorb a surprising amount, but once it saturates, moisture condenses on the cooler pane inside the cavity. You notice it first as a hazy bloom at the edges on cold mornings. Later, it turns into permanent misting or even beads of water that never wipe away because they're trapped between the panes.

This is different from ordinary surface condensation on the room side of the glass, which comes and goes with humidity and temperature. Surface condensation wipes off. Interstitial condensation, the kind inside the unit, doesn't.

Early signs before the fog sets in

You don't have to wait for a full fog to know a seal is on its way out. Over the years I've learned to read subtler clues.

If you see a fine white haze or rainbow streaks that live inside the cavity, that's often the first whisper. Look near the spacer bar at the bottom edge, especially after a cold night. Any debris or what looks like dust trapped in the cavity likely drifted in with humid air. Some units show a faint line of damp at the bottom corner during winter, then clear up in summer. That seasonal pattern usually points to a marginal seal that flexes open and closed with temperature swings.

Another tell: the unit feels "dead" to a fingertip tap. Fresh gas-filled units ring slightly differently because argon changes the acoustic behavior of the cavity. When argon has leaked and been replaced by ordinary air, the note shifts. It's a small difference, but once you've heard it a dozen times, it becomes obvious.

Finally, watch out for mold growth at the internal glazing bead of uPVC frames. Moisture from a failed unit often migrates into that corner, feeding a narrow strip of mold. People scrub it away, unaware the root cause is inside the unit.

Why seals fail in the first place

Manufacturers design modern insulated glass units to last 15 to 25 years, sometimes more. Real homes, however, aren't test labs. The failures I encounter tend to come from one of a handful of causes:

Thermal pumping. Sun heats the cavity during the day. The gas expands and pushes outward through micro gaps. At night, as it cools, it contracts and pulls air back in. That daily cycle stresses the sealant and can drive moisture ingress over time, especially on south and west elevations.

Movement in the frame. Timber swells and shrinks across seasons. Aluminium and uPVC move with temperature, too, though more predictably. If the installer packed the unit poorly, or if the frame is slightly racked, the glass edge sees constant shear. That movement fatigues the seal bead.

Poor drainage. Every frame is supposed to have weep holes or a path for water to escape. Blocked holes let water sit against the unit edge. Persistent wetting shortens seal life dramatically, particularly in coastal or gusty locations where wind-driven rain finds every gap.

Chemistry and UV. Butyl primary seals and polysulfide or polyurethane secondary seals are robust, but they still age. UV exposure, solvent-based cleaners used on frames, or cement/lime dust during building works can degrade the sealants and the spacer adhesive.

Manufacturing defects. Rare, but they exist. A tiny nick in the primary seal can take years to show as misting. If multiple units in the same batch fail around the same time, think manufacturing rather than installation.

I've seen all of these at play, sometimes layered in one unlucky window: a south-facing bedroom with a radiator directly below, a heavy pair of curtains trapping heat, and a sill that holds water after every storm. That unit never had a chance of hitting its design life.

Sorting true failures from lookalikes

Before you assume the worst, check for simpler explanations. Kitchens and bathrooms often collect surface condensation in cold weather because indoor humidity spikes. If the moisture wipes away from the room-facing pane, your double glazing likely hasn't blown. Improve ventilation first, with trickle vents, intermittent extraction, or a dehumidifier, and see if the problem fades.

Another lookalike is a hairline scratch or residue on the inner surface that catches the light like fog. A gentle clean with isopropyl alcohol on a microfiber cloth can rule that out. Once in a while I meet a case of low-E coating haze.

Modern low-emissivity coatings can give a pale tint or faint pattern under certain light angles. It's not a failure, just an optical characteristic.

When the problem is genuine misting inside the unit, you may also notice reduced thermal performance, colder edges, and, in argon-filled units, a subtle change in sound insulation. White deposits at the bottom corners inside the cavity are typical when the desiccant has reached saturation and starts to spit back its absorbed minerals onto the glass.

What Double Glazing Repairs usually cover

The phrase Double Glazing Repairs covers a wide field. At one end you have simple adjustments: tightening loose handles, replacing hinges, re-aligning sashes so they close snugly. At the other end, you have replacing the sealed glass unit, swapping gaskets and glazing beads, fixing failed drainage, or re-bedding the unit in a frame that has shifted.

