If a window misted up on you this morning, you probably Googled it with a mug of tea in one hand and a towel in the other. The towel helps for a few minutes. Then the fog creeps back and the room feels cooler than it should. When people talk about blown double glazing, they mean an insulated glass unit where the perimeter seal has failed. Moisture has made its way between the panes. You can't wipe that condensation away because it's sealed inside the unit, not on the inner surface. The question everyone asks next is whether you can sort it without ripping out the entire window. Short answer: often yes, the frame can stay. The glass unit is a separate component, and in many cases you can replace just that. But there are caveats, and knowing which route to take saves money and frustration.

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I've worked on timber, aluminium, and uPVC windows in homes ranging from Victorian terraces to new-builds still smelling of plaster. The right fix depends on what failed, how your window was assembled, and how long you want the repair to last. Let's unpack that in plain terms.

What "blown" actually means

A standard double glazed unit is two panes of glass separated by a spacer bar around the edges. The cavity is usually filled with argon or another inert gas, then the perimeter is sealed using a primary butyl seal and a secondary sealant such as polysulphide or silicone. That sealed cavity provides insulation by slowing heat transfer and, when it's intact, it stays dry inside thanks to desiccant beads inside the spacer. Over time, UV light, movement, and temperature cycles age the perimeter seal. If it cracks or delaminates, outside air can creep in carrying moisture. The desiccant absorbs the first wave, then saturates, and finally you get misted double glazing, often with water pooling at the bottom edge on cold mornings.

Tell-tale signs include persistent internal fogging between panes, beads of moisture that never wipe away, kaleidoscope-like streaks, and a general fall in thermal performance. Sometimes you also hear a faint rattle if the gas has escaped and the pressure equalised, especially on larger panes.

Fix the unit or the whole frame?

Most modern windows are built around independent sealed glass units held within a sash or fixed light using glazing beads, packers, and sealants. That means you can usually keep the existing uPVC, timber, or aluminium frame and replace only the failed insulated glass unit. The installer removes the beads, lifts out the old unit, checks the packers and drainage, and drops in a new one. It's a straightforward job on many uPVC systems and a bit more involved on aluminium or older timber, but it's not a full frame replacement.

Complete frame replacement tends to be necessary only when the frame is rotten, structurally distorted, or no longer secure, or when regulations or aesthetics push you toward a redesign. If the hinges are bent or the locking mechanism has failed, those parts can usually be repaired without touching the glass.

So if you're wondering, "Can you fix blown double glazing without removing frames?" the typical answer is yes, by swapping the unit. That sits firmly in the realm of Double Glazing Repairs rather than a wholesale window change. It's what I advise nine times out of ten for homeowners dealing with misted double glazing repairs.

The repair options, from stop-gap to robust

There's a spectrum of approaches, each with trade-offs in cost, disruption, and durability.

Drill-and-vent treatments. You may have seen services that drill tiny holes in the glass to vent and dry the cavity, then add a clear vent or valve. It can clear the fog in the short term and reduce immediate irritation. I've used it in specific cases, for example in a rental just before a tenant move-in where appearance mattered for a few months and the budget was tight. The problem is it doesn't reinstate the original hermetic seal. You've traded a sealed, insulating cavity for a ventilated one that continually exchanges air with the environment. On mild days you might not notice a big difference. In winter, heat loss increases, and the unit can fog again under certain weather conditions. Expect it to be a cosmetic improvement, not a true fix.

Seal reseal attempts. People sometimes ask whether they can "reseal the edges." On uPVC beads, you might add external sealant to stop draughts, but you cannot practically reconstruct the original multi-stage perimeter seal of a factory-made insulated unit in situ. Once that bond fails internally, the unit's days as a sealed system are over. Any attempt to smear silicone around the glass edge will look messy and won't restore the internal desiccant or gas fill.

Full unit replacement in the existing frame. This is the gold standard for most situations. A new unit brings back the Double Glazing Repairs original performance, often with an upgrade. If your blown unit is older, this is a chance to specify low-e coatings, warm-edge spacers, laminated inner panes for security or noise control, and argon fill. Costs vary with size and spec, but a typical casement unit might run a few hundred pounds for supply and fit. On large picture windows or shaped units, the price goes up, but you're still saving compared to changing the entire frame.

