Blown double glazing shows up quietly. One day the view looks a touch cloudy, then you notice beads of moisture trapped between the panes. By the time you see rivulets or a milky film, the seal that kept your insulated glass unit airtight has failed. People call it misted, fogged, steamy, even “gone.” Whatever the nickname, the problem is the same: warm, moist air has found its way into the cavity and condensed where you can’t wipe it off.

If you own a house with double glazed windows, you will face this at some point. Seals are consumable parts, even if manufacturers rarely pitch them that way. The trick is deciding when to schedule Double Glazing Repairs and when to call time on a tired unit. I have replaced hundreds of sealed units and more than a few entire frames. The right decision depends on the glass specification, the frame’s condition, where the window sits, and what you expect the property to do for you over the next decade.

What “blown” actually means

A modern double glazed unit is a sandwich: two panes of glass, a spacer bar around the edges to keep them apart, and a perimeter seal keeping the gas in and the weather out. Many units use argon or krypton gas and a warm-edge spacer to reduce heat loss. The spacer contains desiccant beads that mop up small amounts of moisture during manufacture and minor pressure changes later on.

When the perimeter seal fails, the gas escapes and is replaced by normal air. Moisture rides in with that air. Once the desiccant saturates, any cool morning or quick temperature drop turns that moisture into fog between the panes. From the street it looks like a bathroom mirror after a shower. You cannot clean it, because the problem lives in the cavity.

A blown unit loses two things. Clarity goes first, then performance. That invisible gas layer and the dry cavity it maintained contributed to the window’s U-value. When it fails, heat transfer rises. In an upstairs bedroom, that shows up as a cooler feel near the window and, on windy days, a drafty sensation even with no air leaks, because the internal pane runs colder.

Why units blow sooner than they should

I keep notes on jobs, partly to remember what worked and partly to avoid repeat mistakes. The reasons for premature failure fall into a handful of patterns:

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- Manufacturing shortcuts: Some low-cost units rely on a single seal rather than a dual-seal system. They can work, but they are more vulnerable to UV and temperature cycles. I have seen bargain units fog in under five years.
- Poor installation: A good fitter beds the unit properly, uses packers to align it, avoids twisting the frame, and leaves drainage channels clear. If the sealed edge sits in standing water or the frame flexes, the seal degrades.
- Harsh exposure: South and west elevations get the worst of UV and heat cycling. Coastal homes also contend with salt, which ages seals and hardware. A unit that lasts fifteen years on a sheltered north wall might only see eight on a sun-baked gable.
- Chemicals: Over-enthusiastic cleaning with harsh solvents attacks sealants and gaskets. I once traced a string of misted panes to a caretaker who used solvent-based adhesive remover on the PVC frames every few months.

None of these should scare you. They just explain the spread in lifespan. When manufacturers talk about 20 to 25 years for a sealed unit, they assume decent installation, ordinary exposure, and sensible cleaning. Many units reach that. Plenty do not.

Diagnose before you decide

You can learn a lot with five minutes, a dry day, and a careful look.

Stand back and check whether the fogging is between the panes rather than on the room side or outside face. Touch the inside pane; if your finger leaves a dry track, you are looking at internal condensation, not a blown unit. Internal condensation points to high humidity and poor ventilation, a different problem with different fixes.

Next, look along the bottom edge of the glass from an angle. Do you see the spacer bar with tiny perforations and maybe a product code printed on it? If so, note it down. Good suppliers put the date and specification on there: 4/20/4 Argon, Low-E, Warm Edge, that kind of thing. That helps a glazier order a like-for-like replacement.

Finally, inspect the frame. Timber needs solid paint or stain with no soft patches. PVC should show no cracks or chalking so advanced that it crumbles under a thumb nail. Aluminium shouldn’t be corroded around the thermal break. If the frame and sashes are square, close smoothly, and seal properly, a blown unit is a glass problem, not a frame problem. That pushes you toward repair rather than full replacement.

Can you Fix Blown Double Glazing without replacing the unit?

This question lands in my inbox a few times a month. Short answer: not in a way that restores the sealed, insulated performance the window had on day one. There are services that drill tiny holes in the glass, vent the moisture, flush the cavity with alcohol, then install breathable plugs. Done neatly, it can clear the fog and buy time.

The catch is in the physics. A double glazed unit works because the cavity is sealed and the gas is dry. Drilling holes surrenders that. You exchange a foggy, failed unit for a clear, permanently vented unit. It may look better, but its U-value is worse than a proper sealed unit and often worse than a healthy single pane with secondary

glazing. On cold nights you get a colder inner pane, more downdraught, and potentially more room-side condensation.

I only recommend the vent-and-clear method in two scenarios: where the glazing is inaccessible without scaffolding and the homeowner wants a year or two's grace, or where heritage constraints make unit replacement awkward and short-term aesthetics matter more than thermal performance. As a permanent fix, it is a compromise.