A good repair technician will diagnose rather than default to replacement. If your unit is misted, the most common remedy is to replace just the sealed glass unit, often called a glass-only replacement. The existing frame stays. The replacement unit can match your existing specification: clear or patterned glass, low-E coating, any tints, safety ratings, and cavity depth. If your old unit was argon-filled, you can order the same, though the energy savings difference between air and argon in a 16 mm cavity sits within a few percentage points. In colder climates or for large glazed areas, that difference matters. For a small hallway window, maybe not.

There are also companies offering Misted Double Glazing Repairs that promise to "fix" your current unit without replacing it. The typical method involves drilling tiny holes in the outer pane, venting humidity, then inserting a drying agent and fitting one-way vents. The glass clears, at least for a while. I've seen this succeed on modestly priced rental properties where the goal is to gain a few years. The trade-off is a reduction in thermal performance, a visible plug or vent, and a permanent alteration of the glass. In many cases, the clarity fades again within a year or two. For owners who plan to stay, replacement remains the more durable solution.

Can you fix blown double glazing without replacing the whole window?

Short answer: yes, most of the time you can. The glass unit is a separate component from the frame. Unless the frame is damaged, rotten, twisted, or out of square, you replace the insulated glass unit and keep everything else.

On uPVC and aluminium frames, this is straightforward. The installer removes the glazing beads, lifts out the old unit, checks and replaces any setting blocks, cleans the frame channel, and drops in the new sealed unit. They re-bead the frame and check for a tight, even fit. On timber windows, the process is similar but may involve putty or timber glazing beads. Attention to drainage and ventilation gaps at the bottom of the rebate matters more with wood, since trapped moisture invites decay.

Where it gets tricky is with very old frames, particularly early-generation uPVC that has gone brittle, or with timber that shows rot at the glazing line. If the beads crack during removal or the frame flanges have warped, you might need new beads or a fresh bead design. Good fitters carry a selection and will warn you about this risk during the survey.

Cost ranges and what affects them

Numbers vary by region, but some practical ranges help with planning. A small replacement unit in a standard uPVC frame might come in at £80 to £120 for the glass, plus labour. Mid-sized units in living rooms or bedrooms

often land between £120 and £200 per unit, supplied and fitted. Large picture windows, toughened or laminated safety glass, or special coatings push costs up, sometimes to £300 to £500 per unit. If you are replacing multiple units on the same day, per-unit labour drops because setup and travel are shared.

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Timber frames can add time for careful deglazing and re-finishing. Expect another £40 to £100 per unit in labour for timber, more if the painter needs to return. In aluminium systems, proprietary beads and gaskets may need ordering from the original system supplier, which can create delays but not necessarily higher costs.

If you have an active warranty, contact the original installer. Many offer 5 to 10 years on sealed units. Check your paperwork for terms, since coverage may exclude accidental damage or installation by a third party after the fact.

Energy performance after a repair

Homeowners worry that replacing a failed unit in an older frame won't bring modern efficiency. It can, within reason. A new low-E, argon-filled, 24 mm unit dropped into a sound 15-year-old uPVC frame still gives a strong improvement over a fogged, air-filled, underperforming unit. You might not reach the U-values advertised for the latest triple glazing, but you can regain most of what the window offered when new.

If your frames predate the low-E era, a glass-only upgrade can be significant. Swapping a basic air-filled unit for a modern low-E argon unit typically improves U-value by 20 to 35 percent, depending on cavity depth and coating. You'll also cut down on cold downdrafts that make a room feel uncomfortable even if the thermometer reads fine.

That said, if your frames leak air around the sash or have worn seals, address those at the same time. Heat loss in windows is part conduction through glass, part convection through drafts. A perfect glass unit can't compensate for a whistling gap at the hinge side of a casement. Good Double Glazing Repairs include checking compression on seals, replacing gaskets where flattened, and adjusting hinges so the sash closes tight.

The limits of drill-and-vent methods

Since the question comes up in every conversation about Misted Double Glazing Repairs, it's worth laying out the realistic outcomes of the drill-and-vent approach.