How the unit-only replacement works

From the customer side, it looks simple: a fitter pops out, removes the beads, swaps the unit, and cleans up. The hidden craft sits in measurement, packing, and drainage.

A proper measure. The fitter measures visible glass size and calculates the overall unit size allowing for the depth of the recess and the glazing bead overlap. Thickness matters. You need a unit that fits the frame's glazing channel and hardware tolerances. On uPVC, 24 mm and 28 mm units are common, but I see 20 mm and 36 mm in older and premium products. If you get the thickness wrong, the beads won't clip back securely or you'll compress the seals badly.

Matching sightlines. The spacer bar needs to sit at an appropriate depth so it doesn't show unevenly around the edges. Warm-edge spacers in grey or black look better than shiny aluminium in many frames. If aesthetics matter, ask to see a spacer sample.

Packers and squareness. Pack the unit at the correct points to carry weight to the hinge side on opening sashes and to avoid racking the sash. Incorrect packers cause sash drop, draughts, and lock misalignment. I've been called to "failed locks" that were just badly packed replacement units twisting the sash a few millimetres.

Drainage and weep holes. Frames are designed to manage any water that gets past external gaskets. If the drainage channels are blocked, your new unit sits in a bathtub. A good technician clears the weep holes and checks the gasket condition before reinstallation.

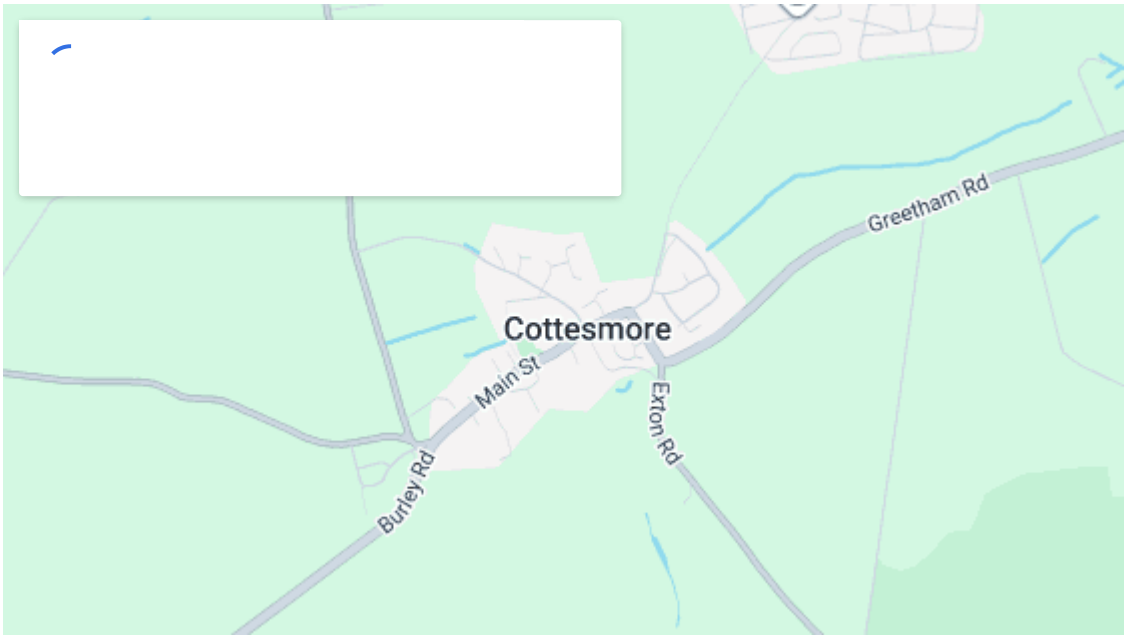
Sealing and beads. Internal beads on uPVC clip in, often starting with the shortest piece. Aluminium systems may use pressure plates and gaskets. Timber might need glazing points and fresh bedding compound. No matter the system, you should not see excessive flex or hear creaks. Once in, a quick water test on the outside edge helps confirm that gaskets and corner joints behave.

The work time is usually under an hour per typical window once the unit is made. Lead time for the glass often ranges from a couple of days to two weeks depending on coatings, toughening, or laminated glass requirements.