What proper Misted Double Glazing Repairs involve

For a standard modern window with a good frame, the fix is to replace the sealed unit, not the whole window. Glaziers call this a unit swap. It is surgical work, not major surgery.

The fitter removes glazing beads or timber stops, cuts any old sealant, eases out the blown unit, cleans the rebate, checks packers, and drops in a new made-to-measure unit. The beads go back, the external seal line gets made good, and that is it. No plaster disruption, no redecoration, usually under an hour per sash. For bays and oversized panes, add a bit of time and a second pair of hands.

Costs vary by size, glass spec, and where you live. As a rough UK guide, a small casement unit, say 600 by 900 mm, with plain clear glass might run £90 to £140 supplied and fitted. Add Low-E coating with argon and a warm-edge spacer, and you might see £120 to £180. Toughened or laminated glass increases the price. Larger units climb accordingly. A typical three-bed semi with two misted upstairs casements and a failed lounge pane might land between £300 and £600 for like-for-like replacements. Given the gains in clarity and efficiency, most people consider that money well spent.

When a unit swap isn't enough

Sometimes a blown pane is the tip of the iceberg. A few red flags tell me to talk about full replacement.

If the sashes rack when you open them, if the PVC frame has bowed beyond what packers can correct, or if timber has rot deep enough to take a screwdriver easily, new glass will not solve the draft, the binding hinges, or the water ingress. You will enjoy a clearer view and still feel cold. In those cases, full window replacement makes sense.

Hardware can also tip the balance. If your espag locks barely engage, the shoot bolts miss their keeps, and hinges have visible wear, the bill to sort all that plus new sealed units inches closer to the cost of new windows. With labour rates what they are, it is sometimes smarter to put that spend into a fresh frame with a 10-year warranty.

Finally, consider specification leaps. If your existing glass is early-generation double glazing without Low-E, without gas fill, and with aluminium spacer bars, replacing a few blown units like-for-like leaves performance on the table. You can up-spec the new sealed units within the old frames, but not every old frame has the right glazing depth to accept thick, modern units. Where it does, great, fit 4/20/4 or even 4/16/4 with soft-coat Low-E and argon. Where it does not, and you want better winter comfort, replacement becomes the straightforward route.

Energy performance and payback, told straight

People ask about savings with an air of hope. Properly sealed double glazing with Low-E coatings makes rooms feel more comfortable at lower thermostat settings. That is a real, practical saving that does not always show up on a spreadsheet. As for raw numbers, a single misted unit in an otherwise good house will not wreck your energy bills. It is a drag, not a disaster.

Replace a handful of blown units with modern Low-E, argon-filled glass and you can improve the U-value by around 0.5 to 1.0 W/m²K compared to old clear double glazing. That translates to modest annual savings per window, often £10 to £30 depending on location, exposure, and occupancy patterns. Multiply across a house and you might see a few hundred pounds per year if you are updating wholesale, less if you are only replacing the worst offenders. The comfort gain though, especially near seating areas, is immediate Cat Flap Installation and noticeable.

Full window replacement makes a bigger dent in heat loss if your frames leak or the old units are primitive. Add trickle vents, better gaskets, and modern multipoint locks that pull sashes evenly against seals, and you reduce infiltration too. Payback periods vary, and anyone who quotes a precise number without seeing your home is guessing. My rule of thumb: if you plan to stay put for 8 to 12 years and your windows predate the mid-2000s, the combined benefits of new frames and glass usually justify the investment. If your frames are sound and only a couple of units are misted, unit swaps give the best return.

A note on warranties and paperwork

Before you spend, find your paperwork. Many houses in the UK have FENSA or CERTASS certificates for window installations, and many installers backed their work with unit warranties, often 5 to 10 years. If your windows are within that window, a misted pane is frequently covered. The installer might be gone, but the manufacturer of the unit may still be trading. It’s worth an email with photos and the spacer-bar code.

Even outside warranty, that spacer code helps match the spec. Ask your glazier to record it. If you ever sell, being able to show receipts for Misted Double Glazing Repairs reassures buyers and surveyors that you maintained the property.

Upgrades to consider at replacement time

A failed unit is an inconvenience, but it is also a chance to improve comfort. Several low-cost options earn their keep:

- Low-E soft-coat glass with argon fill reduces heat loss without darkening the room. For most homes this is the baseline for Double Glazing Repairs today.
- Warm-edge spacers cut down on edge-of-glass condensation. They cost little and reduce that cool halo you feel in winter.
- Laminated glass for street-facing rooms adds security and quiet. It also blocks more UV, which protects furnishings. The inside pane can be laminate without changing the outside appearance.
- Acoustic glass on busy roads. It will not silence lorries, but it softens the sharpness of traffic noise.
- Solar control coatings on south or west elevations to temper summer gain, especially for big fixed panes or bi-folds.

These do not need new frames, only accurate measurement and a supplier who understands glazing depths and weight. Check that your hinges can carry a heavier unit if you add laminate or thicker cavities.