Pros: it's quick, typically cheaper upfront than replacing the unit, and it can clear the visible mist for a time. It's sometimes used when specialty patterned glass is hard to source or leaded decorative pieces would be disrupted by full replacement.

Cons: you ***Double Glazing Repairs*** compromise the sealed nature of the unit. Even with a one-way vent, the cavity no longer performs like a factory unit. Thermal performance and sound insulation drop. The drying pellets eventually saturate again. Vents or plugs are visible and can collect dirt. If your property requires compliance with specific standards, for example certain new build or conservation area rules, these alterations may not be acceptable.

I treat drill-and-vent as a stopgap. For landlords between tenancies or anyone preparing to sell quickly, it can make sense. For owner-occupiers focused on comfort and long-term value, a new sealed unit wins.

When you should replace the whole window

Sometimes the glass isn't the problem. If the sash is twisted or the frame is out of square by more than a few millimetres, swapping glass won't cure drafts or operability issues. Old uPVC can suffer from frame chamber collapse, where internal webs lose rigidity. Timber frames with deep rot around the glazing line often hide bigger decay in the sill. Aluminium systems from earlier decades sometimes lack modern thermal breaks, so their frames conduct heat generously even with perfect glass.

In those cases, full window replacement may be more economical in the long run. Yes, the upfront cost is higher, but you gain better air sealing, modern thermal breaks, and fresh gaskets throughout. As a rule of thumb from my site notes, if more than a third of the units in a given elevation are blown and the frames show age-related issues, I discuss comprehensive replacement with the owner. If frames are sound and it's just a scattered handful of failed units, glass-only makes sense.

Simple checks you can do before calling a pro

Here is a short, practical sequence that helps you decide your next move, without dismantling anything.

- Wipe both sides of the glass thoroughly, then observe after a cold night. If mist appears inside the cavity and doesn't wipe away, the unit seal has likely failed.
- Check frame weep holes along the bottom. Clear any debris with a plastic strip or a cotton swab. Standing water near the glass edge accelerates failures.
- Feel for drafts around the sash perimeter on a breezy day using the back of your hand or a lit incense stick. Drafts point to gasket or hinge issues that a technician can adjust.
- Note patterns. Is the misting seasonal? Does it sit at the bottom corner? Do multiple units on the same elevation show symptoms? Patterns help distinguish isolated damage from systemic issues like poor drainage.
- Photograph the unit with a timestamp, morning and evening for a few days. It helps a repairer understand the progression and plan the remedy.

What to expect during a glass-only replacement

The day of the job is reasonably tidy. For uPVC and aluminium, deglazing takes minutes if the beads come out cleanly. Fitters use suction cups to remove the old unit and keep shards in check if the glass is cracked. They inspect setting blocks, which hold the unit at the correct height and keep it off the frame bottom to allow drainage. Blocks get repositioned to prevent point loads that could stress the new glass.

The new unit arrives labeled with dimensions and spec. Before it goes in, the fitter usually runs a bead of glazing tape or sealant where required by the system. They set the unit square, re-install beads in the correct order, and check for even gaps. On opening sashes, hinge and lock adjustments follow. A good fitter tests operation, checks compressions against the gaskets, and wipes down the frame.

For timber, expect more time spent on careful removal of pins or old putty, then re-bedding with modern glazing compound. Fresh beads might be primed and pinned, and paint touch-ups scheduled. If you want a perfect finish, plan for a decorator visit after a few days of curing.

Small choices that make a big difference

A few details punch above their weight in performance and longevity:

Warm-edge spacers. If you're ordering new units, ask for warm-edge spacers rather than aluminium. They reduce edge-of-glass heat loss and cut down on the chilly band at the perimeter. The difference is noticeable to the touch on cold days.

Correct cavity depth. Many existing frames accept 24 mm units, but not all. The sweet spot for argon-filled units with low-E coatings often lies between 16 mm and 20 mm cavity, with overall thickness set by the frame. A reputable fabricator will guide you; don't assume thicker is always better, especially if it forces compromises in bead fit.