When the frame has to go

There are cases where keeping the frame is a false economy. I've removed timber sashes that looked fine at first glance but crumbled at the corners once the glass weight came off. On uPVC, distortion from years of heat with dark foils can turn a sash banana-shaped. Add to that worn multipoint locks with obsolete gearboxes and you may find yourself spending good money on glass while the opening light still doesn't shut correctly.

Look closely for these warning signs: deep rot in timber beyond the glazing rebate, warped sashes that won't re-pack square, cracked aluminium thermal breaks, missing or brittle gaskets that cannot be sourced, or frames so old that replacement beads are no longer available and brittle ones will snap on removal. If several of those stack up, a full new window can be the smarter move. That way you also get modern trickle vents if needed, better U-values, and fully functioning hardware.

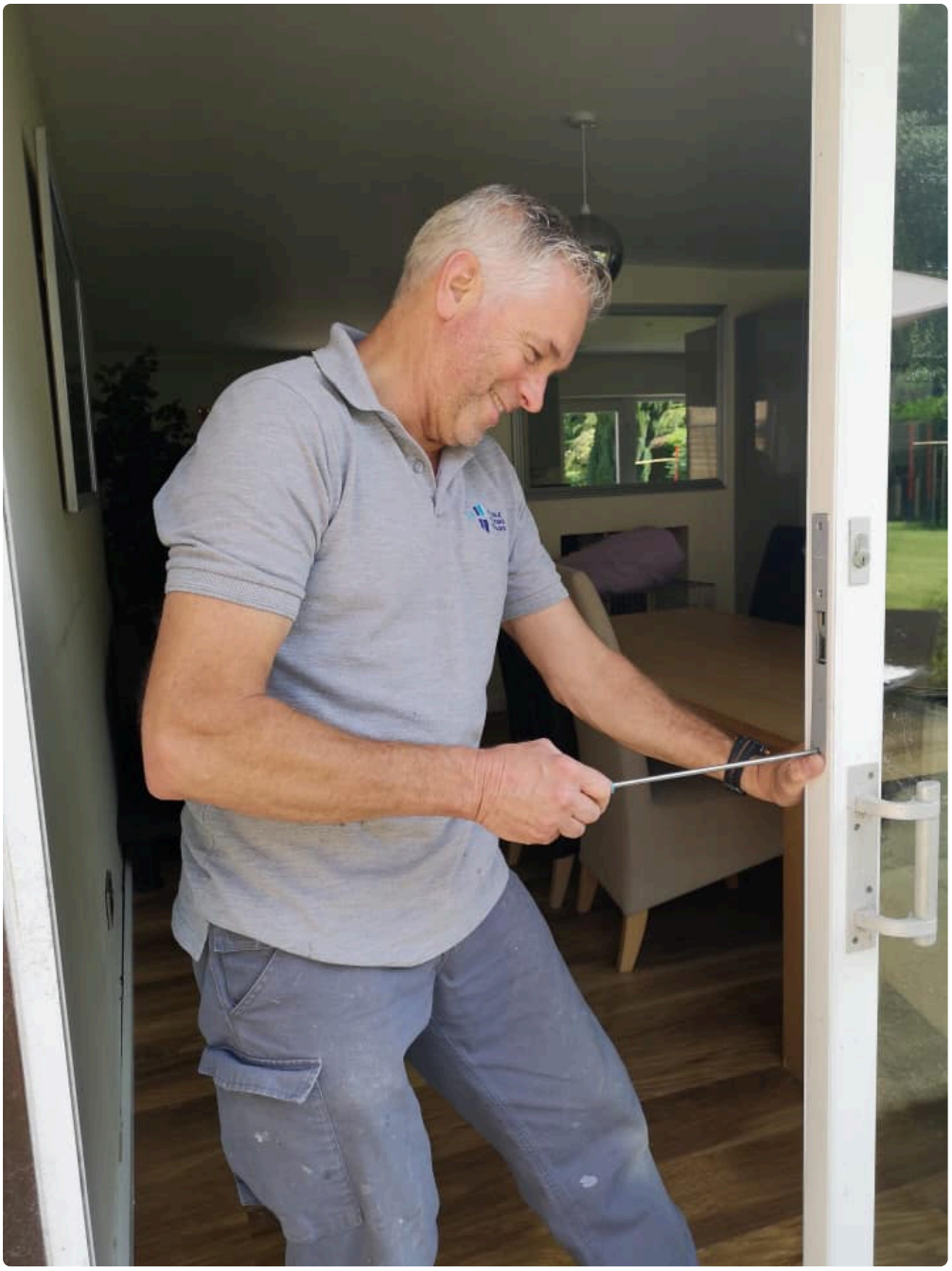


Energy performance questions people ask me

Will a repaired unit feel warmer? Yes, if you replace like-for-like, you're at least back to the original insulation. In many homes I recommend low-e soft-coat glass with a warm-edge spacer. That small change can trim heat loss noticeably. On a north-facing room with large panes, switching a 20-year-old clear double-glazed unit to a 28 mm argon-filled low-e unit often brings the U-value down by 0.5 to 0.7 W/m²K. You feel that as less downdraught near the glass and fewer cold spots around your legs when you sit nearby.

Do you lose the argon over time? Gas loss occurs gradually across decades when seals are intact, but a new quality unit with proper edge construction will hold its fill effectively through its warranty period and often well beyond. Warm-edge spacers help by reducing temperature stress on the seal.

What about noise? You can treat a blown window as a chance to upgrade to acoustic laminate. Changing one pane to 6.4 mm laminated glass while keeping the other 4 mm or 6 mm creates an asymmetry that reduces resonance. It won’t match a dedicated acoustic unit with big cavities, but the difference is noticeable on traffic noise without touching the frame.



Can you DIY this?

If the frame uses internal beads and you're comfortable with careful pry work and suction cups, you can sometimes remove and refit units yourself. I've seen competent DIYers tackle small fixed lights. But tempered glass is heavy, edges are fragile, and one slip turns a cost-saving exercise into a sweep-up and a second order for glass. The real risk is not the replacement itself but mis-measuring or mis-packing, leading to a unit that fogs at the edges because of pressure points or a sash that doesn't lock cleanly. If the window is on an upper floor or you have external beads, I recommend a professional.