What about DIY?

If you are handy, unit swaps on standard PVC windows are within reach. The risks are in measurement, handling, and sealing. Order a unit 2 to 4 mm undersize in each dimension to allow for squareness and thermal expansion. Specify the exact overall thickness to match the old packers and beads, or you will fight the clips. Wear glass-

cutting gloves, use proper suction cups, and have a second person. Drop a pane and you will regret doing it yourself.

Timber frames are trickier. Removing and refitting beads without bruising the paint, bedding the unit on the right sealant, and re-lining the drain paths take practice. If the sightlines show, any slip will annoy you forever. On listed properties, leave it to a specialist.

Cost traps and how to avoid them

I have seen quotes swing wildly for the same job. A few points keep you out of trouble.

Ask for the glass spec in writing: thickness, cavity, gas, spacer type, coatings, and safety requirements like toughening near doors or low-level glazing. If the quote only says “double glazed unit,” it is incomplete, and you may end up with a cheaper, poorer-performing replacement.

Beware of upsells that don’t fit your use. Acoustic glass on a quiet cul-de-sac does little. Solar control on a north elevation can dim rooms needlessly. Match the upgrade to the problem you actually have.

If multiple panes have misted in the same elevation, investigate drainage and cill caps. I once replaced six lounge units only to return two winters later. The culprit was a blocked drainage path that bathed the unit edges after each downpour. Clearing it and notching the packers solved the recurrence.

Finally, coordinate with redecorating and exterior cleaning. Fresh units make old frames look tired. A day with a detail brush, non-abrasive cleaner, and new gaskets can lift the whole facade for little money.

Timber, aluminium, and PVC: how frame type nudges the decision

Timber windows reward care. If you keep paintwork intact and manage water, unit swaps make sense for decades. The sightlines stay crisp, the building's character intact, and your thermal performance remains respectable with modern Low-E units. When timber rots in glazing rebates, however, the repair cost can rival full replacement unless the windows are worth restoring for heritage reasons.

Aluminium frames last, especially modern thermally broken systems. If the powder coat is sound and the gaskets flexible, a unit swap is simple. Older non-thermal aluminium from the 70s and 80s can be hopelessly cold. Replacing units helps a bit, but you still feel the cold frame. Consider full replacement if comfort is the priority.

PVC is common and generally forgiving. The tell is rigidity. If the sash sags, corners have pulled, or reinforcement is minimal, you can swap units and still have a floppy sash that leaks. Colored foils chalk over time, but that is cosmetic. If the structure is sound, unit swaps make perfect sense and often bring the window back to near-new performance.

Environmental sense without greenwash

There is a sustainability angle here that deserves plain talk. Making a new window frame consumes more material and energy than making a replacement sealed unit. If your frames are good, replacing only the failed glass reduces waste and carbon while solving the problem. When frames are poor performers or at end of life, full replacement saves more energy in operation and, over ten to fifteen years, can offset the higher manufacturing footprint. Either way, disposing of glass and frames responsibly matters. Ask your installer how they recycle old units and profiles. Good firms will have an answer beyond "skip."

What I tell friends and clients

I try to keep advice simple and grounded in the building in front of me. Here is the gist, the way I say it over a cup of tea.

If just one or two panes are blown and the frames are healthy, order new sealed units that match or slightly improve the spec. You will get your view back, boost winter comfort, and spend a sensible amount. That is the sweet spot for most Misted Double Glazing Repairs.

If a run of units on the same elevation has failed, look for a common cause. Fix the drainage or shading issue as you replace the glass, or you will be doing it again.

If the frames have had their day, do not throw good money after bad. Put the budget toward new windows with the right features for the house: Low-E, warm-edge, proper trickle vents, quality hardware. Get three quotes, same spec, from installers who measure carefully and talk details rather than slogans.

If you are tempted by drill-and-vent services, weigh clarity against performance. They can make a fogged view presentable for a while. They cannot restore the physics of a sealed unit. As a stopgap, fine. As a fix, not so much.

And finally, do not wait for every unit to blow. Replace the worst offenders early. The longer a misted unit sits, the more moisture it cycles, and the more staining you see etched into the inner faces. Early replacement preserves appearances and often lets you reuse beading without it snapping from brittleness.

A quick, sane decision path

- Identify the fault: between-the-panes mist means a blown unit. Surface condensation means a humidity or ventilation issue.
- Check the frames: if they are square, dry, and seal properly, you are in unit-swap territory.
- Specify properly: Low-E, argon, warm-edge spacers as a baseline. Upgrade for noise, security, or solar control where needed.
- Fix root causes: clear drainage, correct packing, avoid harsh solvents on frames.
- Replace frames only when structure, hardware, or performance gaps make it the better long-term spend.

Treat your windows as systems rather than ornaments. The glass, the seals, the frames, the way water drains and air moves, all of it matters. Get those parts working together, and you will forget about your windows for years, which is exactly how it should be.