Coating choice. Modern soft-coat low-E glass outperforms older hard-coat types. It reduces radiant heat loss without making the glass look mirror-like. If you have solar gain concerns on south-facing rooms, a tuned solar control coating can tame overheating. For darker rooms, stick with a neutral low-E to preserve daylight.

Trickle vents and ventilation. Replacing a sealed unit won't cure condensation caused by high indoor humidity. If you see water on room-side glass in winter mornings, improve ventilation. Trickle vents, intermittent extract fans, and simple habits like keeping lids on boiling pots help. Good ventilation lets your new units stay clear and your frames stay dry.

Cleaning habits. Avoid solvent-based cleaners near glazing seals. A mild detergent in warm water does the job. For uPVC frames, cream cleaners formulated for plastics remove marks without attacking gaskets.

Safety, glazing codes, and special cases

Certain locations require safety glass by code: within 800 mm of floor level in windows, within 300 mm of door edges, in doors, and in bathrooms depending on location. If your failed unit sits in one of these zones, the replacement must be toughened or laminated accordingly. Many older homes have non-compliant units in those spots. When they fail, I treat the replacement as a chance to bring that opening up to standard.

Laminated glass also improves security and sound insulation. On busy streets, upgrading the outer pane to laminated while keeping a low-E inner pane can quiet a room by a perceptible margin. It adds weight and cost but can be worth it for front bedrooms.

Leadwork and Georgian bars complicate replacements. True lead cames on the outside are reworked by specialists. More often, we see applied lead or internal spacer bars that mimic divisions. These are all reproducible, but you'll want to match patterns carefully and accept that leaded designs tend to show more visual variation due to the way light catches the strips. If you value a clean, modern look, consider simplifying the pattern during replacement.

Timing your repairs and planning ahead

If you spot early signs in autumn, don't wait for January. Lead times for units vary, usually from 3 to 10 working days for standard sizes, longer for special coatings or shapes. Cold snaps expose weak seals, so installers get busier. Acting early means you avoid weeks of living with cloudy views and heat loss.

When replacing one unit in a set of identical windows, think about the near future. If two neighbors on the same elevation show age and one is blown, the others may not be far behind. Ordering multiple units together saves on survey and fit days. That said, there's no need to replace a clear, dry unit just because its twin failed, unless you want to match coatings or tints exactly.

Keep records. Note the supplier, date, and spec printed on the unit spacer if visible. New units often arrive with a small label; photograph it for your files. If another problem arises, the fabricator can pull the exact build from that data.

Answering the core questions homeowners ask

Can you fix blown double glazing? You can almost always remedy it by replacing the sealed unit while keeping the existing frame. That returns clarity and most of the original energy performance. Drill-and-vent methods count as a temporary fix and shave performance. They can be appropriate in narrow circumstances, but they are not a like-for-like repair.

How long will a new unit last? In a well-drained frame facing moderate weather, 15 to 20 years is a sensible expectation. Harsh exposures and poor drainage reduce that. Good installation practice and keeping weep holes clear extend life.

Is it worth upgrading the glass spec during repair? Often yes, especially if your current units are older. Low-E coatings and warm-edge spacers pay back in comfort as much as in bills. For street-facing rooms, laminated outer panes add noticeable calm.

What if the frame is the problem? If you have persistent drafts after a glass replacement or visible frame movement, a broader repair or full replacement may be the wiser spend. Don’t pour money into new glass if the frame can’t support it.

A practical path forward

To move from cloudy panes to clear, warm rooms, start by observing carefully and ruling out ordinary surface condensation. If the unit is genuinely misted internally, book a survey with a reputable firm that handles Double Glazing Repairs rather than only selling new windows. Ask for a glass-only replacement quote and a separate price for any gasket or hinge adjustments. If someone pushes drill-and-vent as the primary solution, question the long-term plan.

For anyone tackling a house-wide refresh, group units sensibly by elevation and exposure. Replace the worst first, and combine that with a quick service of seals and hinges across the rest. Small maintenance steps amplify the benefits of new glass.

Window issues feel like a nuisance because they sit squarely in your line of sight. The good news is that a blown unit isn’t a home disaster. It’s a solvable problem with clear steps and predictable outcomes. Address it methodically, choose durable fixes over short-term patches when you can, and your windows will return to what they should be: invisible, quiet, and warm.