Where DIY shines is in the detective work before calling anyone. Spot blocked trickle vents and weep holes. Check for perished gaskets or loose handles that cause draughts unrelated to the glass. Knowing whether the issue is the unit or the frame helps you direct the spend.

The marketing around "repair kits" and shortcuts

I've tested sprays, edge tapes, and moisture-absorbing pouches marketed toward misted double glazing repairs. The physics is unforgiving. Once moisture is cycling inside the cavity, anything short of a sealed replacement will

be temporary. An anti-fog coating on the inner pane might improve appearance, but you're still living with a compromised insulated unit. If you need a cosmetic fix for a house sale, be honest with the buyer and price accordingly, or expect the survey to flag it.

Drill-and-dry services tend to cost less up front than a new unit. On small panes in utility rooms, I've signed off on them when the client understood the limitation: you gain clarity, you do not restore full thermal performance. On a main living room window, the heat loss penalty and risk of recurring haze mean I rarely recommend it.

Special cases: heritage and tricky frames

Timber sash windows present their own puzzle. Many have slim double glazed units that push the limits of timber rebate depth. If a unit blows in a narrow sash, you need a supplier that can make a thin, high-performance unit, often with warm-edge spacers that visually blend. Sometimes re-glazing is also a chance to freshen up linseed putty or modern equivalents, seal knots, and work in a discreet bead that sheds water correctly. The frame stays in place, but the craft is slower.

On older aluminium, some systems rely on pressure plates and gaskets that have hardened. You can still replace the unit, yet you may have to source new gaskets or live with a visual mismatch if the original profiles are obsolete. It's doable, just plan for extra parts.

Leadlight overlays present another wrinkle. Decorative lead attached to the outer pane often dates the window. If you like the look, ask the supplier to replicate it within the new unit so the lead sits between panes. That keeps the exterior easy to clean and reduces maintenance.

Cost, timelines, and what good looks like

For an average casement sash with a standard size unit, supply-and-fit pricing in many UK regions sits somewhere in the 120 to 250 pound range per pane for like-for-like replacements, with more for larger, toughened, laminated, or shaped glass. A big patio door panel can easily run 300 to 600 pounds per unit. Pricing varies regionally and with access, so treat these as ballpark figures.

Lead times are short for clear units, typically 3 to 7 working days. Add a week for toughening or unusual specs. Installation is clean and quick, rarely more than a morning for several windows. Good installers carry glazing shovels, suction lifters, a gasket roller, and a mitre tool for tidying beads. They'll photograph the frame after bead removal to show drainage channels and gasket condition. That transparency builds trust and catches issues early.

A solid job leaves you with these outcomes: no rattle, even bead lines, no drafts, and a visible improvement in clarity. The installer should offer a written warranty on the glass unit, often 5 years, sometimes 10. Keep the paperwork. If a unit fails prematurely, reputable firms swap it without quibbling.

Preventing a repeat failure

No sealed unit lasts forever. Temperature swings, UV exposure, and movement steadily age the perimeter. But you can prolong life. Keep weep holes clear so water does not pond around the unit. Avoid heavy pressure washing directly at glazing beads and gaskets. If you're repainting timber, don't bridge the glass and bead with thick paint that traps moisture around the edge, and use breathable coatings that accommodate movement. For south-facing dark-foil uPVC, summer heat can be brutal. Good packers and correct gasket compression reduce mechanical stress and help seals survive those cycles.

If your home has ventilation issues, window condensation can look worse, and you might misdiagnose the cause. Condensation on the room-side surface wipes away and comes back in predictable patterns during cooking, showers, or overnight in bedrooms. Condensation inside the unit stays even on dry days. Knowing the difference avoids unnecessary spend.

Real-world snapshots

A couple in a 1990s bungalow called me about three misted units in their conservatory. The frames were uPVC, white, with internal beads. They expected a full replacement based on a salesperson's pitch. We swapped out five sealed units instead, changed the gasket on the leakiest bay, and cleared the drainage. They kept their existing frames and saved roughly two-thirds of what a full refit would have cost. The new units included low-e glass with warm-edge spacers, so the room now warms faster on bright winter days.

Another job involved a top-floor flat with aluminium frames and external beads, a windy site near the coast. The client wanted a quick fix. Drill-and-vent would have cleared the fog, but the salt air would have lived in that cavity. We went with toughened, laminated replacements and replaced perished gaskets. The frames stayed, yet the acoustic improvement surprised the client as much as the return of clarity.

Not every story ends with a simple unit swap. In a Victorian semi, we uncovered deep rot under a painted timber bead. Every time it rained, water tracked behind the paint film and sat against the unit edge. We rebuilt the rebate with a resin system, added a discreet capillary break, and only then fitted the new unit. Still not a frame replacement, yet much more than a five-minute swap, and essential for longevity.

How to brief a contractor so you get the right outcome

Provide rough sizes and photos of the beads and frame. Confirm whether the beads are internal or external and whether any units are near doors or low to the floor, which may require toughened glass by regulation. If you want upgrades, say so early: low-e, warm-edge spacers, lamination, or thicker cavities if the frame allows. Ask the installer if they will check packers, drainage, and gasket condition during the visit rather than just swapping glass. Finally, clarify lead time and warranty in writing. You're commissioning Double Glazing Repairs that should last, not a patch-and-run.

Here is a short checklist you can use when you call around:

- Photograph the window from inside and outside, including close-ups of beads and any manufacturer labels.
- Measure visible glass width and height, and if possible the overall thickness from bead to bead.
- Note whether the unit sits in a fixed frame or an opening sash, and whether it is upstairs or hard to access.
- Mention any security or acoustic goals, like laminated glass or thicker panes.
- Ask about warm-edge spacers, low-e coatings, and warranty length on the new unit.

So, can you fix blown double glazing without removing frames?

Yes, in most homes you can replace the failed glass unit and leave the frame right where it is. That approach restores clarity and insulation with minimal disruption, fits neatly under the umbrella of misted double glazing repairs, and usually costs a fraction of a full window change. The exceptions revolve around damaged or obsolete frames, severe timber decay, or designs that make re-glazing impractical. If you find yourself tempted by quick cosmetic fixes, remember what they do and what they don't. They can buy time, they don't deliver the sealed performance you had when the window was new.

Treat a blown unit as a chance to get the window you always wanted, but with the bones you already have. Specify a better spacer, a smarter coating, maybe a laminated pane for security or noise. Pack it right, keep the drainage clear, and you’ll forget it was ever a problem until the next storm reminds you the house holds heat the way it should.